Student Activism in Malaysia

Meredith L. Weiss

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Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow

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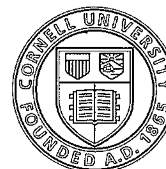

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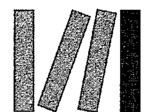

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Translation of cover image: "Restore Students' Right to Engage in Politics: Solidarity for the UKM4." This 2010 poster refers to the case of four Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) student activists, charged during a parliamentary by-election with being in possession of campaign materials for the opposition Pakatan Rakyat coalition, a violation of the Universities & University Colleges Act (UUCA). The case became a rallying point around the UUCA's constraints on students' liberties and academic freedom.

Cover graphic adapted from a poster designed by Fahmi Reza.
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A project such as this one necessarily incurs a cornucopia of debts. The knowledge of how many others have helped this project along, and how impossible it would be to thank all of them—activists, academics, administrators, friends—at all adequately, is humbling. But I will start at the beginning, flounder through the middle, and pretend for a moment that there is an end.

The genesis of this book began on the margins of another project, on civil society in Asia, during which conversations with Ed Aspinall, Kyaw Yin Hlaing, and Suzaina Kadir, in particular, sparked our thinking about the specific provenance, significance, and characteristics of student activism. As we four delved into a collaborative project on the latter phenomenon across Asia, and I began research for my intended chapter on Malaysia, I realized that what I had thought was a puddle was more a swamp: I felt compelled to write a book just on Malaysia alongside that region-wide volume. And that is when the debts really started to pile up ...

I have been helped along the way by outstanding institutional support. DePaul University, the East-West Center, and the University at Albany, my institutional homes over the course of the project, have all offered much needed moral and tangible research support. A fellowship at Georgetown University's Center for Democracy and the Third Sector (helmed by the ever helpful Steve Heydemann), followed by a Fulbright fellowship at Universiti Malaya (with Khadijah Khalid my gracious faculty host), allowed both intellectual stimulation and single-minded attention to my research. A grant from the Asian Political and International Studies Association offered additional financial assistance (augmented by Hari Singh's ready encouragement), while the chance to present pieces of the research at over twenty universities and other fora helped to hone my analysis.

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ACRONYMS

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia)
AMCJA	All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (allied with PUTERA)
API	Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Generation of Aware Youth)
ASA	Asian Students Association
BBMN	Barisan Bertindak Mahasiswa Negara (National Students' Action Front)
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
BTN	Biro Tata Negara (National Civics Bureau)
CIE	Confédération Internationale des Etudiants (est. France 1919)
CLS	Chinese Language Society
COSEC	Coordinating Secretariat for National Unions of Students
CSS	Catholic Students' Society (UM)
CUS	Catholic Undergraduates' Society (USM)
DAP	Democratic Action Party
DEMA	Malaysian Youth and Students' Democratic Movement
DTC	Dewan Tunku Cancelor (Tunku Chancellor Hall, a.k.a. Great Hall)
FRU	Federal Reserve Unit (riot police)
GAMIS	Gabungan Mahasiswa Islam Se-Malaysia (Malaysian Muslim Students' Association)
GMMI	Gerakan Mahasiswa Mansuhkan ISA (Students' Abolish ISA Movement)
GPMS	Gabungan Pelajar-pelajar Melayu Semenanjung (Peninsular Malays' Students' Union)
HEP	Hal Ehwal Pelajar (Student Affairs Department)
IIU	International Islamic University
ISA	Internal Security Act
ISC	International Student Conference (Leiden)
ITM	Institut Teknologi MARA (later University Teknologi MARA)
IUS	International Union of Students (Prague)
JAC	Joint Activities Committee
JERIT	Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (Oppressed People's Network)
JKMI	Jawatankuasa Kebajikan Mahasiswa India (Indian Student Welfare Committee; later Students' Welfare Committee)
Keadilan	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party)
KSJT	Komunité Seni Jalan Telawi (Telawi Street Arts Community)
KTAR	Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman (later Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman)
MB	Menteri Besar (Chief Minister)
MBM	Majlis Belia Malaysia (Malaysian Youth Council)
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MCU	Medical College Union
MDU	Malayan Democratic Union
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MOVE	Malaysian Academic Movement (Pergerakan Tenaga Akademik Malaysia, a.k.a. GERAK)
MPM	Majlis Pelajar Malaysia (Malaysian Students' Council)
Nantah	Nanyang University
NEP	New Economic Policy
NOC	National Operations Council
NUS	National University of Singapore
NUSU	Nanyang University Student Union
PAP	People's Action Party
PAS	Parti Islam se-Malaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
PKAUM	Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik UM (UM Academic Staff Association)
PKPIM	Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia (National Association of Muslim Students of Malaysia)
PKPM	Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Malaya (National Union of Malayan Students)
PMI	Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam (Muslim Students' Society)
PMIUM	Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Malaya (UM Muslim Students' Society)
PBMUM	Persatuan Bahasa Melayu Universiti Malaya (University of Malaya Malay Language Society)
PMSF	Pan-Malayan Students' Federation
PRM	Parti Rakyat Malaysia (formerly Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia, Malaysian People's Party)
PSSM	Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia (Malaysian Social Science Association)
RCU	Raffles College Union
RRC	Retrenchment Research Centre
SB	Special Branch
SITC/UPSI	Sultan Idris Training College/Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (Sultan Idris Teaching University)
SMM	Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (Malaysian Students' Solidarity)
SRC	Students' Representative Council
SU	University of Singapore (later NUS)
Suaram	Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Voice of the Malaysian People)
Suhakam	Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysian (Malaysia Human Rights Commission)
TLS	Tamil Language Society
UBU	Universiti Bangsar Utama
UiTM	University Teknologi MARA
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia)
UM	Universiti Malaya (University of Malaya)
UMANY	Universiti Malaya Association of New Youth
UMKL	University of Malaya at Kuala Lumpur (1957–61)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UMS	Universiti Malaysia Sabah
UMSU	University of Malaya Students' Union
UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
UPM	Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Agriculture University of Malaysia), renamed Universiti Putra Malaysia

USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia (Science University of Malaysia)
USSU	University of Singapore Students' Union
UTAR	Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
UUCA	Universities and University Colleges Act
UUM	Universiti Utara Malaysia (Northern University of Malaysia)
WUFI	We Unite for Islam

CHAPTER ONE

CAMPUS: POLITICS—POLITICS: CAMPUS

> Let not a future historian write of us: "They were an uninspired, convictionless generation; their only monuments are the used dance-coupons, the cigarette stubs and the Week-ender."[1]

Across campuses and continents worldwide, student activists seized the headlines in 1968. While, in Poland that March, students challenged Communist Party control over universities and cultural production, neighboring Czechoslovakia experienced its short-lived "Prague Spring," culminating in two undergraduates' self-immolation. In the United States, antiwar activism ratcheted upwards in April with Students for a Democratic Society's Ten Days of Resistance and the occupation of Columbia University, then with youth- and student-led riots surrounding the Democratic Convention in Chicago in August. On Paris's Left Bank in May, students spearheaded massive demonstrations against the DeGaulle government and a general strike. In Mexico City in October, the brutal suppression of student protests for social justice and democracy—the "Tlatelolco massacre"—stunned the country, ten days before the Olympic Games commenced in that city. And the list goes on. Students across the globe were taking a stand. That wider context served as the backdrop to activism in any one state—in this case, we focus on Malaysia.

Time and again, students have played pivotal roles at moments of social and political upheaval. The descriptive term "student" not only defines a role, but offers a powerful collective identity to those who adopt it.[2] "Among the first groups to feel the pull of modern ideas,"[3] university students comprise an incipient intelligentsia and skilled workforce; they enjoy elite status and a degree of freedom even amid the proletarianizing effects of mass higher education.[4] The phrase "student activism," defined as students' (usually undergraduates') collective mobilization vis-à-vis state, economic, societal, and campus powerholders, is a widely resonant, if loosely

[1] "The Challenge," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, p. 4.

[2] David A. Snow, "Collective Identity and Expressive Forms," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (London: Elsevier, 2001), pp. 2213–14.

[3] Philip G. Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World: Themes and Variations* (Singapore: Maruzen Asia, 1982), p. 174.

[4] Seymour Martin Lipset, "University Students and Politics in Underdeveloped Countries," in *Student Politics*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1967), p. 6; Christopher A. Rootes, "Politics of Moral Protest and Legitimation: Problems of the Modern Capitalist State," *Theory and Society* 9,3 (1980): 475–76.

specified, concept; it encompasses more than just attention-grabbing rebellion.[5] Nor can we properly speak of *a* student movement: student activism may assume any of a broad range of operational fields, orientations, strategies, ideologies, networks, and constituencies. Although only a minority of university students engage in this phenomenon, student activism is worth studying given how widely embraced and influential this identity category and genre of activism has been, both in its direct impact on politics, and in calibrating the political status of intellectuals broadly and of informed political critique.

Theories of contentious politics (or of social movements specifically) are useful for understanding student activism, but crave refinement. Student movements are distinctive among social movements given the transience, structural position, and subject status of their adherents, the breadth of their constituencies, and the apparent universality of their underlying mission. The upsurge of a student protest cycle in the late 1960s–early 1970s was spectacular, but not unique. Though not necessarily or always antigovernment, students have wielded their "moral force" and energy against regimes, leaders, and policies with startling ubiquity and effect. Each time students assume so pivotal a function, observers watch with surprise, perhaps alarm—and invariably, a sense of déjà vu. That said, however common student activism may be, noted Donald Emmerson in 1968, students even in politically malleable developing areas "tend to be politically aware, interested, and active in sharply decreasing degrees."[6] It is easy to forget in a quiet period how transformative a mass of incensed students can be when a protest cycle ramps up, and vice-versa. A quintessential example: who knew in the 1960s that Japan's militant, radical, and potent Zengakuren (National Federation of Student Self-Government Associations) would yield to the quiescent academic culture of today?[7]

The university plays a unique role in any polity, but is particularly key in the context of postcolonial political, social, and economic development. Institutes of higher education have a dual mandate: to produce workers (per Horace Mann) and to produce self-actualized, good citizens (per John Dewey).[8] Not all students are activists, but all wend their way through the campus, understood broadly as the inherently political, institutional manifestation of the university. That environment is critical in filtering new ideological trends and structuring the nature and aims of student activism. It is in and through the university—an institution usually exported

[5] E. Wight Bakke and Mary S. Bakke, *Campus Challenge: Student Activism in Perspective* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), p. 13.

[6] Donald Emmerson, "Conclusion," in *Students and Politics in Developing Nations*, ed. Donald Emmerson (New York, NY: Praeger, 1968), p. 390.

[7] While hardly representative of the majority of Japanese students, the largely Marxist Zengakuren (by the mid-1960s, the group was really a cluster of self-professed Zengakuren of varying ideological stripes) was powerful both in the university and outside, its activities ranging from politically incendiary demonstrations against the US–Japan Security Treaty, which erupted in 1960, to violent skirmishes over Japan's role in the Vietnam War in 1967–68, to the months-long occupation and closure of prestigious Tokyo University and dozens of other campuses in 1968–69, protests staged to address university-related issues. Ichiro Sunada, "The Thought and Behavior of Zengakuren: Trends in the Japanese Student Movement," *Asian Survey* 9,6 (1969): 457–74; Philip G. Altbach, "Student Movements in Historical Perspective: The Asian Case," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1,1 (1970): 82; and Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, pp. 187–88.

[8] David Schultz, "The Corporate University in American Society," *Logos* 4,4 (2005), viewed at www.logosjournal.com/issue_4.4/schultz.htm on March 15, 2011.

from the metropole to colonies, often complete with staff and traditions—that modernizing elites are trained and nurtured, that elements of culture are both challenged and preserved, that state goals for development of human resources are pursued, and that national pride and intellectual life are embodied and advanced. It is this institution, moreover, that provides the semipermeable boundary around a collective student identity and student activism: students might engage also or instead as citizens of the outside world, but much of their involvement and agency tends to be focused inward toward the campus or channeled through specifically student-based organizations.

While the first universities formed centuries ago, *student* as an acknowledged political category is a comparatively modern invention. *Student* as used here represents a collective identity; collective identities in a sociological sense represent more a process of creating social actors than a fixed property of those social actors. The word thus identifies a person with an embedded sense of collective agency rather than one who has adopted a social or role identity as merely an individual enrolled in an educational institution.[9] Balanced between the supposed vibrancy of *youth* and savviness of *intelligentsia*, students are by definition transients in the identity category *student*. Moreover, unlike, for instance, secondary school students, university students are (or are presumed to be) no longer under the ready control of parents or guardians, but are recognized as adults, with the ability to make their own decisions.[10] Their stature is confusing: since they are expected to be future leaders, students' potential may garner them respect and cultivate arrogance disproportionate to their age and experience, yet they remain for the moment still subordinates in society. Nowhere is this ambiguity more acute than when the broader polity is equally precariously poised on the cusp of independence. Although readying themselves for self-governance, these soon-to-be-postcolonial states were not supposed to get *too* brazen or overconfident. University students then occupied a subject position, both on campus and geopolitically. Nearly all the early elites of many postcolonial states gained training, connections, and legitimation by participating in nationalist and subsequent student movements, and a significant number of revolutions and coups have sprung from campuses across Asia and elsewhere. At the same time, student politics today seems perhaps more normalized than it was in the 1960s–70s and accounts of students' distinctiveness, romantic and impractical.

Here we explore a case that covers the spectrum, from avid activism to concerted avoidance: Malaysia. The overarching objectives of this book are, first, to explore student activism as a distinctive genre of social movement, and, second, to examine the political impacts and externalities of student activism in Malaysia. In particular, I trace a project of "intellectual containment" by which a cautious and defensive postcolonial state suppresses student mobilization both physically and normatively, simultaneously curbing future protest, erasing a legacy of past protest, and

[9] Snow, "Collective Identity and Expressive Forms," p. 2213.

[10] British officials hence barred secondary school students from the Pan-Malayan Student Federation: "It is undesirable that school boys and girls, who should be under the control of parents or guardians, should form Associations so that they may take an active part in politics collectively as students, or so that they may become organised bodies in a position to negotiate with the authorities, whether School, Government, or otherwise." Memorandum by the Chief Secretary, "The Student Movement in Malaya" (Ex.Co. Paper No. 5/22/55), the National Archives: Public Records Office (hereafter TNA:PRO), CO 1030/263.

stemming the production of potentially subversive new ideas. What is important here is not so much quantification of the students involved in activism (an impossible task, regardless), but tracing the impact and recognition of that activism: its reception in society and government, and resultant changes in frames and space for engagement among students themselves. What was once sanctioned and even welcomed (within bounds) is now illicit and disallowed in Malaysia, reflecting more than just changes in the encompassing political regime. A theory-informed approach reveals the importance of changes in the meaning of and responses to a specific collective identity in shaping claims made and strategies adopted, both by students and by their interlocutors.

Malaysia presents a useful case for several reasons. First, student activism in Malaysia, though ultimately less cataclysmic than in places like Indonesia and Iran, has run the gamut ideologically and strategically over the years. Second, Malaysian student bodies are unusually crosscut by ethnoreligious and partisan loyalties that inhibit concerted student ideology and action, fostering instead more narrow, potent collective identities. Third, much as in other developing states, Malaysian policies on higher education have changed dramatically and rapidly over the years, creating analytically useful, clear "regimes" that can be compared diachronically. And finally, the course of development of higher education in Malaysia, as in other former colonies, has been conveniently brief: Malaysian tertiary education is a twentieth-century phenomenon, developed as a clearly colonial institution, and aggressively, if inconsistently, nationalized and indigenized since the 1960s.

We begin, though, by introducing student activism as a phenomenon and focus, with particular emphasis on Asia and the postcolonial world, followed by a brief synopsis of what a case study of Malaysia will illuminate and of how the volume fits together.

Understanding Student Activism

Student activism is hardly a new concept: rebellious American students questioned both British rule and prevailing moral codes in the 1770s; the nineteenth-century Russian Revolution was largely university-based; and students in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France, Germany, and Russia adopted "renunciatory personal styles, including long hair among men and short hair among women, colored spectacles, dirty clothes and life styles, and a stress on obscene language."[11] However, student activism manifests differently in different sites and eras, even if the category *student* tends to be taken for granted in the literature.[12] Understanding the nuances of this concept will help us make sense of the Malaysian experience. Students do not constitute a class in a Marxist sense, although they may approach one by dint of their concern for their own education and prospects,[13] nor do such uniform parameters apply as for the category *youth*. Even primary-school students have at times joined the political fray (consider Soweto in June 1976, when a thirteen-year-old protester was among the first student casualties), yet discussions of "student activism" usually refer to students enrolled in tertiary-level institutions. On the converse, former student activists may cling to that moniker even long after their opportunity to study has passed—for instance, Burmese "student activists" continue rallying from exile, having been chased out of their universities in 1988.[14] The present study focuses on activism among enrolled university students, but acknowledges the unavoidable arbitrariness of the focus.

As becomes clear in the chapters to come, the sense of *student* as a distinct category and basis for activism is socially constructed. Some subset of those who identify functionally as "students" embrace the collective identity *student*, a process of "identity alignment" that generally happens through discursive framing or the actual experience of activism.[15] Despite the category's inherent variability, in many societies, "it is understood that students are a crucial constituent group in political society and have by definition the right and duty to act."[16] In particular, where students represent "the only outspoken and effective oppositional force"—as in developing or authoritarian states—their contribution may be magnified, legitimated, and endorsed by other frustrated, but more constrained, segments of society.[17] Or, as expressed by a contemporary University of Dhaka student amid rounds of student-led anti-government rallies, "It's the students' duty ... to give a voice to the people."[18]

In large part, what validates *student* as a collective, political identity to audiences and adversaries of a student movement in any context is a historical record of that identity's enactment, invoked and reactivated in the process of public engagement.[19] On the other hand, efforts to define student activism not as a social movement like others, but as a "culture,"[20] obscure the mechanisms behind that activism: implicit or explicit framing processes, organizational maintenance, and other aspects of micromobilization for collective action. A more satisfying explanation requires exploration of parameters, meanings, and methods. Broadly speaking, this identity category is different from others: it is temporally and spatially bounded, located only in the brief interregnum between matriculation and graduation, and tethered to a

[11] Seymour Martin Lipset, "Youth and Politics," in *Contemporary Social Problems*, ed. Robert K. Merton and Robert Nisbet, 3rd edition (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 752–54.

[12] John W. Meyer and Richard Rubinson, "Structural Determinants of Student Political Activity: A Comparative Interpretation," *Sociology of Education* 45,1 (1972): 28.

[13] Ian Weinberg and Kenneth N. Walker, "Student Politics and Political Systems: Toward a Typology," *American Journal of Sociology* 75 (1969): 82.

[14] Hence the slogan of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front, "Revolution is our school ... our university." See Aung Naing Oo, "'Revolution is Our School ... Our University,'" *The Irrawaddy*, August 16, 2008, available at www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=13882, last accessed on March 15, 2011.

[15] Scott A. Hunt, Robert D. Benford, and David A. Snow, "Identity Fields: Framing Processes and the Social Construction of Movement Identities," in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, ed. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph Gusfield (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), p. 185; Snow, "Collective Identity and Expressive Forms," p. 2216.

[16] Meyer and Rubinson, "Structural Determinants of Student Political Activity," p. 36.

[17] Ross Prizzia, "Student Activism and Political Change," in *Thailand: Student Activism and Political Change*, ed. Ross Prizzia and Narong Sinsawasdi (Bangkok: Allied Printers, 1974), pp. 1–3; Rootes, "Politics of Moral Protest," p. 474.

[18] Quoted in Emily Wax, "Bangladesh's Epicenter of Political Tumult," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2007.

[19] Craig C. Calhoun, "Science, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity," in *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), p. 105; also Snow, "Collective Identity and Expressive Forms," p. 2213.

[20] Gerard DeGroot, ed., *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), p. 4.

campus or classroom. Student organizations may be expected to require constant attention to recruitment, to face an abbreviated protest cycle, and to undergo more ongoing redefinition and renewal than other sorts of social movement organizations. The unusual difficulty or delicacy of coalition-building across student and other social movement organizations is testament to the distinctiveness (insulation, arrogance, elitism, transience) of student organizations and the relative incomparability to other collective identities of a collective student identity.

Student activism is not synonymous with youth activism, although membership in these categories overlaps. Certain motivating factors—reputed vigor, idealism, impatience with elders, lack of occupational constraints—apply to both. However, the concentration of students in classrooms and residential hostels and their primary function as learners rather than earners (even for those who work as well) sets them apart. A distinctive "campus ecology" facilitates student mobilization: boundary walls reduce risk, dormitory roommates serve as brokers and enforcers, interuniversity networks simplify alliance-building and imitation, and the spatial dimensions of student traffic create obvious nodal points for interaction.[21] Given this ecology, the campus itself is a target for activism only for students and academic staff—and campus-level issues may represent key grievances.[22] Historically, socioeconomic class and status tended to distinguish students from youth more broadly, as well. As Benedict Anderson explains:

> In an earlier time, "student" had been almost synonymous with "member of the national elite"—a being on an almost stratospheric plane above the mass of his countrymen. But by the late 1960s and early 1970s, social mobility had created conditions where "student" might still have elevated connotations, but could also signify something like "the neighbour's kid who got into Thammasat when mine didn't." It became possible to envy and resent students in a way that would have seemed incongruous a generation earlier.[23]

Reflecting a broader and increasingly heterogeneous student body, student leaders by the 1970s were more likely to come from lower-middle-class than upper-class groups, and not necessarily from the most prestigious faculties.[24]

Students share certain characteristics with intellectuals or others in academic settings (their lecturers, for instance), although, again, their subject position sets them apart.[25] Even so, as for other intellectuals, students' elevated status and prospects may clash with their political ideals and complicate identification with the masses.

[21] Dingxin Zhao, "Ecologies of Social Movements: Student Mobilization during the 1989 Prodemocracy Movement in Beijing," *American Journal of Sociology* 103,6 (1998): 1495.

[22] For instance, Nella Van Dyke, "Protest Cycles and Party Politics: The Effects of Elite Allies and Antagonists on Student Protests in the United States, 1930–1990," in *States, Parties, and Social Movements*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 235–36.

[23] Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (New York, NY: Verso, 1998), p. 152.

[24] Altbach, "Student Movements in Historical Perspective," p. 81.

[25] Frank A. Pinner, "Students—a Marginal Elite in Politics," in *The New Pilgrims: Youth Protest in Transition*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Robert S. Laufer (New York, NY: David McKay, 1972), pp. 283–84.

For instance, in military-ruled South Korea of the 1980s, a revolutionary worker–intellectual alliance could only be cemented once university students and academics by the thousands foreswore "university diplomas, job prospects, and middle-class lives" for factory work.[26] Partly in light of this example, radical students in New Order Indonesia did much the same to foment and facilitate industrial action, living also among the rural poor to gain credibility and access to assist in land disputes.[27] Yet students overall may be as resistant to change as their elders, especially when their own prospects could be at stake.[28] That tension was particularly keen during the nationalist era, when educated elites' interests clearly lay with the status quo, but students, journalists, and others bucked economic self-interest to press an ideological agenda advocating independence.

Seen differently, students may resemble less intellectuals than military leaders or certain clergy. These "marginal elites," explains Pinner, are producers of collective goods, who "live off the community" to some extent, enter formally into that status, are often quartered together and apart from others, enjoy special privileges and immunities, and are under separate legal jurisdiction.[29] Their specific ecology of social segregation and internal communication relaxes the communal bonds that constrain others in society and facilitates mobilization and ready leadership, but leaves them reluctant to restructure an order in which they are so privileged. Since they lack the organizational structure and independent social and political base of the military or clergy,[30] however, students' empowerment is far less inherent to their status as members of that category; as we shall see, students may be particularly powerless to prevent their own sociopolitical marginalization.

Furthermore, the transnational dimensions of student protest cycles are striking. Students operate within a national context, but also may comprise part of "an international stratum of intellectuals."[31] The fact that students may study either in their home countries or abroad contributes to the cross-border flow of ideas and strategies: students returning home for holidays or after graduation serve as brokers, transmitting relevant frames and tactics. For instance, a small but significant number of students from the colonies in Southeast Asia attended universities in Europe, where they not only encountered radical (and not so radical) ideologies, but also developed networks among colonial and European classmates, European parties, and political associations. The case of Vietnamese students who traveled to study either in Japan in the early twentieth century, or to France in far greater numbers, is exemplary,[32] as is that of the around 17,000 Chinese students studying in Japan, the US, and Europe by 1906.[33] Still today, students may join political campaigns while overseas, whether oriented toward the home or host country.

[26] Namhee Lee, "Representing the Worker: The Worker–Intellectual Alliance of the 1980s in South Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* 64,4 (2005): 912.

[27] Edward Aspinall, *Opposing Suharto: Compromise, Resistance, and Regime Change in Indonesia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 140–43.

[28] Emmerson, ed., *Students and Politics*, p. 409.

[29] Pinner, "Students—a Marginal Elite," p. 285.

[30] Ibid., pp. 286–88, 294–95.

[31] Emmerson, ed., *Students and Politics*, pp. 391–92.

[32] Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919–1939* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1989).

[33] Altbach, "Student Movements in Historical Perspective," p. 77.

That mobility across a wide swathe of colonies, in which so many of the universities, established in a narrow European mold, resembled one another, helped transmit the identity *student* as the crux of an "activist package," complete with iconic images, legends, and theories, albeit tweaked to fit each local context.[34] Such tweaking is akin to anthropologist Tom Boellstorff's concept of "dubbing,"[35] or adapting attributes of cultural tropes in novel and dynamic ways across contexts, while still retaining a recognizable core. To some extent, then, states set their expectations based on the global model, often presuming that their local student activists were likely to behave like peers overseas, and hence merited a comparable response. And states, too, could ascribe elements of local students' demands to mere borrowing: we shall see, for instance, that unsympathetic Malaysian authorities were inclined to dismiss local students' demands to participate in university administration in the late 1960s as mimicry of their American counterparts; while those examples did influence local students, these demands, in fact, had a far longer domestic history.

Yet geopolitics reinforced a "global" gloss on student activism: the students' transnational orientation, unique social position, and future potential rendered them important targets for Cold War antagonists. That backdrop helped to frame and structure student activism at the domestic level, not least since local alignments (particularly in Cold War hotspots like Malaysia) so closely paralleled those at the international level. By 1937, the League of Nations recognized an official international student organization, the forty-two-member Confédération Internationale des Etudiants (CIE), established in France in 1919. The CIE's orientation was neither political nor religious, and it excluded the more politically active students in unaffiliated colonial nations. Even so, allied governments (especially France) supported the CIE, in part, to harness the diplomatic power of intellectual networks. The organization folded when German troops sacked its Brussels headquarters in 1940.[36]

Following World War II, two federations prevailed, reflecting students' transnational ideological potential. The first was the antifascist International Union of Students (IUS), launched in Prague in 1946. Dominated numerically and financially by Western and Eastern European communists, the IUS took on a more openly "red" stance after Prague's 1948 coup. Western student unions then founded the International Student Conference (ISC) in 1950 and the Coordinating Secretariat for National Unions of Students (COSEC) in Leiden just over a year later. While the ISC was initially less politically oriented (though Western governments clearly perceived it as a counterweight to the IUS), by the mid-1960s, increasingly militant and independent affiliates, primarily from the developing world, had nudged the organization toward an increasingly activist stance. The IUS and ISC were structurally similar: each had over seventy affiliates (with some overlap), large staffs, international meetings scheduled every two or three years, widely disseminated magazines, and substantial funding (the IUS was chiefly funded by Eastern European governments; the ISC was supported by the United States' CIA[37]). Supplementing these two rival internationals were religious student networks (for instance, the World Student Christian Federation, founded in 1896, whose journal pioneered coverage of students) and partisan or youth organizations inclusive of students (especially the Budapest-based, procommunist World Federation of Democratic Youth; the Brussels-based World Assembly of Youth; and the International Union of Socialist Youth).[38] These organizations provided key movement resources, especially for students in the developing world, regardless of those students' Cold War ideological commitments.[39]

Academic staff, too, may be notably transnational in orientation and identity. The predominantly European model and (sometimes radical) teaching staff of most Asian colonial universities reinforced the significance of Western cultural and intellectual influences.[40] For instance, survey research in the late 1960s found Thai university students' extended exposure to foreign teachers, particularly from the American Peace Corps (most of whom were staunch antiwar liberals) to be a significant factor in their political socialization.[41] "Western" ideals of academic and other freedoms infiltrated the Thai campus in the same period, both from lecturers trained overseas and from imported publications,[42] helping fuel the emergence of Thai students as a collective force in the early 1970s.

The broad-brush schemas outlined above imply that students' propensity for certain forms of activism should be rather predictable. In reality, student behavior is anything but uniform or consistent: the contributing factors are too many and contingent. Amid the surge of protest movements internationally during the 1960s into the 1970s, any number of studies probed the biological and social correlates for student activism. Taken as a whole, their results were inconclusive or even contradictory. Emmerson, for instance, summarizes findings for the developing world: female students tended to be less politically informed and active than their male counterparts; the effects of age, class year, and parental social status or political

[34] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 227–28.

[35] Tom Boellstorff, "Dubbing Culture: Indonesian *Gay* and *Lesbi* Subjectivities and Ethnography in an Already Globalized World," *American Ethnologist* 30,2 (2003): 225–26.

[36] Philip G. Altbach, "The International Student Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5,1 (1970): 159–60; Thomas Nilsson, "The International Student Movement 1919–1939," *European Student LINK* 2,27 (2004), at www.esib.org/newsletter/link/2004-02/history1.php, accessed on September 6, 2006.

[37] A New Left magazine, *Ramparts*, broke the story of the CIA's involvement in the ISC and its US affiliate, the postwar National Student Association. See Sol Stern, "A Short Account of International Student Politics and the Cold War with Particular Reference to the NSA, CIA, Etc.," *Ramparts* 5,9 (1967): 29–38. Speaking at Stanford University in February 1967, US Vice-President Hubert Humphrey called this spate of revelations "one of the saddest times, in reference to public policy, our Government has had." Quoted in Phil Agee, Jr., "The National Student Association Scandal," *Campus Watch* Fall (1991): 12. The CIA purportedly had covertly funneled money, providing as much as 90 percent of both organizations' budgets, since as early as 1949. Only a handful of student leaders knew. The agency's ties with the National Student Association, already shaky, soured definitively after the exposé. As furious member unions bolted from the ISC, the organization dissolved. See also Karen Paget, "From Stockholm to Leiden: The CIA's Role in the Formation of the International Student Conference," *Intelligence and National Security* 18,2 (2003): 134–67.

[38] Altbach, "The International Student Movement"; Thomas Nilsson, "Students as Cold Warriors," *European Student LINK* 3,28 (2004), at www.esib.org/newsletter/link/2004-03/history2.php, accessed on September 6, 2006.

[39] Altbach, "The International Student Movement," pp. 156–57.

[40] Altbach, "Student Movements in Historical Perspective," pp. 75–76.

[41] Prizzia, "Student Activism and Political Change," pp. 5–6.

[42] Jeffrey Race, "Thailand 1973: 'We Certainly Have Been Ravaged by Something ...'" *Asian Survey* 14,2 (1974).

leanings were ambiguous; and a self-image as pure and righteous was common. Students in social sciences, law, and humanities, and from capital cities, secular rather than religious institutions, and "overexpanded, underdeveloped mass systems of higher education" were more likely to be politicized (and leftist).[43] Conventional wisdom that students act out frustration over "vocational prospectlessness" notwithstanding, Emmerson concluded that "an excess of aspirations over opportunities seems to contribute to student unrest only when other variables point in the same direction."[44] The main conclusion we can draw from these largely inchoate findings is merely that students are *not* inherently radical or even usually active, yet certain characteristics of their role and environment are conducive to rapid, effective mobilization.

When it does occur, student political activism is known for being oriented more toward moral than material ends[45] and for its "emphasis on style over program and commitment over compromise."[46] Particularly in the postcolonial world, this posture is characterized, in part, by a predilection for challenging the state, developed in the course of nationalist agitation. Despite their intense activism, Indonesian students, for instance, have consistently denied any interest in power. These students apparently recognize that, as Harry Benda describes,[47] intellectuals' power may stem from their having no material stake in the political struggle, for a leader who goes on the attack against disinterested critics exposes his or her own political frailty. Guided by this insight into politics, Indonesian students have claimed purposefully to be motivated only by moral considerations.[48] Echoing that sentiment, Thailand's King Bhumiphol lauded students' consistent integrity and moral purpose in 1973 as an antidote to corruption.[49] Given the scant concrete rewards at stake, students can and often do choose to withdraw from activism—whether through drugs, counter-culturalism, religion, or blinkered studiousness—rather than challenge perceived injustice or societal contradictions.

While electoral engagement has never been their primary avenue, students *have* wielded political influence. Indeed, a subset has come to power beyond the campus level: for instance, Indonesia's parliament included a cluster of students in the 1970s[50] and the University of Malaya Student Union seriously considered fielding a candidate in 1969. Referring especially to activists in developing states, Altbach offers several possible explanations for students' clout: a lack of established political institutions, students' participation in independence movements (which legitimates subsequent involvement), students' consciousness that they are an "incipient elite" and "somehow special," the location of so many universities in capital cities,

[43] Donald Emmerson, "Conclusion," in *Students and Politics in Developing Nations*, ed. Donald Emmerson (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp. 392–406.

[44] Ibid., 409-10.

[45] Rootes, "Politics of Moral Protest," p. 475.

[46] Emmerson, *Students and Politics*, p. 415.

[47] Harry Benda, "Political Elites in Colonial Southeast Asia: An Historical Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7,3 (1965): 244–45.

[48] Arief Budiman, "The Student Movement in Indonesia: A Study of the Relationship between Culture and Structure," *Asian Survey* 18,6 (1978): 615–17, 622.

[49] Race, "Thailand 1973," p. 201.

[50] Joseph B. Tamney, ed., *Youth in Southeast Asia: Edited Proceedings of the Seminar of 5th–7th March 1971*, Occasional Paper No. 11 (Singapore: ISEAS, 1971), p. 63.

students' role as spokespersons for a less educated and less empowered broader public, and the relatively higher socioeconomic status of the average student compared to his or her counterparts in industrialized nations.[51] Especially where the government tolerates some degree of opposition, but other groups are weak or lacking,[52] students, according to Altbach, "are a consistent, important, and even legitimate part of the political equation ... and the campus is a key part of the political system."[53]

Students need not engage either alone or in opposition, however. Emmerson notes that a student's "ties to family and community are not somehow magically severed by matriculation. Nor is he automatically an enthusiast in the vanguard of change. In part a product of modernization, he is psychologically exposed to its dislocations; often its prime beneficiary, he can number among its casualties as well."[54] The very fact that students do engage politically, in however transgressive a manner, confirms "the inclusion of students as a status group in the social and political system, rather than their alienation and withdrawal from the system."[55] In the heydays of nationalism and decolonization, for instance, student movements frequently allied with nationalist or leftist organizations and political parties. Students in Malaya, as well as Burma, Vietnam, India, and Indonesia, for example, helped focus dissent against colonial rule and develop a national language and culture.[56] Having established ties on campus at that early stage, political parties there and in other developing states maintained that niche long after, at times joined by additional allies from the middle classes or other sectors.

At the same time, students and intellectuals may find alliance with less-educated counterparts difficult, particularly where either social capital and mutual trust are low and the risk of repression is high, as in China and Taiwan through the late 1980s,[57] or where student organizations fear compromising their "purity" as students, as in Indonesia during 1998. Hence the irony in Indonesia that "students had legitimacy to give voice to demands precisely because they were not *rakyat* [common people], but attempted to lend force to their demands by asserting that they were the will of the *rakyat* and [acting] in the interests of the *rakyat*."[58] As we shall see, just such tension between elitism and feeling out-of-touch pressed Malaysian students toward village-level community service from the 1950s on. At the same time, students everywhere walked a fine line between productive collaboration and being branded as puppets.

[51] Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, pp. 164–65.

[52] Frank Parkin, "Adolescent Status and Student Politics," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5,1 (1970): 147–48.

[53] Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, p. 164.

[54] Emmerson, ed., *Students and Politics*, p. 415.

[55] Meyer and Rubinson, "Structural Determinants of Student Political Activity," p. 24.

[56] Altbach, "Student Movements in Historical Perspective," p. 75; Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, p. 179.

[57] Daniel Kelliher, "Keeping Democracy Safe from the Masses: Intellectuals and Elitism in the Chinese Protest Movement," *Comparative Politics* 25,4 (1993): 379–96; Teresa Wright, *The Perils of Protest: State Repression and Student Activism in China and Taiwan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

[58] Dave McRae, *The 1998 Indonesian Student Movement*, Working Papers on Southeast Asia, #110 (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 2001), pp. 35–36.

Ties between students and other sectors fed conspiracy theories, particularly in the 1960s, which identified domestic radicals as provocateurs in search of gullible, accessible recruits and as the key instigators of student protest generally. Those perceptions—to which left-wing students' vanguardist ethos and widespread ties to trade unions no doubt contributed—situated students as Cold War pawns "being controlled by the wrong side."[59] These assumptions that students were being manipulated in "a kind of 'proxy politics'" were surely overblown,[60] but the damage was done. As Altbach explains, Asian students' ties with political parties and fronts have largely diminished since then.[61] Typically, once nationalist students graduated and became nationalist leaders, craving stability and legitimacy, they tended to dismiss their erstwhile allies on campus, who, from their perspective, "became 'indisciplined' elements or anti-social forces";[62] the evolution of Singapore's People's Action Party is a quintessential example of this pattern. The advent of "normal" politics and the loss of a common colonial enemy hence has tended to render students in most Asian countries, at least, as domestic opposition groups that pose challenges to the university and society.[63]

Still, student activism operates at different levels, allowing participants opportunities to regroup and retrench. At times of great (inter)national ferment and societal strain, students may organize and direct their energies toward the broader political arena. At all times, the campus itself presents an equally valid battleground. Ideas of academic freedom and university autonomy set the campus apart,[64] and the university administration provides a salient and relatively accessible target. Also, economic modernization and rising levels of graduate un(der)employment have fomented university-level grievances concerning curricula, lack of opportunities for creativity and personal growth, the orientation toward profit rather than intellectual enhancement, and the like.[65] More recently, shifts in the nature and constituency of higher education—particularly with the increasing intrusion of market mechanisms—have sent ripples through the field of student activism. The ever-greater breadth of the student body, however, makes building a distinctive collective identity, one with the potential to be mobilized, ever more challenging, especially given the generic multiplication of demands on students' leisure and work time. The dynamics of these processes will become more clear as we see them play out in Malaysia.

[59] Brian Salter, "Explanations of Student Unrest: An Exercise in Devaluation," *British Journal of Sociology* 24,3 (1973): 335.

[60] Emmerson, ed., *Students and Politics*, p. 410.

[61] Altbach, "Student Movements in Historical Perspective," p. 75

[62] Ibid., p. 79.

[63] Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, pp. 182–83.

[64] A cogent example: police combating activists who were hiding out at Benito Juarez Autonomous University in Oaxaca in late 2006 "stopped short of crossing into the campus, pulling up as if they had hit an invisible wall." Law and tradition barred them from entering the campus. Explained one demonstrator, "The university is our symbol of autonomy, of freedom." Manuel Roig-Franzia, "In Oaxaca, Violence Erupts near Campus," *New York Times*, November 3, 2006, p. A25.

[65] Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, pp. 183–84.

When Student Activism Develops

Academic attention to student activism peaked in the late 1960s to early 1970s, as scholars searched for the triggers of the "student revolt" then in progress. As student activism surged, the volume of work on the phenomenon, and the range of "explanations" proposed, increased in equal measure.[66] Most analyses deemed students to be *sui generis*, and either trivialized them or explained their protests with theories of social breakdown, evaluating these protests as riots or in terms of crowd dynamics.[67] By the 1980s and 1990s, as academic interest in social movements rose, a new generation of scholars subsumed student movements within a more generic civil society frame. Student activism does fall within a broader tradition of mobilization, yet the distinct identities and interests it involves call for a more nuanced treatment.

Some of these studies published in the 1960s and 1970s, many based on American experience, focused on comparing activists with nonactivists. These analyses were meant to tease out predictors of individuals' proclivity to protest.[68] Other studies of the period aimed to elaborate a theme of generational protest,[69] or to compare the institutional contexts in which students in industrial democracies and those elsewhere circulated.[70] Most focused on the structural features of protest movements, on self-development, or on the immaturity of those involved, dismissing the participants as kids "just sowing a few wild, political oats along that bumpy road to maturity,"[71] rather than focusing on the substantive and ideological content of their activism. Moreover, much of this literature hovered in the realm of theoretically weak pop psychology, pronouncing on students' idealism, compulsion to demonstrate their independence, excitability, or unanchored libidos.[72] For instance, one of the period's relatively few studies of Southeast Asian students dwelled on the effects of "inhibition and uncertainty" among youths set adrift, unchaperoned, among members of the opposite sex, foreigners, mass media, and more.[73]

That some of the most prominent works in the field were so disparaging of the subject matter helps to explain why academic interest failed to keep pace with the continuing political salience of student movements in so many countries and contexts, whether in the (supposedly less volatile) industrial democracies or in the still-developing world. Yet not all the social scientists, journalists, pundits, and students themselves writing on student activism in the 1960s, 1970s, and subsequently were so dismissive. Part of what makes students worth studying is that, while such factors as socioeconomic status, family structure, and personality

[66] Philip M. Burgess and C. Richard Hofstetter, "The 'Student Movement': Ideology and Reality," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 15,4 (1971): 687–88.

[67] For example, Bakke and Bakke, *Campus Challenge*, p. 14; Burgess and Hofstetter, "The 'Student Movement,'" p. 702.

[68] For instance, James W. Clarke and Joseph Egan, "Social and Political Dimensions of Campus Protest Activity," *Journal of Politics* 34,2 (1972): 503–05, 511–20.

[69] Most pivotally, Lewis S. Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1969).

[70] Weinberg and Walker, "Student Politics and Political Systems," pp. 78–80.

[71] Salter, "Explanations of Student Unrest," pp. 329, 331–32.

[72] Lipset, "University Students and Politics," p. 16.

[73] Joseph Fischer, "The University Student in South and South-East Asia," *Minerva* 2,1 (1963): 48–49.

traits help to indicate which members of the general public engage in political activity, for a time, at least, university students were relatively homogenous—meaning some other factor might be identified as the spark that caused the activist few to become engaged.[74] Sociologists and political scientists, in particular, tended to focus more on personal motivations, attitudes, and ideologies than on organizational attributes of the universities and other dimensions.[75] Even key disciplinary journals included thoughtful pieces on student protest, while authors and editors were daily confronted with its reality at their universities and in the media. Yet as these early works fed a rising tide of interest in social movements broadly, scholarship on student activism, specifically, tapered off. A core aim of this study is to press this literature further: to focus on a revealing case study in order to extrapolate theoretical insights into identity-based mobilization, intellectual activism as a political force and challenge, and the distinctiveness of a particularly widespread and enduring form of social movement. While student movements clearly have much in common with other social movements, their genesis, in particular, is distinctive. The dimensions that most clearly set student movements apart are linked with the broader campus ecology, or the environment for mobilization among students and faculty, and, specifically, they involve issues of time and autonomy.

First, the length of time students spend on campus influences each individual's proclivity to become engaged: there is a learning curve to student activism, as a person must come to know the issues and actors, become acclimated to university classes, and master the bureaucratic and physical landscape. Older students may have an advantage in confidence, resources, and familiarity with higher education—for instance, one notes the many former teachers, enrolled in universities, who were critical participants in Malaysian student movements of the 1950s through the 1970s. Medical students, too, were overrepresented among early student leaders there, not least due to their mere persistence on campus, given their longer courses of study. The abbreviation of the standard course of study in all disciplines in Malaysia since then and the encouragement of a nose-to-the-grindstone ethic, which leaves little time for extraneous activity, have had the not-incidental effect of obstructing mobilization among students.

The scope for autonomous organization is likely to be even more significant as a determinant of student mobilization. Both Singapore and Malaysia have seen substantial institutional controls imposed on orientation programs, structures of student governance, and all other aspects of campus life. For instance, until the early 1970s, University of Singapore elections were "proper, student-run" affairs, garnering the victor "a certain status and public recognition." Student organizations were well-funded through student union fees, and student publications were well-informed and of high quality.[76] As described in chapter 4, regulations imposed in Singapore after the early 1970s, replicated also in peninsular Malaysia, systematically dismantled these conditions: politically connected university officers came to

[74] For instance, Glaucio A. D. Soares, "The Active Few: Student Ideology and Participation in Developing Countries," in *Student Politics*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1967), pp. 124–47.

[75] Philip G. Altbach, "Student Activism in the 1970s and 1980s," in *Student Politics, Perspectives for the Eighties*, ed. Philip G. Altbach (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981), pp. 3–4; and Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, p. 162.

[76] Teng Siao See, "The World of the English-Educated in the 1960s and 1970s: An Interview with Koh Tai Ann," *Tangent* 6 (2003): 274–76.

regulate and supervise student organizations and elections, student publications were banned or their editors cowed, and the student union lost financial and administrative clout. Those students empowered to take on "adult" roles can be expected to grasp more readily their entitlement to participate as politically responsible adults, especially given the availability of independent, sturdy platforms for engagement right on campus. The elimination of those platforms and the discursive belittlement of undergraduates have worked in tandem to make contemporary Malaysian students less likely than their forbears to feel justified in and empowered for collective action.

Furthermore, any assumption that there is a link between students and activism rests upon a conception of "students" as a collective—and not merely social or role—identity. The extension of higher education to the masses, now underway throughout the world, necessarily broadens and diffuses that identity category, as does the increasingly common assumption that an undergraduate education merely develops skills for the "knowledge economy." These trends are most apparent and transformative in the developing world. As Lipset noted at an earlier stage, "Because of the small size of the educated middle class, students in certain underdeveloped countries make up a disproportionately large section of the bearers of public opinion; their various affinities of education, class, and kinship with the actual elites give them an audience which students in more developed countries can seldom attain."[77] In hindsight, though, postcolonial students' status might be more accurately recognized as ephemeral, as the process of nation-building jostled the ranks of powerholders and etched a line between the new state and domestic troublemakers.

Inasmuch as students' social status helps to justify and explain their political behavior,[78] the normalization of higher education and recalibration of that status could be expected to depress students' political activity. The trends are not univalent, though; the widespread postwar phenomenon of overabundant graduates' declining future prospects (which only imperfectly tracks economic development), itself a core grievance, has the potential to ignite activism.[79] In Thailand, as in Malaysia, for instance, student activism reached its apex during the 1960s and 1970s, when the number and heterogeneity of universities soared,[80] not when the undergraduate cohort was most narrow. Ever greater numbers of young Thais, from increasingly diverse backgrounds, entered universities, where they espoused norms advocating progress and individual achievement, then grew frustrated by their inability either to secure prized civil-service positions or advance political democratization.[81]

Politicians in Malaysia and other such states, who themselves embraced politics as impassioned students, can now rather plausibly argue that contemporary students are different, being less select a group, with a diminished sense of their own elite

[77] Lipset, "University Students and Politics," p. 6.

[78] Meyer and Rubinson, "Structural Determinants of Student Political Activity," p. 35.

[79] Parkin, "Adolescent Status and Student Politics," pp. 154–55.

[80] In the period 1961–72, Thailand launched four new universities, two graduate schools, and an enlarged technical institute. Secondary enrollment tripled, and both university and vocational/technical enrollment more than doubled from 1965–75. Barbara Griffiths, "The Role of Vocational Students during the Democracy Period in Thailand," in *Loggers, Monks, Students, and Entrepreneurs: Four Essays on Thailand*, ed. Bryan Hunsaker et al. (Dekalb, IL: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 1996), pp. 84–85.

[81] Frank C. Darling, "Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand," *Pacific Affairs* 47,1 (1974): 6–8.

stature and voice. The pervasive, infantilizing rhetoric surrounding students today simply reinforces the changing relationship of students to society: Malaysian undergraduates are now termed *pelajar* (students) rather than the grander *mahasiswa* (undergraduates, specifically), rhetoric that makes it clear they are presumed to lack the credentials to speak as adults. In contrast, the attempted hermetic insulation of undergraduates from society—for instance, in New Order Indonesia—may perversely bolster the elevated position of the campus: students and lecturers have access to texts, concepts, and international perspectives with which the general public, apart from a stratum of intellectuals, is not trusted; the state's effort to confine students' engagement to the campus grounds acknowledges how dangerous those ideas and opinions could be if they were available to the general public, too.

Yet the changing stature and functions of the university present complex effects. Students and their families approach higher education laden with expectations: they expect the institution to provide adequate facilities and mentoring, and to qualify the student for elevated career opportunities after graduation. In countries such as Malaysia, the very conditions of postcolonial political life—from the linguistic legacies of the metropole to the exigencies of newly independent economic development—complicate matters. As Thomas Silcock noted in the early days of Malaysian independence, "A fundamental feature of university life in Southeast Asia is that it has been imported from abroad, with ready-made value systems sometimes already crystallized in institutions, techniques, and attitudes."[82] Given institutional stickiness and lecturers' training, these postcolonial universities tended still to emulate those of the former colonial power,[83] even though "the university pattern developed by the relatively wealthy and demographically stagnant metropolitan country is not … the one best suited to a poor, rapidly growing, and newly independent country."[84] More broadly, those rules and structures that might garner external approval from England or the Netherlands lacked internal legitimacy in Malaysia and Indonesia. In newly independent Southeast Asian nations, the expansion of education went hand-in-hand with enhancing government authority and reaching across different sectors of the population, efforts that were part of a wide-ranging statist project that typified the early postcolonial period and, in many cases, triggered a severe and even violent extra-institutional backlash against newly incumbent regimes.[85] In the meantime, a combination of too-hasty reorganization, skyrocketing enrollments, competing financial demands, and political commitments and interference made it difficult for freshly minted postcolonial universities to match the founding colonial ideal, and rendered local universities ever less likely to turn out critical-thinking, competent technocrats and professionals.

Importantly, impacts on individuals may be as enduring as impacts on institutions: studies suggest that generational effects keep former student activists far more politically engaged than the average citizen. James Fendrich and Kenneth Lovoy, for example, surveyed radical student activists, members of student government, and "noninvolved undergraduates" at intervals after their graduation

[82] Thomas H. Silcock, *Southeast Asian University: A Comparative Account of Some Development Problems* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1964), p. 3.

[83] Ibid., pp. 7–9.

[84] Ibid., p. 17.

[85] David H. Kamens, "'Statist' Ideology, National and Political Control of Education, and Youth Protest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27,4 (1983): 568–70.

from a US university. Twenty-five years on, the radicals remained the most politically active and left-leaning, and the previously noninvolved were the least so.[86] The authors propose that a person's activism as a student is a meaningful predictor of enduring individual political proclivities, and that low underlying levels of popular political participation lend the relatively few activist students, radical or otherwise, disproportionate political influence.[87] We have at least some evidence of comparable effects in Southeast Asia, raising concerns for the long-term vibrancy of political culture in nations where student-based movements have been suppressed. For instance, Stephen Douglas finds "the student political subculture" to have been "a major agency of political socialization" in mid-1960s Indonesia.[88] Certainly, even an impressionistic survey of Malaysian politics and civil society reveals a preponderance of former student activists. This does not prove that involvement in politics at the university *educated* these individuals to be politically engaged for the rest of their lives, since many of them probably joined student movements due to earlier predilections (a point on which existing evidence is mixed). Yet these patterns do underscore the long-term and national significance of student activism. All told, these defining dilemmas and subsequent repositionings mandate a dynamic perspective on student activism: such shifts, common across all states and regions, do not mean activism will not resurface, but that its participants, targets, modes, and impacts may change dramatically and repeatedly over time.

ACTIVISTS IN A STATE IN TRANSITION: MALAYSIA AND ITS CONTEXT

Asia and Latin America tend to be glossed rather broadly in theoretical or "normative" works on student activism, Africa is almost absent, and the United States and, to a lesser extent, Europe are front and center. At the same time, the tenacity and unpredictability of students in developing states, not least in Asia, have fascinated observers since the postcolonial nationalist era. A context energized by political and economic development offers space and legitimacy for student activism not generally found elsewhere, and the vibrancy of student movements in these young Asian nations can be better explained by the coincidence of political developments across the region than by some common "Asian" culture or identity.[89] That said, the differences among these movements are striking, given varying levels and modes of repression, nationalist struggles and colonial legacies, and educational institutions and policies.

The story of student activism in Malaysia weaves through the narrative of a young state engaged in its own sociopolitical development. The university in Malaysia dates only to 1949, when King Edward VII College of Medicine (established 1905) and Raffles College (established 1929) merged. The new University of Malaya, located in Singapore, offered English-medium higher education to a select cohort of

[86] James Max Fendrich and Kenneth L. Lovoy, "Back to the Future: Adult Political Behavior of Former Student Activists," *American Sociological Review* 53,5 (1988): 780–84; also James Max Fendrich and Robert W. Turner, "The Transition from Student to Adult Politics," *Social Forces* 67 (1989): 1051–52.

[87] Fendrich and Turner, "The Transition from Student to Adult Politics," p. 783. See also Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[88] Stephen A. Douglas, *Political Socialization and Student Activism in Indonesia* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 189–97.

[89] Altbach, *Higher Education in the Third World*, p. 190.

Malayans. No longer did aspiring elites have to go abroad to earn the degrees that would grant them access to the top ranks of the state-in-waiting (by 1949, independence was a rather sure thing, however hazy the details). As colonial Malaya and Singapore[90] recovered from World War II and the Japanese Occupation and prepared to follow neighboring Indonesia and the Philippines into independence in the 1950s, many undergraduates felt torn between vaunted positions as soon-to-be leaders and subordinate status as students. Ever aware of the momentous times in which they lived and of their own possibly heroic roles in the emerging new order, concerned students agonized over grand questions of nation-building, economic systems, political culture, and international alliances, even as they enjoyed campus life and readied themselves for future careers.

Declaring *Merdeka!* (independence) took only a moment; building a coherent nation took much longer. It was on campus that many of the debates central to that process first took shape: on language and education policies, ethnic pluralism, religion in government, and more. Dedicated both to intellectual pursuits and to the cultivation of leaders, the university became a hothouse for emergent political ideas and strategies. The same major rifts that divided students divided the broader citizenry, then and since: citizens and students alike disagreed in their perspectives on the position of Malay and non-Malay languages and cultures, the merits of socialism versus the free market, the importance of civil liberties versus a strong state, the role of Islam in politics and society, and the place and meaning of partisanship. (The direction of influence—did it move from campus to polity or vice-versa?—is part of what I will probe here.) From the outset, students in the region—in Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, China, and elsewhere—offered examples and allies to Malaysian students. With the passage of time, the character of the Malaysian university has shifted, but the campus has never shed its function as a crucible for larger political debates, even when most students have remained disengaged, whether blinded into passivity by the glow of a secure career ahead or simply cowed by rules and shadowy admonitions.

Malaysia has much in common with other plural, postcolonial states, not least in its use of education policy as a tool for nation-building and the extent to which changes in the polity have been reflected by shifts in the scope, focus, and repertoires of student activism. In Malaysia, the transitional events that most changed the nation, and the student movement, were independence, the brief merger with and separation from Singapore, and the adoption of extensive preferential policies for Malays and smaller indigenous groups. (Other changes on campus have led a societal drift, as toward cultural and political Islamization.) Yet both observers and students themselves note the relative paucity of overtly political activism among contemporary Malaysian students, or, indeed, among the Malaysian public at all. Though levels of disengagement have waxed and waned, Malaysian students have been less inclined toward radicalism than their counterparts in neighboring states for at least the past few decades. Three factors go some way toward explaining why,

[90] The colony had three components up until 1946: the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Malacca, Penang); the Federated Malay States (Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang); and the Unfederated Malay States (Johor, Terengganu, Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis). In 1946, Singapore became a separate Crown Colony, and the rest of the states united in the Malayan Union, reconstituted two years later as the Federation of Malaya and granted independence in 1957. Malaya became "Malaysia" with the annexation of Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak in 1963. Singapore exited the federation two years later.

despite important structural congruencies, student activism looks different in Malaysia than elsewhere in the region. Those salient factors are the deep and intransigent social cleavages dividing students, the relative lack of elite privilege and pride now attached to student status, and the availability of more "tame" channels for participation.

First, more than elsewhere, the university campus in Malaysia represents a distinctive node within the polity. The government's concerted efforts to foster a Malay middle class through aggressive affirmative-action policies, especially since the 1970s, have focused significantly on extending tertiary education among Malays, rendering the university a site for demographic transformation. Prior to 1969, Chinese students accounted for around 70 percent of the Malaysian undergraduate population, while Malays made up less than 30 percent; by the mid-1970s, those proportions had nearly reversed. Moreover, after this transition an increasing majority of Malay students were from poor, traditionally Islamic, rural areas.[91] While the state's policies intended to blur racial distinctions by reducing the coincidence of ethnicity with class, thus curbing communal mistrust and resentment, a side effect of affirmative action has been to render campuses deeply segregated along lines of race and religion. Even when in the same hostel or classroom, students from differing racial and religious backgrounds seldom mix, and noncommunally-oriented students have been hard pressed to surmount the racial divisions marking student activism increasingly since the late 1960s.[92]

As the following chapters will demonstrate, prior to the late 1960s, the most prominent student initiatives generally reflected a non-ethnic perspective, and class analysis carried real resonance, not least since socialist parties and organizations were still overt and thriving in Malaysia, but also because of skewed campus demographics: Malays were seriously underrepresented. Beginning in the late 1960s, student movements were significantly affected by the influx of Malay students, who came from more diverse economic backgrounds than did the population of students enrolled in the universities before. Already in 1971, a government report found "a mutual lack of comprehension and understanding" across racial groups at the University of Malaya that might lead to "polarization on serious political issues and even to hostility in times of student crises."[93] Especially as government policies escalated this demographic shift, the political timbre of both campus and country changed. Most prominently, the surge in campus Islamist activism since the 1970s (detailed in chapter 5) has both paralleled and stimulated a rise in Islamist politics

[91] Josef Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," *Pacific Affairs* 49,2 (1976): 199.

[92] For instance, see Chandra Muzaffar, "Has the Communal Situation Worsened over the Last Decade? Some Preliminary Thoughts," in *Kaum Kelas Dan Pembangunan Malaysia/Ethnicity Class and Development Malaysia*, ed. S. Husin Ali (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia, 1984), pp. 356–82; Thagavelu Marimuthu, "Student Development in Malaysian Universities," RIHED Occasional Paper #19, Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development (Singapore), 1984; Sheela J. Abraham, "National Identity and Ethnicity: Malaysian Perspectives," paper presented at the Second International Malaysian Studies Conference, Kuala Lumpur, August 2-4, 1999; and Heng Pek Koon, "The Mahathir Generation and Nation-Building in Malaysia: Political, Economic, and Socio-Cultural Dynamics," in *Reflections: The Mahathir Years*, ed. Bridget Welsh (Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Program, SAIS, Johns Hopkins University, 2004), pp. 366–76.

[93] Abdul Majid bin Ismail et al., *Report of the Committee Appointed by the National Operations Council to Study Campus Life of Students of the University of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Chetak Kerajaan, 1971), p. 29.

more broadly. The most intractable divisions among students now separate Malay, Chinese, and Indian students from each other, on the one hand, and divide Malays of differing levels of piety and political predilections, on the other. At the same time, when only children of "already more modernised and educated classes" tended to find their way to university, those parents and children were likely to share similar worldviews.[94] This homogeneity quickly dwindled on campuses dominated by a Malay student population and Malay language-medium. While issues-based activism should still be feasible, the coincidence of ethnic and linguistic (as well as class) cleavages, the paucity of cross-racial communication, and a degree of attendant mistrust make broad-based mobilization more difficult in Malaysia than in many other countries.

Second, whatever elite-standing undergraduate status may have conferred has atrophied rapidly since around the mid-1970s. In the 1960s, students in Malaysia, as elsewhere, considered themselves part of an intellectual elite rather than as equals with the rest of their age cohort, even as political parties recruited most youth and other leaders from among those who did not attend university.[95] Since the mid-1970s, in fact, students have been excluded even from youth wings of Malaysian political parties, although other youths may participate at will. (Nonetheless, the roster of prominent student activists of decades past reads like a "who's who" of political leaders from both government and opposition parties.) An important motivation for student activism in Malaysia in the past was students' irritation with corruption in government—indicating the students' internalized sense that they could act as moral arbiters for the nation—as well as resentment against the government's "talking down" to them.[96] Moreover, in that earlier era, the public supported student campaigns (for instance, the election rallies that will be described in chapter 4) out of faith in the students' sincerity and lack of ulterior motives.[97] At least for a time, then, it seems that in Malaysia, as in Indonesia, students were seen to possess a "moral force" that qualified them to stand in for less pristine social groups at moments of national crisis. More recently, the intervention of political parties in campus politics makes it unlikely that contemporary students could claim the same moral standing, even if the language of "purity" still crops up when activists describe their motivations. And the common perception that students today are not on par with their forebears (see chapter 6) carries further implications for students' suitability to serve as "spokespeople and agents of social change."[98]

Changes in selection criteria for universities in Malaysia and efforts to make higher education more widely available through both affirmative action and regulatory liberalization (see chapter 5) have undercut the assumption that university students constitute an elite with special intellectual and moral standing. From the outset, that status owed at least as much to the rarity of being among the chosen few in higher education and to the breadth of extracurricular activity on campus, much of it intellectually inclined, as it did to the actual content of most students' education. Indeed, from the colonial era, while most university graduates were Chinese and Indian, it was Malays who could climb at least to the middle rungs of the colonial administration; education alone conferred limited mobility.[99] The comparatively technocratic bent of Malaysian higher education has only exacerbated such trends: since colonial days, state planners have deemed higher education more as a tool for forging the necessary human resources for economic development than for cultivating intellectual elites. Already in 1968, opposition party leader Goh Hock Guan complained that a Higher Education Planning Committee report "concentrates largely on the need to produce so many more doctors, engineers, dentists, architects, arts men, agriculturalists, etc.," rather than "nation builders."[100] Since then, not only has extracurricular politicking been sharply curbed, but the education sector has become more commercialized in approach and intended applications. If higher education is just one more step in training for economic productivity, students should have no special status as the "conscience" of the nation, as they may claim elsewhere. Increasingly, too, unclear or inappropriate standards, poor facilities and academic resources, inadequate interaction with faculty, and the specter of graduate unemployment contribute to a pervasive sense of frustration, insecurity, and alienation among university students in Malaysia—a stark contrast to the energy of earlier eras. Such shortcomings are increasingly inimical to intellectualism or curiosity, especially given intense pressure from family, society, and the market to "succeed."[101]

Third, when Malaysian students do choose to engage, they enjoy more opportunities to speak out than do students in more repressive regimes, notwithstanding the structural (dis)incentives and demographic patterns that discourage certain sorts of activism. It is true that Malaysian students face constraints on engagement. However, while the ostensibly restrictive Universities and University Colleges Act (see chapters 4–6), in particular, clearly *is* important, it has not quelled political involvement to the degree one might expect. At the time of the law's passage, the University of Malaya campus paper vented, "In attempting to prohibit a healthy interest and participation in politics, the government is paving the way for unhealthy, undercover activities."[102] Such a redirection happened elsewhere—in Burma and Indonesia, for instance—but not to any significant extent in Malaysia. Moreover, students themselves seem less than daunted by the Universities and University Colleges Act. As we shall see, activists of the early 1970s simply disregarded the law, while later activists suggest that ignorance and apathy are far more debilitating, even if regulations compound those effects.

In this light, the shift to "contained" forms of contention—for instance, participation in reasonably tame religious organizations or in tightly managed

[94] Fischer, "The University Student," p. 45.

[95] Josef Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics: A Preliminary Comparative Inquiry," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1,1 (1970): 18.

[96] Denzil Peiris, "The Emerging Rural Revolution," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 87 (1975): 31.

[97] Hishamuddin Rais, "Akta Universiti Dan Ruang Demokrasi," Idealis Mahasiswa: Laman Web Mahasiswa Malaysia, available online at http://idealis-mahasiswa.tripod.com/artikel-harian/mar2002/14mar01.html, accessed on April 19, 2011.

[98] Md. Ibrahim, "Mampukah Mahasiswa Kini Menjadi Agen Perubahan Masyarakat?" *Aspirasi* 9 (1984-85): 113.

[99] Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1946*, 3rd ed. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), p. 9.

[100] Goh Hock Guan, "A Critique on [sic] the Higher Education Planning Committee Report," *Rocket*, July / August 1968, pp. 4–5.

[101] Fischer, "The University Student," pp. 47–48, 52.

[102] "Construed or Misconstrued," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 7, 1971, p. 14; also Charles D. Brockett, "The Structure of Political Opportunities and Peasant Mobilization in Central America," *Comparative Politics* 23,3 (1991): 253–74.

elections—represents a shift in tactics more than just a diminution of Malaysian student activism compared with student movements elsewhere. Malaysian students *have* taken comparatively radical action in the past, however "well aware that their future careers as students and government employees were put in danger by taking such actions," peaking when they had few other channels through which to express dissent.[103] Indeed, it was when the formal political opposition was unusually coopted and weak in the early 1970s (chapter 4), conditions that perhaps gave students a greater sense that it was imperative for them to speak out, that student activism in the nation reached its rambunctious peak. The fact that students, as citizens, now do (or will, after graduation) have at least some channels for engagement, and that opposition parties retain at least some scope for efficacy, may explain why students have felt less need of late to be so transgressive in their activism as they were in more authoritarian periods and contexts. Indonesia in the late 1990s offers a comparison: students active in the *Reformasi* movement there stood in for forces from civil and political society that had stagnated under the autocratic New Order,[104] whereas well-developed opposition parties took the lead in Malaysia's contemporaneous *Reformasi* movement.[105]

Even so, just as not all citizens are content with the political space the government offers, critical students, too, may not be fully satisfied with "official" channels. More to the point, students have always had some "safe" venues, yet in the past more of them still opted for mass protest than they do now. Broadly speaking, students overall clearly see themselves and are seen by others as occupying a distinctive niche in the polity, whether as idealistic prophets of a new order or as immature citizens of a comfortable system, mimicking the complacency of their elders. Understanding when, how, why, and which students mobilize and tracing that engagement over the decades reveals the contours of a polity in development and illuminates the evolution of a government fostered under colonial tutelage, one that has remade itself as an independent state with a burgeoning economy and stunning ambition. A close examination of the campus, too, reveals the impacts of the state's multipronged strategies of suppression that have changed the campus ecology both physically and at the levels of curricula, discourse, and political legitimacy.

The university thus offers a lens on the dynamics of political culture, activism, institutional and ideological development, and the shifts in priorities that take place as state and society come into their own after the *longue durée* of colonial rule. Even when Malaysian students have chosen not to engage—and really do leave as their legacy only dance-coupons and debris, as the editorialist in our epigraph fretted—understanding why the elites-in-training of a state with such boundless prospects shirk a more activist role tells us much about Malaysia, student movements, processes of mobilization and demobilization, and the challenges of postcolonial political development.

[103] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 17.

[104] Edward Aspinall, "The Indonesian Student Uprising of 1998," in *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia*, ed. Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley, and Damien Kingsbury (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), pp. 212–37.

[105] Meredith L. Weiss, *Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Objectives, Scope, and Methods

To recap, my aim with this volume is twofold. On the one hand, I seek to situate student activism among other social movements and the university among other political institutions. By tracing the course of Malaysian student movements, I explore when and how student activism produces an impact upon national politics, and how this activism differs from other forms of political engagement. This elaboration will suggest how the place, identity, and agency of students, academic staff, and the campus itself have shifted amid larger dynamics of nationalism, nation-building, and "modernization." On the other hand, I resuscitate and illuminate a political and historical narrative little known even to most Malaysians and Singaporeans, a narrative that traces the extent of activism among local students, the state's actions in cracking down on that engagement, and the ways academe has become entangled in and made a scapegoat for broader political struggles. The first goal focuses on clarifying a hazy area in theories of contentious politics; the second, more empirically, is concerned with the place of intellectuals and ideas in postcolonial political development.

My approach is largely historical and ethnographic, but driven by fundamentally political questions. I use a close examination of student activism in Malaysia to demonstrate mechanisms central to contentious politics: category formation, object shift, brokerage, certification, radicalization, attribution of opportunity and threat, diffusion, and repression[106]—or, more plainly, how students interpret their political status, choose their targets, find allies, build legitimacy, get riled up, decide when to act, and mobilize others, whether allies or opponents. Such questions regarding the significance, scope, and impact of student activism are particularly difficult to address, given the limited scholarly attention to the subject, the transience of the identity category involved, and the rosiness of the glasses through which so many gaze back on their student days. Wherever possible, I triangulate sources to ensure as thorough and reasonable an account as possible. I draw heavily on colonial and postcolonial archives, especially oral histories and government documents regarding student agitation and relevant policies, contemporaneous mainstream media accounts, campus publications, interviews with present and former student activists (and, to a lesser extent, nonactivist students), and secondary sources ranging from student theses to official statistics.

The nature of the research presents unique challenges. For instance, documentation of early left-wing—especially Malaysian Chinese—student activism reported from the perspective of its participants is especially sparse. Anxious about being tarred as "communist," leftist students were loath to leave a paper trail. More broadly, the curbs introduced by the state in the 1970s and 1980s were not imposed just on students; professionals in the media, too (among other sectors), were reined in sharply. Not only did student publications dwindle at that point, but mainstream newspapers came to offer far less critical coverage, as well, especially of "opposition" politics and initiatives. My account grows unfortunately heavily reliant on a narrower range of published sources as it proceeds. And, perhaps most importantly, while both past and current student activists were generous with their time and eager to share their stories, thoughts, and resources with me, the "dogs that barked" are oversampled here. (Moreover, particular activists have been especially voluble,

[106] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

have left especially rich oral or written records, or were simply unusually significant players. These individuals loom large in the text, though hopefully only in proportion to their actual importance.) Nonactivists present a far more slippery target, and few pro-government students from the current generation consented to be interviewed. While challengers tend to claim the limelight, a substantial share of contemporary students actively or passively support the government. It is impossible to know how many do, since these students normally display such support by *not* speaking out, especially in a less-than-fully-democratic setting like Malaysia. Aware of these issues, I have expanded upon and weighed the available data as judiciously as possible, for instance by searching out nonactivist and pro-government voices in more mainstream campus publications and other media.

Part of what makes studies of this sort so necessary, but so difficult and, at times, troubling, is the extent to which historical (and especially activist or political) narratives are revised and reproduced. I do not refer only to the ways that people frame narratives at the stage of mobilization, but also to their recounting.[107] The past, historian Thongchai Winichakul reminds us, is framed by the present: memory projects backwards, such that "historical knowledge provides prior texts that also determine and shape what and how we remember past events in the present."[108] Activists and observers alike remember past student activism in light of what has happened since. Hence, not only may contemporary expectations about what students should or can contribute be different from what they were in earlier eras, but that difference shapes interpretations of what came before.

Nor is that reshaping necessarily a neutral process. More than mere passage of time engenders misremembering or forgetting; the selective retelling of a dominant narrative reinforces stereotypes, delegitimates forms and strategies for mobilization, and stifles or forges possible collective identities.[109] More specifically, a state's efforts to downplay or disparage the political contributions of students and academic staff could be expected to discourage mobilization. The sense that they are connected to a legacy of activism often legitimates and motivates students who can claim recognition (as for those in China in 1989, invoking trailblazers of decades past) "at once as modernizers and patriots, serious intellectuals, and democrats."[110] The stifling of students and intellectuals may thus be doubly damning; it may not just curb activism and critical analysis at that moment when the restrictions are imposed, but may also "sanitize" the historical record, since knowledge of the past may then be inadequately reproduced by those muted academicians. On the other hand, sustaining the memory of crackdowns, such as the brutal events of October 1976 in Bangkok, ensures that the "ugly and cruel side most do not want to face" is not

[107] For example, see William A. Callahan, *Imagining Democracy: Reading 'The Events of May' in Thailand* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1998).

[108] Thongchai Winichakul, "Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past: The Ambivalent Memories of the October 1976 Massacre in Bangkok," in *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, ed. Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles Keyes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), p. 263.

[109] Huang Jianli, "Positioning the Student Political Activism of Singapore: Articulation, Contestation and Omission," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7,3 (2006): 403–30.

[110] Calhoun, "Science, Democracy, and the Politics of Identity," p. 93.

forgotten,[111] perhaps making would-be activists hesitate to take such risks themselves.

Any account of student activism must necessarily roam beyond the campus. I focus on domestic Malaysian students, although, as described above, students who study abroad are seldom completely divorced from their peers back home, and international student movements offer both material and inspirational resources. At the same time, I locate the campus within a wider environment. I tease out the links and discontinuities between student activism and outside political forces or agendas, and examine, for example, students' participation in national political movements, the role of political parties in campus elections, and the ties between student groups and off-campus nongovernmental organizations. The dilemmas and stages Malaysia has faced since the late colonial era are to some extent universal—they typically involve managing pluralism, sustaining growth, staffing a bureaucracy, channeling political engagement—but students' contributions have been less predictable. The insights developed here through critical historical description and analysis thus contribute not just to our knowledge of Malaysian society and politics, but also to the literature on contentious politics, civil society, and political development more generally.

Overview of Volume

Our narrative begins with the early days of student activism: the years between World War I and independence. Prominent on the scene then were left-wing Chinese activists and early nationalists of all ethnic groups. Nationalism quickly gained steam after World War II. As elsewhere in the colonial world, Malayan students allied with radical journalists and early political parties to press and prepare for independence. Debates over ethnicity, language, the pacing of the political and economic transition, and distribution of power and resources dominated the agenda. As Malaya approached independence, political leaders—both British and Malayan—exhorted students in the newly launched University of Malaya to take on the mantle of (future) leadership in charting a course for the new nation. All the same, and as was to remain the case thereafter, more mundane issues of intramural sports teams, fashion, social activities, and student welfare remained high on most students' agendas.

Chapter 3 details the first decade after independence, 1957–66. The University of Malaya, established in Singapore, opened a Kuala Lumpur branch. However, after Singapore left the Federation of Malaysia, each of these two branches became a separate university. The merger of Singapore and Malaya and international responses to that federation, along with broader questions of nation-building, shaped the chief political debates on campus at the time. Chapter 4 looks at the heydays of protest in Malaysia, from 1967 through 1974. Never before or since have Malaysian students been so invested in larger societal struggles, both domestic and foreign, nor has the state cracked down so harshly on their involvement. Students rallied to the cause of peasants and urban squatters, brought issues of socioeconomic justice before the electorate in the tense 1969 elections, and set the course for a new

[111] Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "Reflections on October 6, 1976: Time and Violence," *Crossroads* 19,1 (2007): 195.

phase of Malay nationalism. Students' efforts resulted in a fresh set of restrictive laws, progressively tightened since that time, to suppress further such outbursts.

The muting of the campus from 1975 to 1998 is the subject of chapter 5. Demographic changes transformed the student community. As rural Malay students streamed onto the campuses, and as more left-wing channels were curtailed, Islamist activism gained momentum, sending ripples across the polity. At the same time, higher education became significantly normalized: new universities and other institutions for higher education proliferated, and campus politics increasingly came to mimic the partisan patterns outside the gates. Chapter 6 probes the gradual revitalization of student activism in the late 1990s, as the confluence of social justice and Islam shaped broad political priorities and encouraged students to join a mass protest movement. The state was quick to strike back; unsubtle reminders, plus an ongoing spate of arrests, left most students, like most citizens, anxious not to rock the boat.

Chapter 7 reflects on this historical narrative to identify key themes and trends, homing in on the dynamics of students' subjugation—specifically, what I term "intellectual containment." Here I examine how the state delegitimates students' participation to undercut the challenge they pose, while at the same time minimizing overt coercion. I question how the nature of, motivation for, and efficacy of student activism have changed over time, as the relative positions of the campus within the polity and of students within society have shifted. Assuming that the site and nature of mobilization condition state responses, I ask what understanding the particularities of mobilization among students adds to our knowledge of political contention. This account is not intended to be definitive but, rather, to (re)open an important field of inquiry. This study takes student activism seriously as a mode of political engagement, as a possible bellwether for or counterpart to broader political trends, and as a realm for the activation of the same sorts of mechanisms that function behind other forms of political contention, but with observable, meaningful distinctions.

CHAPTER TWO

IN THE BEGINNING: PRE-INDEPENDENCE

> We wanted freedom. We wanted our self respect. We wanted to be ourselves. We wanted to be modern. We wanted our own writers, our own poets. We wanted a place in history.[1]

Malaya emerged from World War II primed for change. The turbulent dislocation caused by the Japanese Occupation brought into focus the finite boundaries of colonialism and the old aristocratic order. Twin bogeys of communism and communalism (ethnic segmentation) hovered over society. The Proclamation of Emergency in 1948—a panicky, antidemocratic response to the rise of the Left—cast a pall over the political field. And the accelerating spread of mass education and media here, as elsewhere, subverted established hierarchies as nationalism settled in. A month after its first general elections—swept by the three-party Alliance of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC)—the Federation of Malaya declared *Merdeka* (independence) as a constitutional monarchy in August 1957. Singapore's 1954 Rendel Constitution, which recommended partial internal self-government, but with continuing British control of internal security, defense, law, finance, and foreign affairs, nudged the crown colony toward increasing autonomy, then on to statehood in 1958. Sibling rivals, Malaya and Singapore united (together with the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak) in the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, but the union proved stormy and short.

This chapter explores the ways in which higher education, and, specifically, political engagement among a new mass of undergraduates, helped to shape late colonial and early postcolonial government and society. With an eye toward looming independence, colonial authorities introduced English- and Malay-medium tertiary education: first a small network of colleges, then eventually a university. Education was an important component of the colonial enterprise, given the British preference for direct rule and development of local administrative capacity. Instead of studying in England or India, though, youths could now gain knowledge, skills, and social mobility at home. Though they made developing higher education part of their mission for Malaysian society, the British could not fully control the process or its outcomes. As a set of institutions and an increasingly complex student body took shape, student associations blossomed, and their members focused their attention both on and off campus. Nationalism and leftist politics specifically attracted students of the era, and these issues reverberated especially in the iconic "University case" and *Fajar* trial (both detailed below), as students struggled to connect with

[1] Interview with Dominic Puthucheary, January 27, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

society and find their niche. Such engagement helped to foster the students' still relatively uncontested sense of entitlement to participate in political debates and conflicts, and their free exercise of that privilege later motivated (and stood in sharp contrast to) the state's delegitimation and suppression of that voice.

Located in Singapore rather than in more rural, peninsular Malaya, the system's English-medium flagship institutions were to train and certify bright local youths especially as doctors, teachers, and civil servants. These institutions topped a four-track system of English-, Malay-, Chinese-, and Tamil-medium primary and (more limited) secondary schools.[2] The founding of the university piqued the confidence of the young nation, invigorated cultural and intellectual production, and provided a venue for political debate and mobilization. The colonial authorities' aim in establishing vernacular and vocational colleges, though, was to preserve an existing socioeconomic order; they warned in 1936 that "unrestricted English education" might result in a class of underemployed, "warped and bitter" people—better to "remove the temptation from the peasant."[3]

Indeed, the first institutes for higher education in colonial Malaya were fundamentally pragmatic at heart. The Malay College at Kuala Kangsar (MCKK), established in 1905, led the trend. The English-medium "Eton of the East" was to train Malay aristocrats (and a limited number of especially promising "commoner" boys) for the equally new Malay Administrative Service. Exclusive and elitist, the school in its makeup and mandate preserved upper-class Malays' status and stature.[4] The establishment of the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) followed in 1922 (formed of the amalgamation of existing training colleges in Malacca and Matang). Designed to train Malays in pedagogy and elementary agriculture so they could spread modern, "scientific" methods as teachers in rural communities, SITC almost immediately took on another role, as a literary and nationalist hub.[5] A Malay Women's Training College followed in 1935, although by 1941 girls still accounted for only 11 percent of students in Malay schools and 30 percent in Chinese schools.[6] And in 1936, the former Technical School, founded in 1906 to train staff for public works and infrastructural positions, was renamed the Technical College, Kuala Lumpur,[7] and the School of Agriculture at Serdang, Selangor, established in 1931, was similarly reconstituted as the College of Agriculture Malaya in 1942. (Both these institutions gained university status in the 1970s.)

[2] Preceding all these was the Latin-medium theological college of the Mission des Etrangères, Malaysia's first formal school, founded in Penang in 1807 and drawing students from across Asia. A trade school was planned as early as 1816, but stalled until a short-lived effort in 1853, revived in the 1920s. Harold Robinson Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya, 1900–1941," *The Malayan Historical Journal* 2 (1955): 32, 43–44. See also Philip Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya 1874–1940* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[3] A Memorandum on Educational Policy in the Straits Settlements and in the Federated Malay States, Prepared by the Governor and High Commissioner, April 1936, TNA:PRO CO273/616/14, 14.

[4] Khasnor Johan, "The Malay College, Kuala Kangsar, 1905–1941: British Policy of Education for Employment in the Federated Malay States" (MA thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1969), p. 223; also Loh, *Seeds of Separatism*, pp. 79–81.

[5] Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 232–33; Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," p. 35.

[6] Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," pp. 41–42.

[7] Harold Robinson Cheeseman, "Report on Vocational Education in Malaya" (Command Paper No. 64) (Straits Settlements: Legislative Council, 1938), p. 13.

The jewels in the crown, though, were two new colleges in Singapore, one each for medicine and liberal arts. The Straits and Federated Malay States Government Medical School was established in 1905,[8] then renamed King Edward VII Medical School in 1912 and King Edward VII College of Medicine in 1920. The standard course in medicine was six years, dentistry (added in 1929) was five years, and pharmacy (added in 1935) was three, though most students took longer to earn these degrees and a high percentage before the war failed to graduate.[9] Raffles College—initially proposed in 1918 as a coeducational teachers' college and a nucleus of a future university[10]—was legally incorporated as a liberal arts college in 1922 and began classes in 1928.[11] Economic depression suppressed enrollment early on: in its first decade, Raffles College graduated a total of only 229 students.[12] Attendance soon swelled, however, especially once British authorities overcame their fears regarding "the less restrictive atmosphere" of Raffles compared with MCKK, and sent their first batch of probationers in 1938.[13] Raffles offered a three-year course for an arts or science diploma, as well as a one year postgraduate course in education. Nearly all prewar graduates became teachers.[14] Teaching remained the dominant career path long after the war, at least for female graduates, in part since they were barred from the Administrative Service.[15]

Japanese wartime occupation put these colonial schemes on hold. The Japanese Army made the Raffles campus its headquarters and restructured the Medical College in April 1943 as Syonan Medical College. Around two hundred students from Singapore, Malaya, Sumatra, and Java attended Syonan, studying mainly Japanese language and culture alongside clinical training.[16] (Apparently determined to waste no time, the Council of Raffles College met in the Changi Internment Camp in September 1942 to plan for the resumption of classes, which was to take place as soon as possible after victory and the expulsion of the Japanese.[17]) Perversely,

[8] A medical college had been proposed as early as 1889, but lack of qualified students quashed the plans. In the meantime, local candidates trained at the Singapore General Hospital and studied at the Medical College at Madras, then were bonded to the Straits Government for fifteen years. P. A. Tambyah, "Selection of Medical Students in Singapore: A Historical Perspective," *Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore* 34,6 (2005): 147C; Tan Chee Khoon, *From Village Boy to Mr. Opposition* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 1991), p. 89.

[9] Loh, *Seeds of Separatism*, p. 116.

[10] Ibid., pp. 116–17.

[11] Harry Chan Keng Howe, "The Raffles College Story," in *Raffles College 1928–1949* (Singapore: Alumni Affairs and Development Office, National University of Singapore, 1993), pp. 7–8.

[12] Loh, *Seeds of Separatism*, pp. 116–17; Ahmad Ibrahim, "Higher Education in Malaya," *Bulletin of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia* VII,1 (1972): 99.

[13] Khasnor Johan, *The Emergence of the Modern Malay Administrative Elite* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 81–82.

[14] Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," p. 45.

[15] A notable clutch of student leaders of the period, male and female, went into library work, among them Hedwig Anuar (first head of the Singapore National Library), Beda Lim, Patricia Lim, Manijeh Namazie, and, briefly, James Puthucheary.

[16] S. W. Low, W. T. Gan, and W. K. Tan, "A Century of Medical Students' Activities (Medical College Union/Medical Society)," *Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore* 34,6 (2005): 153C.

[17] Papers and correspondence relating to Raffles College's reopening after Japanese occupation, in preparation for its absorption into the university, including notes of the council

Malaya's first "university" took shape in this period, at the Changi prisoner-of-war camp. Local British administrative and teaching staff were marched with thousands of others to Changi Air Force Base and Changi Prison in December 1941. There, they offered classes to occupy their time and boost morale.[18] Math professor and future vice chancellor Alexander Oppenheim (who served as head); economics professor Thomas Silcock, the Army's Chief Law Officer (who also held a doctorate); and others organized a functioning university, with faculties of physics, chemistry, philosophy, English, engineering, languages, and zoology, as well as Singapore's first law school, and offered classes on military history, fine arts, and more. They scrounged for supplies and taught mostly outdoors, though Japanese officials allowed a delegation of lecturers to "rescue" a handcart's worth of books from the Raffles College library. Changi University had "well over a thousand students," "elaborate courses," and a strict timetable. The lectures were immensely popular; some were offered dozens of times,[19] such as, for instance, Camp Education Officer Harold Cheeseman's series "A Study of Malaya," which extended to over one hundred lectures.[20] An Australian POW who served as registrar credits Changi University with "preserving the sanity of a great percentage of the inhabitants there," even though some of the students "couldn't even write."[21]

The organizers modeled the syllabus on that of a "conventional" university, intending to seek recognition for Changi University degrees after the war if it went on long enough. The courses lost formality after the first term, though, as camp conditions worsened.[22] Then, when many of those involved were shipped off to Thailand in late 1942, those who remained divvied up the treasured library. Although they were unable to continue "in the educational line" in Malaya, some lectures continued.[23] After the war, a number of students were awarded War Diplomas or special entrance waivers for further study, including those who passed Cambridge Local exams in the camp.[24]

With the war over, events moved quickly. As early as 1938, a commission chaired by Sir William McLean had recommended that the Medical College and Raffles College unite as a university college under the supervision of the University of London, as an interim step toward full university status.[25] The Asquith Commission renewed that call in 1945 by proposing establishment of university

meeting held in Changi Internment Camp, September 1942; Raffles College, Singapore: TNA:PRO BW90/617.

[18] Thomas Silcock, oral history, A000180, reel 7, April 29, 1982, National Archives of Singapore, Oral History Centre [hereafter NAS, OHC].

[19] Sir Alexander Oppenheim, oral history, A000220/08, reel 4, September 18, 1982, NAS, OHC; and Thomas Silcock, A000180, reels 6–7, April 29, 1982. Another area of the camp also started a university college, relying on the advice and assistance of Oppenheim and his colleagues. Singapore's Changi Prison Museum features a few mementos of this unofficial institution, including a class schedule.

[20] Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," p. 30.

[21] Anthony Bowden Newsom, oral history, A002776, reel 2, August 4, 2003, NAS, OHC.

[22] Thomas Silcock, A000180, reel 7, April 29, 1982.

[23] Alexander Oppenheim, A000220/08, reel 4, September 18, 1982.

[24] Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," p. 30.

[25] W. H. McLean, et al., *Higher Education in Malaya: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1939).

colleges across the British colonies.[26] A final commission in 1947, headed by Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders, met with alumni and students, then advised immediate establishment of a full-fledged university. (An early student union president deemed the students' input to be "the most valuable and significant contribution made by the undergrads of the period of transition."[27]) Four difficult years of occupation, the commission's report noted, had yielded "a more emphatic realization of the importance of university education, not merely for training students to fill the highest posts in the country, but also to give them the qualities of leadership and disinterested public service which are necessary for the progress of her people."[28]

Education at all levels experienced a postwar surge. Enrollments in Malaya's government-aided primary and secondary schools increased nearly 160 percent between 1946 and 1953. The rate of increase in private Chinese schools was even greater: from fewer than 5,000 students in 1947 to over 40,000 ten years later.[29] Many students' educations had been on hold during the war—for instance, enrollments had declined from 90 percent to 50 percent in Penang between 1942 and 1945[30]—and people were eager to return to school. Also, particularly when it came to English education, "While before there was limited interest and widespread indifference, now there is broad and general demand—almost a frantic desire to catch up."[31] Although enrollments at Malay schools were also rising rapidly,[32] Malays expressed apprehension about the proposed English-language university. They were concerned that their own economic or political condition might decline in relative terms if primary and secondary education lagged because preference was given to the university, or that the institution's outlook and products might be too un-Malay in character[33]—that it might be less a "University of Malaya than just a University in

[26] A. J. Stockwell, "'The Crucible of the Malayan Nation': The University and the Making of a New Malaya, 1938–62," *Modern Asian Studies* 43,5 (2009): 1159–60.

[27] K. Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities in the Period of Transition from College to University 1940–1955," in *A Symposium on Extracurricular Activities of University Students in Malaya*, ed. A. A. Sandosham (Malaya: World University Service, [1954]), p. 26.

[28] Alexander Carr-Saunders, et al., *Report of the Commission on University Education in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, Federation of Malaya, [1948]), pp. 6–7. Stockwell offers a detailed discussion of the university's establishment in the context of late colonial policy. Stockwell, "'The Crucible of the Malayan Nation,'" pp. 1149–68.

[29] Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya 1948–1960* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975), p. 428.

[30] T. N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 45.

[31] I. S. Falk, with Ruth H. Falk, "Education in the Federation of Malaya" (preliminary draft), Working Paper for the Report of the Mission to Malaya (Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, July 1954), pp. 5, 90, TNA:PRO CO1030/52.

[32] Abdul Aziz Mat Ton, "Persekolahan Melayu 1945–1948: Satu Manifestasi Semangat Perjuangan Melayu," in *Pendidikan Di Malaysia: Dahulu Dan Sekarang*, ed. Khoo Kay Kim and Mohd. Fadzil Othman (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980), pp. 142–43.

[33] K. S. Patton, American Consul General, Singapore, to Secretary of State, Washington, DC, November 10, 1938, *Bimonthly Political Report, September–October, 1938* (No. 162), RG 59, Department of State Decimal File 1930–39, 846D.00/48, NA II; or Carr-Saunders, *Report of the Commission*, p. 7. Still, reform-minded Muslims had touted aspects of Western-style education—from alternatives to rote learning to training in economics—for decades. Khoo Kay Kim, "Perceptions of Progress and Development among English-Educated Muslims in World War II Malaya," *Sejarah: Jurnal Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Malaya* 2 (1993): 151–52, 156.

Malaya."[34] Future prime minister Mahathir Mohamad (an obvious exception to the rule) declared that the community's "apathetic attitude" towards the university stemmed not just from its cost or location, but from "the inherent nature of the kampong [village] Malays: a nature which treats English education as secondary and unimportant."[35] A year later, he added provocatively, "there is still the question of average intelligence to consider": Malays on the whole have a "low average I.Q.," he said, due both to character and environment. He urged that preference be given to Malays in the distribution of university scholarships, to counterbalance these "natural laws."[36]

Indeed, while plans for a university met with resounding acclaim overall, few Malays could partake of this new educational opportunity: as of 1954, 43 percent of manual and low-level white-collar workers in Singapore were illiterate, and a mere 7 percent had completed secondary school.[37] Most importantly, English education, which began with the Penang Free School in 1816, remained largely restricted to the aristocratic elite and non-Malays, especially Straits Chinese, Eurasians, and Indians. In the Malay-majority federation, as of 1953, only about 14 percent of students were educated in English, compared with 33 percent in Chinese and 47 percent in Malay; 44 percent in Singapore were English-educated, and most of the rest were educated in Chinese.[38] Until the 1930s (when the government stepped in), English schools were generally fee-based, urban, and run by either Protestant or Catholic missionaries, all of which militated against Malays' enrollment.[39] Even after that point, Malay children still generally began at vernacular schools—in rural areas, these were typically makeshift, community-supported *sekolah rakyat* (people's schools), with their roots in local religious schools—and then the brightest transferred to the English stream after a period of intensive language study, by which point most were older than their non-Malay peers. (Most stopped their schooling at the primary level.) The inaugural class of twenty-three students at the medical school in 1905 included only one Malay, and the college had produced only twenty Malay doctors (out of around 240 total) by the start of World War II.[40] With independence imminent in the 1950s, still fewer than 10 percent of undergraduates were Malay,

[34] Minutes by H. E. The High Commissioner, Kuala Lumpur, July 16, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/194/2.

[35] C. H. E. Det [Mahathir Mohamad], "Malays and the Higher Education," *Sunday Times*, September 26, 1948; also "Malays and Higher Education: Summing-up," *Sunday Times*, October 17, 1948.

[36] "Malay Progress and the University," *Sunday Times*, November 27, 1949.

[37] Yeo Kim Wah, *Political Development in Singapore, 1945–55* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1973), p. 178.

[38] Barrington Kaye, *A Manifesto for Education in Malaya* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1955), p. 19.

[39] Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–1946*, 3rd ed. (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), pp. 8–9; Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," p. 36.

[40] Loh, *Seeds of Separatism*, pp. 116–17. The small Indian minority, in contrast, was overrepresented: after forty-five years, 165 of 417 total graduates were Indian. Of the remainder, 154 were Chinese and 62 were Eurasian. A total of 33 were women. Tambyah, "Selection of Medical Students in Singapore," pp. 149–50C.

notwithstanding scholarships and other help.[41] In fact, more Malays studied overseas than attended the University of Malaya (UM) in its early years.[42]

Moreover, plaudits did not translate into cash. The British government contributed around one-third the anticipated capital costs to launch the university: £1,000,000. The Singapore and federation governments were expected jointly to contribute the same amount, and the balance was to come from public donations. But two months' worth of appeals yielded only a paltry fraction of that sum. One editorial expressed a rueful analysis, "To say that this is disappointing is to put it mildly indeed," especially since an under-funded university "may become a political danger instead of a benefit."[43] Yet as a compelling sign of students' own commitment, the Raffles College Union (RCU) organized students to work through their long vacation in 1949 and contribute 60 percent of their earnings toward the university, for both colleges' unions urged prompt establishment of the new institution.[44]

The two colleges merged to form the University of Malaya in 1949. UM began with faculties of medicine, arts, and sciences; others were added later: education in 1950, engineering in 1956, law in 1959, and agriculture in 1960. Former Medical College principal George Allen served as vice chancellor the first two years, then was succeeded by Sidney Caine (1952–56), then Oppenheim (1957–65). The first intake included just 645 students, 114 of them women, ranging in age from their mid-teens to their twenties, the war having muddled cohorts. By 1956–57, the student population had more than doubled, to 1,457, including a handful of graduate students.[45] Academic standards at the new university were "creditably high," the facilities were good, and, in the wry words of one expatriate lecturer, "no one seemed strikingly penurious, suicides were minimal, nervous breakdowns were more a sign of affluent sophistication than of desperate spiritual stress, and there was much less coyness than among the Thais."[46] A member of UM's first graduating class enthused, "I think the foundation of the university was ... one of the factors that helped Asians in Malaysia and Singapore to realize that they were as good as anyone else."[47] On the whole, colonial officials deemed the university essential to ensuring

[41] Cheah, *Red Star over Malaya*, p. 9; Harper, *The End of Empire*; Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," pp. 86–87.

[42] In 1950, 125 of 218 students studying overseas were Malay, but only 25 of 139 Federation students at UM were Malay, and the next year, just 10 of 104 were. See "Admission of Malays to the University of Malaya," 1952, TNA:PRO CO1022/344.

[43] "University Appeal," *Straits Times*, June 3, 1949, p. 4. Funding remained a concern. Reflecting on the university through the mid-1960s, Oppenheim lamented the "woefully inadequate provision by governments for the educational work of the institution." Alexander Oppenheim, A000220/08, reel 8, September 18, 1982.

[44] Secretary, R. C. University Fund Committee to Secretary, University Fund Committee, Selangor, May 24, 1949, Arkib Negara Malaysia, SEL. SEC. 1440/1949, no. 1; "Colleges Appeal for Early Establishment of the University of Malaya," *The Undergrad*, February 12, 1949, p. 1.

[45] R. S. Aitken et al., "Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the University of Malaya, 1957" (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 11.

[46] D. J. Enright, *Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 119.

[47] Peter Mayo, oral history, A001535/02, reel 1, July 22, 1994, NAS, OHC.

Malaya "is to be made ready to govern itself, ... to increase its output and to realise the universal dreams of better living."[48]

A second institution, the privately funded and largely Chinese-medium Nanyang University (known as Nantah),[49] joined UM in 1956 (although it was launched officially two years later), offering classes in arts, sciences, and commerce. Local Chinese secondary schools enrolled over twenty thousand students in 1953, when the proposal for a Chinese university was first tabled,[50] and those who finished with inadequate English language skills for entrance into UM could no longer so readily continue their education in China now that the communists had taken over.[51] An official 1951 commission predicted "disillusionment and discontent" would result from unmet aspirations,[52] while the US government, too, recommended a substantial, immediate increase in facilities offering higher education to the Chinese in Malaya; this project was meant to reduce the threat of communist subversion in local schools.[53] An op-ed in the UM newspaper, noting the lack of opportunities graduates faced, warned that, "Needs unrealised result in frustration; frustration results in aggression."[54] Among Nantah's declared principles—pitched to appeal even to dubious colonial authorities—was one promising to "embody a new Malayan culture developed from the Chinese, the English, the Malay, and the Indian" and to train teachers, government leaders, specialists, and technical experts;[55] the initiative reflected an increasingly local and patriotic orientation among leaders of the Chinese community.[56] For these reasons, the 1957 Aitken Commission report spoke admiringly of Nantah, marveling especially at "the remarkable enthusiasm of

[48] Sir Sidney Caine, "The Development of the University," an address given by Vice-Chancellor Caine on May 6, 1953, at the University of Malaya at Kuala Lumpur, p. 14 (manuscript at UM's Za'ba Memorial Library).

[49] Benefactor Tan Lark Sye initially proposed the name Overseas Chinese University; "Nanyang" (literally, South Seas, or Southeast Asia) was "rather less controversial." Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs for February 1953 (orig. SEA 114/86/04), TNA:PRO CO1022/346.

[50] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University and the Dilemmas of Overseas Chinese Education," *China Quarterly* 20 (1964): 97.

[51] Even so, seven thousand Southeast Asian students sought higher education in China from 1948–53. See Richard Butwell, "A Chinese University for Malaya," *Pacific Affairs* 26,4 (1953): 346. As British subjects or protected persons, the Malayans among them could not be prevented from returning home after completing their studies. "New University 'Not Competition,'" *Straits Budget*, January 29, 1953; Malaya Monthly Political Intelligence Report, September–October, 1950, October 26, 1950, TNA:PRO CO825/82/3.

[52] William P. Fenn and Wu Teh-yao, et al., "Chinese Schools and the Education of Chinese Malayans: The Report of a Mission Invited by the Federation Government to Study the Problem of the Education of Chinese in Malaya" (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1951), p. 8.

[53] Circular Instruction from the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions and Consular Offices (CA 5294), January 14, 1956, Department of State, Central Files, 797.00/1-1456, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957: Southeast Asia*, ed. John P. Glennon, vol. XXII (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), pp. 757–78.

[54] Liew Meng Leong, "The Chinese Schools of Malaya," *Malayan Undergrad*, June 8, 1955, p. 4.

[55] Aitken, "Report," p. 55.

[56] Fujio Hara, *Malayan Chinese and China: Conversion in Identity Consciousness, 1945–1957*, IDE Occasional Papers Series #33 (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1997), pp. 34–35.

the Chinese community for the University and its provision of the capital cost of founding it."[57]

Yet Nantah sparked controversy from the outset. Colonial officials feared its "influence was certain to be pernicious; it would be in continual danger of being captured by communism, and it was bound to accentuate the differences between Chinese and Malays and between alien Chinese and Straits born Chinese."[58] Even if Nantah countered the lure of China, a bond among Chinese communities in the region could compromise goals of national assimilation, favoring Chinese culture in a way that might stymie nation-building.[59] Those who supported Nantah—from the clutch of capitalists at the helm to MCA leader Tan Cheng Lock—reiterated that the institution would be noncommunal and cosmopolitan.

Endorsements and contributions flowed from all levels, from rickshaw drivers to bankers, in a rather astounding show of community ambition and pride.[60] The largest single sponsor was millionaire rubber baron Tan Lark Sye, and substantial contributions also flowed from the Singapore Hokkien Association (which donated the site), newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau*, Penang Cycle and Motor Traders Union, "Tiger Balm King" Aw Boon Haw, and others.[61] (These sponsors' intense degree of involvement led to certain problems. Nantah's first chancellor, prominent Chinese-American author Lin Yutang, resigned after just a few months, aggravated by financial backers' meddling.[62]) From its first class of 594 students in 1956, Nantah grew rapidly, with 900 students by the next year, almost all from Chinese middle schools in Singapore and the federation, and with only 20 percent under age twenty-one at entry; the relatively advanced age of many of the entering students was largely due to the Japanese Occupation years.[63] Nantah's launch also kick-started plans to expand facilities for Malay, Chinese, and Tamil studies at UM to obviate further such initiatives and spawned calls (fulfilled over a decade later) for a Malay University.[64]

But UM retained its privileged niche. It is for this reason that our account centers on public university students, largely to the exclusion of other tertiary students (for instance, at polytechnics and teaching colleges). The university nurtured a distinctly British-flavored "intellectual tradition" in a Malaya with, in the words of a UM history lecturer, "almost no leisured class concerned with the things of the mind, a class accustomed to reading and writing books, and providing the organs of an

[57] Aitken, "Report," pp. 55–56.

[58] Note on the meeting held at 11 AM on 22nd June, 1954, in Sir J. Martin's room to discuss finance and other matters in connection with the University of Malaya, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[59] Butwell, "Chinese University," p. 348; Dennis Bloodworth, "Crucial Case in Singapore," *Observer*, September 29, 1957.

[60] Yao Souchou, "All Quiet on Jurong Road: Nanyang University and Radical Vision in Singapore," in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, ed. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), p. 174.

[61] Butwell, "Chinese University," p. 345.

[62] Andrew W. Lind, *Nanyang Perspective: Chinese Students in Multiracial Singapore* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1974), pp. 104–5; "Academic Frontier," *Time*, August 16, 1954, p. 81.

[63] Aitken, "Report," p. 55.

[64] "New Chinese Department May Open," *Straits Budget*, March 19, 1953; Federation of Malaya Monthly Political Intelligence Report, No. 3 for March 1953, TNA:PRO CO1022/204.

informed public opinion."[65] The Eurocentrism of this culture posed challenges, though, as it implied the inferiority of local indigenous cultures and languages, at a time when fewer than 10 percent of students reached the tertiary level in their education;[66] their "placid" English education fostered cohorts of "future civil servants and teachers, who'd never say boo to a goose."[67] Educated and privileged, these students at UM and its predecessor colleges *were* motivated to play by the rules in a system so tipped in their favor, but as early as the 1930s, eddies of "political ferment" swirled among them.[68]

Yet our study must begin elsewhere—not in the government-run English schools, but in an extensive network of community-run Chinese-medium "middle" (secondary) schools. Later we will consider the ill-fated university at its apex. For while it was the English-educated who were being groomed to run a sovereign Malaya, it was in the Chinese middle schools that *student* first became a salient collective identity. That momentum both laid the groundwork and provided a counterpoint for the university student activism with which we are primarily concerned.

SETTING THE STAGE: EARLY RADICALISM IN THE CHINESE SCHOOLS

Malaya saw its first real burst of student activism on the heels of China's May Fourth Movement of 1919, which followed the modernization of the education and examination system in China in 1906. Chinese students and workers joined forces against concessions to Japan in the Treaty of Versailles, marking the rise of a new intelligentsia. The aftershocks spread as Malayan Chinese schools recruited relatively young teachers from China through the 1920s and 1930s, teachers who were fired up with critical new ideas about state and society, together with increasingly pro-China and anti-imperialist textbooks.[69] As early as June 1919, Chinese schoolteachers and pupils joined violent anti-Japanese demonstrations in Singapore, Penang, and Kuala Lumpur, which led to the imposition of martial law in Singapore and Penang.[70] The British complained: "In China it was the students who took the lead in the overthrow of the imperial power and the twentieth century renaissance. In consequence, teenagers at [Malayan] Chinese schools think that they should be the vanguard of political movements."[71]

By the 1930s, Chinese middle-school student activists were part of a newly energized and forceful left wing, including trade unions, emergent (Chinese, Malayan, and Indonesian) nationalist associations and parties, and radical vernacular media. Though the British labeled all of these entities as part of a communist united front, most "were neither communist, united, nor a front for anybody but themselves."[72] Indeed, much early activism— invigorated by such rousing anthems as "The Cry of the Concessions and the Leased Territories" and "Buy Chinese"—was linked to the Chinese nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), instead.[73] Yet the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), followed by the Malayan Community Party (MCP), made inroads over time. By the early 1930s, the CCP had a solid network of student sympathizers. Local developments aligned with regional and global trends, best represented in the February 1948 "Conference of Youth and Students of South-east Asia Fighting for Freedom and Independence," held in Calcutta. Sponsored by the communist-controlled World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students, the meeting was the region's first to take place "aboveground" since World War II. (The participants included noncommunist groups, but many of them either walked out or denounced the conference post hoc for its pro-Soviet timbre.) Decisions made there may have inspired the outbreak later that year of conflicts with communist forces in Burma (in March), Malaya (June), and Indonesia (September), but analysts disagreed on the precise role of the Calcutta meeting and of Moscow's influence in the 1948 disturbances.[74] The MCP sent only one delegate, Lee Soong, to the conference.[75]

The following year, the student Anti-British League (ABL) formed in Malaya. Based almost entirely in Chinese schools, the ABL was critical to the MCP, even if some of the students involved were oblivious to the party's sponsorship, let alone the niceties of Marxist doctrine.[76] The meager state support for Chinese schools and paltry socioeconomic opportunities available to the Chinese-educated in colonial Malaya exacerbated left-wing leanings among the Malayan Chinese. Malayan Chinese themselves covered 90 percent of the cost of the Chinese-medium schools that 85 percent of their children attended postwar, while their taxes helped sustain the other three, more heavily subsidized school streams. Chinese schools suffered in consequence, with poor facilities and materials, sub-par salaries and inadequate teacher training, and a high level of China-consciousness and suspicion of the neglectful local government.[77] In turn, both British officials and Malay leaders saw Chinese schools "as obstacles to the assimilation of Chinese children into Malayan

[65] E. T. Stokes, "Malayan Students Compared with Others," in *A Symposium on Student Problems in Malaya*, ed. A. A. Sandosham and T. Visvanathan (Malaya: International Student Service, [1953]), p. 15.

[66] M. K. Rajakumar, "Lim Chin Siong's Place in Singapore History," in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History*, ed. Tan Jing Quee and Jomo K. S. (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 2001), p. 99.

[67] James Joseph Puthucheary, oral history, A000570, reel 1, June 15, 1985, NAS, OHC.

[68] Alexander Oppenheim, A000220/08, reel 8, September 18, 1982.

[69] Tan Liok Ee, *The Politics of Chinese Education in Malaya 1945–1961* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 15–16.

[70] Ibid., p. 16.

[71] Local Intelligence Committee, Singapore, "Chinese Students' Behaviour," June 9, 1954, TNA:PRO 1030/360. At least one later local activist was the child of a May Fourth Movement participant, Singapore's Tommy Koh. Tommy Koh Thong Bee, oral history, A002021/10, reel 3, July 24, 1998, NAS, OHC.

[72] T. N. Harper, "Lim Chin Siong and the 'Singapore Story,'" in *Comet in Our Sky*, ed. Tan and Jomo, p. 13.

[73] Stanley Spector, "Students and Politics in Singapore," *Far Eastern Survey* 25,5 (1956): 71–72.

[74] Ruth T. McVey, *The Calcutta Conference and the Southeast Asian Uprisings*, Interim Reports Series, Modern Indonesia Project (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1958); Justus M. Van der Kroef, *Communism in South-East Asia* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 29; and Ian Morrison, "The Communist Uprising in Malaya," *Far Eastern Survey* 17,24 (1948): 285.

[75] Returning from Calcutta, Lee Soong stopped off in Burma to mobilize local peasants, while Australian Communist Party delegate Lawrence Sharkey spent the next two weeks in Singapore, meeting with MCP leaders. Morrison, "The Communist Uprising in Malaya," p. 282; and "The Plan," *Time*, October 4, 1948, p. 30.

[76] Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, 182, pp. 185–87; Chiu Wei Li, "Investigating the Radical Left of Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s: Were They in Cahoots with the Commies?," *Tangent* 6 (2003): 35.

[77] Fenn and Wu, "Chinese Schools," pp. 9–11.

society."[78] The Singapore government's announcement in 1950 that students at two Chinese high schools would have to sign enrollment forms "accepting obedient discipline and providing guarantees for their conduct"[79] was emblematic of that distrust (and a harbinger of subsequent requirements), although official responses varied. The Fenn-Wu committee recommended increasing government assistance to Chinese schools, as well as raising standards and developing more locally appropriate texts, while a report that same year by the Barnes committee on Malay education advised cutting off government aid to vernacular schools and promoting only English- and Malay-medium education, to encourage a common national identity.[80] However much some may have resented their more privileged English-educated counterparts, graduates of Chinese middle schools were themselves still elite. In Singapore as of 1954, just 7 percent of manual or low-ranking white-collar workers were middle-school graduates, and the latter moved easily into leading positions in the labor movement.[81]

By the early 1950s, "student riots, organized destruction and bloodshed ... [had] assumed menacing proportions," especially in Singapore.[82] During the May 1955 Hock Lee Bus Company strike, groups of students fed and entertained strikers, then helped to escalate violent demonstrations. Three Chinese schools were closed for a week in the aftermath, and only a prolonged "stay-in strike" spared several ringleaders from expulsion.[83] At the time in Singapore, "no single topic elicited so much press comment, forced political speakers to declare themselves, or was discussed so fully in the home as the burning question of students and their schools."[84] Although they deemed schools in the federation to be less "sick" than those in Singapore,[85] peninsular authorities still had real cause for concern in the early 1950s, as violence broke out in their region, too: acid was tossed in the face of a Chinese headmistress and "killer squads" contracted to murder headmasters in Penang and Klang.[86] Five staff members and students of Penang's Chung Ling High School alone were killed between 1949 and 1952. Strict disciplinary measures imposed in response sparked a massive boycott of classes, and then the school was closed under Emergency Regulations in November 1956.[87] Demonstrations continued across the peninsula, including a hunger strike and a spate of protests that spread from city to city in late 1957.[88] By late November, sixty students had been arrested

[78] Tan, *The Politics of Chinese Education*, p. 4.

[79] "Students Must Sign 'Will Obey' Pledge," *Straits Times*, July 22, 1950, p. 5.

[80] Lawrence S. Finkelstein, "Prospects for Self-Government in Malaya," *Far Eastern Survey* 21,2 (1952): 14.

[81] Harper, "Lim Chin Siong," pp. 15–16.

[82] Spector, "Students and Politics," p. 65.

[83] Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 163; Spector, "Students and Politics," p. 69; Richard Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence in Singapore and Malaysia, 1945–1983* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985), pp. 84–5, 108–11.

[84] Spector, "Students and Politics," p. 66.

[85] Staff Study Prepared by an Interdepartmental Committee for the Operations Coordinating Board, December 14, 1955, Department of State, OCB Files, Lot 61 D 385 Singapore and Malaya, Documents, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, ed. Glennon, pp. 741, 749.

[86] Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, p. 431.

[87] Tan, *The Politics of Chinese Education*, pp. 227–30.

[88] Ibid., pp. 248–49.

under Emergency Regulations and thirty-nine expelled; federation officials subsequently charged more individuals with participating in demonstrations and shut down a number of Chinese schools.[89]

At the same time, an organized "Chinese Education" movement was taking shape, centered around teachers and school management committees, urging support for vernacular education and asserting the cultural autonomy and rights of Chinese Malayans. The pan-Malayan United Chinese School Teachers' Association (UCSTA) formed in December 1951; school management committees united in turn the next year. These two groups joined with leaders of the MCA at a November 1952 meeting that launched a decade-long (then periodically resurgent) movement.[90] When the Razak Report, which formed the basis of federation education policy at independence, was released in August 1956, the Chinese community mobilized in force against its calls for common syllabi across all schools and for instruction and exams in Malay and English. Despite strikes, riots, and demonstrations, the movement met defeat with the 1961 Education Act.[91] It was in the midst of this furor that Nantah was proposed; we return to that process in the next chapter.

Few English-educated students had direct ties with the Chinese-educated student Left. But there were exceptions, both personal and political. The bilingual Wang Gungwu, for instance, began his studies in Nanjing in 1947, returning to Malaya a year and a half later when the university closed down. He joined the first batch of freshmen at UM. Active in student union, literary, and leftist activities, he also maintained links with Chinese students.[92] Wang's junior and fellow activist Lim Hock Siew had siblings in the Chinese schools, one of them a leader at turbulent Chung Cheng High School forced into hiding for several years after leading a student delegation.[93] Others' interactions were more structured. UM student Mavis Puthucheary, for instance, taught English at a Chinese school in the 1950s,[94] while Musa Hitam worked with Chinese middle-school students in the Pan-Malayan Students' Federation (discussed below), then was one of ten student leaders Singapore chief minister David Marshall sent to negotiate with middle-school students ahead of planned riots in the mid-1950s.[95] UM students contested the repression of Chinese middle-school students, but at a sporadic and comparatively minimal level: bringing biscuits and sympathy to students barricaded in the Chinese high school,[96] criticizing a "repugnant" 1955 Singapore Government ban on assemblies of over five Chinese school students,[97] and carrying updates in their

[89] "Labour Party Protests against Suppression of Students," *Malayan Monitor*, December 31, 1957, p. 6.

[90] Tan, *The Politics of Chinese Education*, chap. 3.

[91] Margaret Roff, "The Politics of Language in Malaya," *Asian Survey* 7,5 (1967): 318; Tan, *The Politics of Chinese Education*, pp. 285–87; Tan Chee-Beng, "Nation-Building and Being Chinese in a Southeast Asian State: Malaysia," in *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II*, ed. Jennifer Cushman and Wang Gungwu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988), pp. 139–64.

[92] Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004, Singapore.

[93] Lim Hock Siew, oral history, A000215, reels 6–7, August 26, 1982, NAS, OHC; also Dennis Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse* (Singapore: Times, 1986), p. 81.

[94] Interview with Mavis Puthucheary, August 14, 2004, Bangi.

[95] Interview with Musa Hitam, December 6, 2004, Kuala Lumpur.

[96] Eugene Wijeysingha, oral history, A001595/54, reels 8–9, January 18, 1995, NAS, OHC.

[97] "Council Hits at Government Ban," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, pp. 1, 8.

campus publications.[98] When UM was slapped with a curfew in the wake of October 1956 riots in the Chinese schools, university students, too, jeered the riot police—who lobbed a tear gas canister at their hostel gate in reply.[99] Perhaps most importantly, Chinese-educated students entered UM themselves, especially in the science stream, and the presence of Chinese-educated students called into question the assumption that "the doors of the University of Malaya open with automatic alacrity provided that 'Open Sesame' is pronounced in the proper English accent."[100] For instance, Ong Pang Boon, himself a Chinese school graduate, served as treasurer of UM's Socialist Club in the 1950s, and his close friends from the club coaxed him into the newly formed PAP (People's Action Party).[101] Although the founding of Nantah sharpened the divide between the English-educated and Chinese-educated, UM's student union welcomed Nantah, the latter's student union,[102] and periodic collaborations. All told, as historian Huang Jianli proposes, the boundary between English-educated and Chinese-educated was more porous than the official "Singapore story" allows.[103]

The Development of Associational Life among Students

While middle-school students manned barricades, university students were hardly moribund. By the early 1950s, the thousand-strong UM could boast of a vibrant student scene. Hostel residents, in particular, enjoyed a medley of drama productions, union work, visiting speakers, and more.[104] Over time, too, students—initially treated as "sort of glorified schoolboys"—gained increasing independence.[105] Indeed, it was the poor quality of supervision in the hostels (the first founded in 1916) that had sparked the Medical College's first notable insurgency, an unsuccessful students' strike in 1924,[106] and student–staff relations remained sometimes tense. As a former University of Malaya Student Union (UMSU) president explained, "Rightly or wrongly, the impression has been given that certain sections, especially the expatriates, regard the students with a certain amount of contempt; this may be an unfortunate and erroneous impression, but it has been aggravated by the proud manner in which foreign universities are compared to the University of Malaya."[107] Added another UMSU leader, even "the local staff are often influenced

[98] *Fajar* was probably most consistent in this regard (see, for example, issue no. 17, March 30, 1955).

[99] Editorial by Haniff Omar, *Star*, March 12, 2006.

[100] Federation of Malaya Political Intelligence Report, No. 1 for January 1953, TNA:PRO CO1022/204.

[101] Sai Siew Min and Huang Jianli, "The 'Chinese-Educated' Political Vanguards: Ong Pang Boon, Lee Khoon Choy, & Jeuk Yeun Thong," in *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's Old Guard*, ed. Lam Peng Er and Kevin Y. L. Tan (St. Leonard's, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p. 137.

[102] "Let's Be Friends," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 23, 1956, p. 3.

[103] Huang Jianli, "Positioning the Student Political Activism of Singapore: Articulation, Contestation and Omission," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7,3 (2006): 405–6.

[104] Eugene Wijeysingha, A001595/54, reel 8, January 18, 1995.

[105] Peter Mayo, A001535/02, reel 1, July 22, 1994.

[106] K. Kanagaratnam, "Development of Corporate Life among Students in Malaya," in *A Symposium on Student Problems in Malaya*, ed. Sandosham and Visvanathan, p. 6.

[107] Ibid., p. 9.

by their 'superiors' to forget their origins and identify themselves with the universal tradition, timeless and spaceless."[108] A UM physiology professor at the same conference demonstrated this very attitude, however apologetically: "Our best here is not as good as the best in such places as Oxford or Cambridge, and (judging from their graduates), Harvard or Yale; but it would be surprising if we could equal such standards, for those universities have long traditions of scholarship, and they can choose their staff and students from among the best of many countries." He conceded, though, that "students work harder in Singapore than in England" and that standards at UM are comparable to those of "ordinary English-speaking universities."[109]

The university then occupied an odd niche. While the rest of the civil service shifted increasingly to hiring local staff, the university was excluded from "Malayanization." Most of the European staff, who tended to identify primarily with fellow Europeans, preferred both to remain politically neutral themselves and to limit students' political activities beyond the level of discussion—a stance undergraduates found hypocritical and short-sighted.[110] Younger or more progressive staff felt especially torn. Malcolm Wicks, still in his early twenties and with anticolonial inclinations when he arrived to teach at UM in 1952, found that, while the European commercial elite "tended to regard expatriate university staff as being the last word in subversion ... those of our students who were more politically sensitive had suspicions in the other direction."[111] This description of politicized students' impatience with their instructors was accurate, in part, but at least some students did feel that their lecturers engaged with them as adults and intellectuals, and that their teachers did not attempt to dissuade them from extracurricular involvement, including union work.[112]

Extracurricular activities constituted a core part of undergraduate life from the outset. First on the scene was the sports-oriented Medical Students' Recreation Club, established in 1906 and reconstituted as the Medical College Union (MCU) in 1922.[113] Ordinary membership became compulsory for male students in 1933, but "lady members" were not allowed to join until two years later, then were banned from 1936 to 1938. Compulsory membership was extended to women in 1947—although male peers still regarded them "with tolerant amusement."[114] While initially the

[108] Wang Gungwu, "Staff–Student Relationship," in *A Symposium on Student Problems in Malaya*, ed. Sandosham and Visvanathan, pp. 43–44.

[109] E. M. Glaser, "Malayan Students Compared with Others," in *A Symposium on Student Problems in Malaya*, ed. Sandosham and Visvanathan, p. 13.

[110] Yeo Kim Wah, "Student Politics in University of Malaya, 1949–51," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23,2 (1992): 356–57.

[111] Malcolm Wicks (president of the expatriate-heavy staff association in the early 1960s), oral history, A001683/07, reels 1–3, November 1, 1994, NAS, OHC.

[112] Interview with Ronald McCoy, January 17, 2006, Petaling Jaya; and Hedwig Anuar, A2036, reel 12, August 18/25, 1998; also Stockwell, "'The Crucible of the Malayan Nation,'" pp. 1169–70.

[113] The moniker "MCU" persisted even after the school's renaming, thanks to nationalist students keen "to phase out colonial names." In a diplomatic act of recompense, the school's old residence hall (the FMS Hostel) was renamed King Edward VII Hall in 1957. Lim K. H., "The Medical Students' Societies and Medical Students' Publications," *Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore* 34,6 (2005): 156C.

[114] Lily Sarma, "On Women in the University," in *A Symposium on Student Problems in Malaya*, ed. Sandosham and Visvanathan, p. 24.

organization was dedicated to "the promotion of comradeship and public spirit," the MCU added objectives relating to student welfare in 1924 and social and cultural activities in 1947. Soon, new associations sprang up and organized proliferating concerts, plays, literary activities, and debates.[115] Raffles College formed counterpart associations. The Raffles College Union (RCU, including a separate Ladies' Section) was in charge of student matters, albeit with limited authority, and helped coordinate the activities of other societies. Among these were a Literary and Dramatic Society in which participated both future UM vice chancellor Ungku Aziz and future Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew (whose future wife, Kwa Geok Choo, served as secretary of the RCU Ladies' Section before the war).[116]

Publications were a critical component of these organizations' activities and reflected the relatively unfettered press of the period. The MCU produced the annual *Singapore Medical College Union Magazine* from 1930 to 1949 (it continued publication through the Japanese Occupation), a reincarnation of the early 1920s' *The Medico: Journal of the Studies of the King Edward VII College of Medicine*.[117] The Medical College Literary and Debating Society produced *The Cauldron*, which started in 1947 and depicted the witches' scene in *Macbeth* on its first cover to evoke the stirring up of intellectual "trouble." The popular journal featured everything from campus anecdotes and cartoons to more serious essays. It grew more overtly political after a change of staff in 1949,[118] then was replaced by the *New Cauldron*, an organ of the Raffles Society, the successor at UM to both colleges' literary and debating societies. Still provocative, featuring essays on socialism, polemics against apathy, poems about workers and freedom, and the like, the *New Cauldron* characterized university life with the caption, "Boiling and mixing and melting ... Multi-cultural elements stirring." Even edgier was the short-lived *Malayan Orchid*, founded by left-nationalist medical student Lim Chan Yong in 1949.[119] The focal point for UM's first organized political discussion group, the journal sought a new, distinctively Malayan outlook.[120] The journal was closely linked with the Anti-British League, with which first editor Lim and successor Ong Cheng Piaw were both affiliated.[121]

[115] Kanagaratnam, "Corporate Life among Students," pp. 5–7; Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities," pp. 11–13, 21. World War II marked an especially harsh interregnum for medical students. Over two hundred of them served in the Medical Auxiliary Service. The Medical College was bombed during the very first Japanese air raid; then, in the following week, popular MCU secretary-general Yoong Tat Sin was fatally wounded while on duty at a local hospital. The Japanese shelled the burial ground during his funeral that evening, killing ten more medical students and wounding others. Low, Gan, and Tan, "A Century of Medical Students' Activities," pp. 152–53C; Lim, "The Medical Students' Societies," p. 157C; Abdul Wahab, *Medical Students During the Japanese Invasion of Singapore, 1941–1942*, ed. Cheah Jin Seng (Singapore: Academy of Medicine, 1987), pp. 1–3; and Tan, *From Village Boy to Mr. Opposition*, pp. 52–54.

[116] Rosie Lim Guat Kheng, oral history, A001386, reel 6, January 18, 1993, NAS, OHC.

[117] Lim, "The Medical Students' Societies," p. 157C.

[118] Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 368–69; Tan Chee Khoon, *Without Fear or Favour*, ed. Raj Vasil (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1984), p. 49. Future Malaysian prime minister Mahathir served as editor for a year in the 1940s.

[119] "New Students' Paper Calls for Change of Outlook," *The Undergrad*, January 24, 1949, p. 1; and Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities," p. 23.

[120] Koh Tat Boon, "University of Singapore Socialist Club (1953–1962)" (BA Honours thesis, University of Singapore, 1972/73), pp. 4–5.

[121] Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 367–68.

Meanwhile, the Raffles College Union introduced *The Undergrad* as its "unofficial organ" in 1948; it was rechristened *The Malayan Undergrad* after just four issues, with the founding of UM.[122] Other publications emerged later, from the Socialist Club's left-leaning *Fajar* (Dawn) in 1953, to the Catholic Student Society's *The Challenge*, launched in 1955 "to provoke student thought on contemporary social, economic, and religious problems."[123] The campus press was reasonably free, with a few landmark exceptions. For instance, *Malayan Undergrad* had to fend off an administration attempt to censor its character and circulation early on,[124] and certain publications allowed in Singapore—including *Fajar* and Nantah's *University Tribune* and *Suloh Nantah*—were banned in the federation.[125]

UM made the news off-campus, as well, featuring regularly in both the English-medium and vernacular presses. Students themselves contributed to those media—most famously, Mahathir Mohamad published a series of articles as "C. H. E. Det" (the Europeanization of family nickname "Che Det") in Singapore's *Sunday Times* in 1948–50. (At least some of his classmates knew at the time that these articles were by the "mild-mannered" and "quiet" Mahathir.[126]) Perhaps unsurprisingly for someone who pursued a degree specifically in order to increase his credibility as a candidate for election,[127] several of his pieces were explicitly political. They addressed such topics as education policies, economic modernization, and the development of UMNO, foreshadowing Mahathir's arguments on citizenship, rights, and equality in his 1970 book, *The Malay Dilemma*.[128]

There was indeed much to report at UM at the time. In preparation for the merger of Raffles and the Medical Colleges, and in response to a 1949 Report on Higher Education that called for a university student union, a committee headed by Medical College Union president Tan Chee Khoon and advised by the rather notorious local lawyer John Eber,[129] drafted a new union constitution for ratification

[122] Exemplifying noncommunalism, the paper's first editorial board included Wan Suleiman, George Puthucheary, and Beda Lim. James Puthucheary (George's older brother), Lim Chan Yong, and Abdullah Majid handled production and distribution, and P. C. S. Handy and Manijeh Namazie secured advertisements. See *The Undergrad*, November 29, 1948; J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 1, June 15, 1985; and Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 366–67.

[123] "Catholics Issue the Challenge," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, p. 6.

[124] *Malayan Undergrad* was the organ of UMSU, but UMSU did not select its editorial board. The paper's perspective varied with the politics of the group in control, which ran the gamut. In November 1950, the paper (then controlled by radical leftists) reached an agreement with acting vice chancellor Silcock to include UMSU's publications secretary on its editorial board; UMSU took charge of board appointments altogether two years later. Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities," p. 23; and Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 367.

[125] "Government Asked to Explain Nantah Ban," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 1959, p. 8; "Civil Liberties in Malaya," *Fajar* 4,5 (August 1962), p. 7; Ministry of Internal Security, Malaysia, *Communism in the Nanyang University* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Chetak Kerajaan, 1964), p. 12.

[126] Koh Eng Kheng, oral history, A002000, reel 3, February 23, 1998, NAS, OHC.

[127] Mahathir M., "The Singapore Years and Subsequently," *Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore* 34,6 (2005): 43C.

[128] Khoo Boo Teik, "The Legacy of C. H. E. Det: Portrait of a Nationalist as a Young Man," *Kajian Malaysia* 11,2 (1993): 29–33.

[129] Eber also (unsuccessfully) defended both radical nationalist Ahmad Boestaman (Abdullah Sani bin Raja Kechil) in a 1947 sedition trial and Che Aminah, the Malayan adoptive mother of Bertha Hertogh/Nadra (see below), a few years later. HQ Malaya Command Fortnightly

by the students.[130] The two existing unions merged uneasily. The hybrid organization was at first called the Medical and Raffles College Union, headed by medical student Chee Phui Hung, after which it evolved into the University of Malaya Student Union, headed by Raffles College Union president Geoffrey Leembruggen until he was supplanted by a medical student six months later.[131] Administering the union was a Student Council, made up of twenty-five to thirty members, elected annually. The Student Council, in turn, appointed an executive committee from among its members. Union membership was compulsory for all students, and the limited number of people willing to play active roles lowered the barriers especially to women's participation.[132] Student clubs could either remain autonomous or affiliate with the union. However, affiliated societies had to cater to all students, and not just "sectional interests" (since they received UMSU funds); therefore, partisan political clubs, among others, remained autonomous.[133] Among the more specialized clubs as of the mid-1950s were the Muslim Society (which also followed politics and catered to Malay students' needs);[134] the Student Christian Movement, Catholic Student Society, and University Christian Fellowship;[135] the literary and cultural Chinese Society;[136] and the political Socialist and Democratic clubs.

POLITICAL CLUBS

What especially distinguished UM and embodied officials' acceptance of students' political role in the waning days of colonialism was the development of political clubs. Initially, students eager to acquire a "sound training in political sciences" were denied the "elemental right" to "form political groups and indulge in political activity" like other members of the public.[137] The dearth of such venues not only raised the risk that the university would produce "mediocre and uninformed politicians and statesmen of the future,"[138] but also threatened to radicalize disillusioned students.[139] The clubs students proposed were to be noncommunal, nonsectarian, autonomous, lawful, limited to undergraduates, and "essentially academic in nature," facilitating "intelligent study and analysis of political problems, activities, and thought."[140] UM authorities eventually declared political discussion "both a normal part of University life and a specific contribution to the future development of a Malayan nation."[141] Or, as student James Puthucheary put it, "surely the British government is not going to fall because we have a political club."[142]

First to form was the University Socialist Club, approved at the end of 1952, which developed out of a study group that met at James Puthucheary's hostel room. UMSU president Wang Gungwu was elected as the group's inaugural president.[143] Premised on "anticolonial idealism" and aspiring toward an independent, socialist Malaya,[144] the new club aimed to be relatively intellectual and ideologically moderate, especially in light of recent arrests of radical students connected with the *Orchid* and ABL.[145] It launched the journal *Fajar* later in 1953, appealing across the "old left" for funds—future PAP notables Toh Chin Chye (former president of the Malayan Students' Union in the UK), Goh Keng Swee, Lee Kuan Yew, and others responded with contributions—supplemented by advertising revenue. (The name of the journal, meaning "Dawn," came from a poem by member Hedwig Anuar [née Aroozoo] about the sun's setting in the west and rising in the east; use of the Malay term reflected the prevailing mood.)[146] As *Fajar*'s first editorial described, the club was not for "tittle-tattle at tea or relishing in the pedantry of intellectualism," but to "bring into perspective the conditions of economic security, political liberty, and social justice."[147] Still, while some members took a "straightforward revolutionary Marxist" line, others focused more on local issues, such as communalism.[148] While its events drew crowds, a maximum of twenty or so members were especially active, and the club was selective in granting membership.[149] Reflecting campus demographics, non-Malay men predominated—although there were prominent exceptions from the start.[150] Members came from all faculties and tended also to be

Intelligence Review [1947], No. 53 (orig. 52241/47), TNA:PRO CO537/2151; and "The Case of John Eber," *Malayan Monitor* 5,9 (September 1952), pp. 6–8.

130 Tan, *From Village Boy to Mr. Opposition*, pp. 45–46.

131 Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004.

132 Interview with Hedwig Anuar (who was active in both the RCU and UMSU), July 13, 2005, Singapore.

133 Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 3, August 12, 1982.

134 The society's patrons were Malay nationalist leader Dato' Onn Jaafar and Singapore legislative councilor Mohamed Javad Namazie, whose children were active at Raffles and UM. Mahathir Mohamad, Aminuddin Baki, and Socialist Club member Syed Husin Ali, all later prominent in politics, served turns acting as president. Interview with Manijeh Namazie, February 2, 2006, Singapore; and Mahathir, "The Singapore Years," p. 43C.

135 The first was established at the Medical College in 1948, while the latter two formed shortly after the founding of UM. Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities," p. 21.

136 "Chung Hwa Shuet Hui," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 10, 1956, p. 2.

137 Kanagaratnam, "Corporate Life among Students," pp. 9–10.

138 Zakaria bin Salim, "Communalism in the University," in *A Symposium on Student Problems in Malaya*, ed. Sandosham and Visvanathan, p. 21.

139 For example, J. D. de Silva, "Communism and the Asian Student," *Malayan Undergrad*, January 24, 1953, pp. 2, 4.

140 K. Kanagaratnam, "Political Clubs in the University Should be Non-Communal Non-Sectarian," *Malayan Undergrad* Souvenir Issue (supplement, December 13, 1952), p. 10.

141 Kanagaratnam, "Corporate Life among Students," p. 10.

142 J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 2, June 15, 1985.

143 Other members were Philomen Oorjitham, Sandrasegaram Woodhull, M. K. Rajakumar, Poh Soo Kai, Lim Hock Siew, Jamit Singh, Jerry Goh, and Francis Yeo. Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

144 Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 3, August 12, 1982, and reel 7, August 26, 1982.

145 Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006, Subang Jaya.

146 Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006.

147 Quoted in Tan Jing Quee's presidential address, "Our Role in the Political Movement," *Fajar* 4,5 (August 1962), p. 4.

148 J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 2, June 15, 1985.

149 Michael Fernandez, oral history, A000076/20, reel 8, May 25, 1981; and Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 3, August 12, 1982.

150 Interviews with Lim Hock Siew, February 2, 2006, Singapore; and with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004. Chinese-educated member Linda Chen Mong Hock, for instance, went on to play a leading role in the PAP, Singapore Women's Federation, and the Singapore Anti-Yellow Culture Council before being served with banishment orders in September 1956. "The Clean-up Starts," *Straits Times*, September 20, 1956, p. 1; and Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, pp. 80–81.

heavily involved in other student organizations,[151] as well as active in promoting socialism outside the university, as through trade unions and peasant mobilization.[152] Most members "felt an acute sense of obligation and responsibility to be involved in our people's struggle for national independence."[153] The influence of the Socialist Club expanded as its members graduated: a number of them turned to labor organizing, notwithstanding their English-educated, often upper-middle-class backgrounds.

Only in December 1954 did another political club beckon, as several students announced plans for a Social Democratic Club. Its goals would be to stimulate students' interest in politics, democracy, nationalism, and key social, economic, and cultural problems in Malaya.[154] But plans for this organization seemingly foundered. Instead, a Democratic Club was established the following February. Designed to counter the Socialist Club, the Democratic Club never really took off. According to founding president Musa Hitam, its members were "branded as quislings."[155] To some extent, the Socialist and Democratic Clubs mirrored the People's Action Party and Labour Front, respectively, including in the electoral campaigns members supported. Both clubs sponsored political forums and debates on campus and worked to inform student opinion as negotiations for independence proceeded.[156]

MOVING BEYOND THE CAMPUS

Three separate student unions cast a wider net, joining students across institutions and revealing both commonalities and real differences among university and other tertiary students. The first was Gabungan Pelajar-Pelajar Melayu Semenanjung (Peninsular Malays' Students' Union, GPMS), established in 1948. Dominated usually by teaching colleges, the nationalist GPMS aimed to unite all Malay secondary and tertiary students, to raise awareness of Malays' disadvantaged status, and to pursue the educational improvement and broader progress of the community. The organization focused on issues of Malay culture and language, demanding the introduction of Malay-medium secondary education and a Malay-language university, and engaging in educational and social-service community outreach activities. In the process, the GPMS launched the careers of a number of Malay leaders: politician and writer Kassim Ahmad and nationalist firebrand and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People's Party, PRM) founder Ahmad Boestaman, as well as Syed Husin Ali and Sanusi Osman, who would later become PRM leaders, and Abdullah Badawi, who would later be elected UMNO prime minister.[157]

[151] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 6, August 26, 1982.

[152] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," p. 31.

[153] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 3, August 12, 1982.

[154] "New Political Party to Start," *Malayan Undergrad*, December 1, 1954, p. 1.

[155] "The New Political Club," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, p. 4; and interview with Musa Hitam, December 6, 2004, Kuala Lumpur.

[156] For instance, "The Merdeka Mission: Socialists and Democrats Differ," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 10, 1956, p. 3; and Eugene Wijeysingha, A001595/54, reels 8–9, January 18, 1995.

[157] Interview with Musa Hitam, December 6, 2004; and Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004. Abdul Razak Ahmad, "Living up Nobly to a Glorious Past," *New Straits Times*, January 8, 2006, p. 18; Kee Poo Kong, *Tertiary Students and Social Development: An Area for Direct Action—Student Rural Service Activities in Malaysia* (Singapore: Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development, 1976), pp. 41–43.

Then, in October 1952, reviving an idea bandied about for several years, UMSU convened a conference of students from UM and various colleges in Singapore and Malaya to develop an organization to coordinate and promote nation-building activities, represent student opinion, liaise with foreign student organizations, foster youth leadership, and improve students' quality of life. Medical student Ronald McCoy, the organizing secretary for the conference, linked the initiative to "the normal pattern of Asian student movements," referring to the decades-old nationwide student organizations in such nations as Indonesia, Burma, and the Philippines.[158] The second national union, the Pan-Malayan Students Federation (PMSF), was duly launched in 1953. All members of the affiliated unions—as many as five thousand students—were automatically accepted as members of the PMSF. However, UM students, and, specifically, members of the UM Socialist Club, dominated the leadership and helped draft the PMSF's constitution.[159] The PMSF soon developed into a highly political group, enough so that colonial authorities worried that it was (perhaps unwittingly) a communist front organization.[160] For this reason, student-teachers, whose contracts prohibited political activity, hesitated to participate.[161] Unlike the GPMS, the Anglophone PMSF was dominated by non-Malay, especially Chinese, students. Sales of the Chinese edition of the PMSF's monthly magazine, *Malayan Student*, exceeded 12,000; the August 1956 edition specifically convinced officials that the Nantah and Chinese middle-school student unions were "taking over control" of the organization.[162]

The PMSF was engaged at both local and international levels; its activities ranged from adult-education classes in Singapore[163] to participation in both the Leiden-based International Student Conference and (less avidly) the Prague-based International Union of Students.[164] PMSF president Philomen Oorjitham attended conferences in Denmark, Turkey, Scotland, and the United States, while associate secretary S. S. Gill led a delegation to the inaugural Asian Students' Conference in the Philippines in December 1954. There, the Malayan students found the

[158] "Malayan Students' Conference," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 28, 1952, p. 1; "Students and Politics," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 20, 1953, p. 2.

[159] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 6, August 26, 1982; Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," p. 26.

[160] For instance, Memorandum by the Chief Secretary, "The Student Movement in Malaya" (Ex.Co. Paper No. 5/22/55), TNA:PRO CO1030/263; also Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 193.

[161] Tejen Karmakar, "An Obituary to the Pan Malayan Students' Federation," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 27, 1957, p. 5.

[162] Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya, April 1956, TNA:PRO CO1030/8. The Monthly Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya, September 1956, October 9, 1956, TNA:PRO CO1030/8.

[163] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 6, August 26, 1982. Lim himself taught around thirty students, most of them women, two nights a week.

[164] Interviews with Musa Hitam, December 6, 2004; and Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004; Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 5, August 26, 1982. The IUS had intervened previously in Malayan student affairs: it protested a government crackdown on allegedly procommunist Chinese schools and students in 1950 (Telegram No. 788 to Governor, Singapore, August 5, 1950, TNA:PRO CO537/6013), and members discussed Malayan students' contributions to "the national independence struggle," and their being "hounded and persecuted by the British imperialist oppressors" at a meeting the following year. See John Clews, "Report of the Proxy British Vice-President on the Executive Meeting of the I.U.S., Peking, April 26–30, 1951, distributed by National Union of Students, London, May 21, 1951, TNA:PRO CO1022/146.

conversations—on everything from scholarships to feminism—useful, but were struck most by "the political consciousness of the Filipino students, their constructive programmes for their society, and the unique emphasis and importance which the government places on students," as well as by the sheer number of local universities.[165] And when UM graduate Wan Abdul Hamid, then studying in London, lost a state scholarship for having disobeyed government orders by attending meetings in China and Russia, it was the PMSF that interceded on his behalf.[166] The PMSF also mooted the establishment of an Asian Students' Union as a nonpolitical vehicle for "peace, independence, personal-liberty, and social progress" at its 1955 conference.[167]

Yet outside a narrow circle, the PMSF was poorly received at UM. Resistance especially to its advocacy for Chinese middle-school students revealed not just elitism, but disjunctures across strata, and its popularity suffered when right-wing factions controlled UMSU.[168] During the 1955 UM holidays, UMSU president W. R. Rasanayagam sought unilaterally to disaffiliate the union from the PMSF because of the latter's participation in an international conference in Birmingham.[169] (Ironically, at that conference, the International Union of Students accused PMSF delegates Oorjitham and Gill of defending British imperialism.[170]) Simultaneously, PMSF Assistant Secretary Hussain Ghani published his suspicions "that the PMSF was being exploited for political purposes," citing its sympathy for Chinese school students and the politically dubious character of its delegates to overseas conferences.[171] Defenders insisted the "PMSF has the best of relations with the Governments of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya" and could "categorically deny" such exploitation.[172]

Shortly after, UM's delegation refused to play the British national anthem at the inaugural PMSF Cultural Festival in Kuala Lumpur, thereby rejecting symbols of colonial domination. UMSU censured the delegation.[173] In their defense, *Malayan Undergrad* editor Agoes Salim wrote, "Can we claim to be nationalists ... and yet

[165] "First Asian Student's [sic] Conference," *Malayan Undergrad*, January 22, 1955, p. 3.

[166] "P.M.S.F. Questions Government," *Malayan Undergrad*, January 22, 1955, p. 5. The former was an August 1954 meeting in Peking of the World Federation of Democratic Youth. Colonial officials also registered that UM graduate Abdullah Majid traveled to an IUS meeting in Moscow later that month—presumably the same meeting Wan Abdul attended. Director of Intelligence, Federation of Malaya, Monthly Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya, August 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/7.

[167] "Asian Students' Union," *Malayan Undergrad*, January 22, 1955, p. 4.

[168] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 5–6, August 26, 1982; and Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," p. 27.

[169] *Malayan Undergrad*, November 21, 1955, pp. 1–2, 10.

[170] "Defenders of Imperialism?" *Malayan Undergrad*, April 23, 1956, p. 1.

[171] "The Article by Hussain Ghani that Touched off a Heated Controversy," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 21, 1955, pp. 8, 12.

[172] "The Reply from UMSU Delegation to PMSF," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 21, 1955, p. 9.

[173] The authorities were not pleased, either, with Chinese school students' participation in the festival; for instance, they disapproved of their paintings "portraying semi-starved, over-worked members of the labouring classes." See Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya, Part II, December 1955, TNA:PRO CO1030/8. In the authorities' eyes, the festival confirmed the PMSF to be "a class ally of Communism." Monthly Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya, August 1956, September 8, 1956, TNA:PRO CO1030/8.

condemn outright and without any provision a delegation for adopting, politely or impolitely, what is essentially an attitude towards a foreign tradition arising out of sincere nationalist feelings?" Indeed, PMSF *would* play the state anthem of Selangor, whose sultan was also invited.[174] Facing what UMSU branded an "act of 'grave discourtesy,'" Governor Donald MacGillivray declined to attend.[175] UMSU called an extraordinary general meeting in early 1956; resolutions condemning the PMSF council and UM's delegation passed easily. Declaring it beneath their dignity to represent so cowardly a student body, the leaders of the delegation resigned *en bloc*, throwing the meeting into disarray.[176] Shortly thereafter, UMSU lost control of the PMSF executive leadership for the first time, when Oorjitham's successor, Musa Hitam, lost to the president of the Technical College Students' Union.[177] Citing the PMSF's "stormy history" and the chance that it might now "blunder" and be "used as a front by other people," UMSU officially disaffiliated from the federation later that year.[178] The PMSF soon collapsed.

UMSU joined forces with the Malay-based GPMS the following year to launch the third intercampus union, the tertiary-level-only Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-Pelajar Malaya (National Union of Malayan Students, PKPM). While nonpartisan, PKPM claimed "the right to express its views on national political matters when they affect the interests of the Malayan student community."[179] But independence on the peninsula intruded. Federation education minister Abdul Razak insisted that any national union be confined to include only federation institutions. Moreover, the PKPM's anticolonial overtones and apparent relationship to a "tide of Afro-Asianism" worried colonial authorities in Singapore.[180] UMSU and the other Singapore-based unions had to withdraw.[181] The Technical College Students' Union then again took the initiative, joining with the unions of two other colleges in the National Union of Federation Students. Its inaugural convention showcased "youthful enthusiasm kindled by the parental directive from the Minister of Education," sniped the *Malayan Undergrad*, revealing "the superficiality of the beginning of autonomous student government" in the new state.[182]

All the while, UMSU situated itself not just among local tertiary institutions, but as part of an international category. Groups from universities across Asia—and even the defeated US presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson—visited UM from early on,

[174] "Role and Fulfilment," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 10, 1956, p. 4.

[175] "That Anthem Affair," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 10, 1956, pp. 2–4; also Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 5, August 26, 1982.

[176] "Defenders of Imperialism?" *Malayan Undergrad*, April 23, 1956 p. 1; Tejen Karmakar, "An Obituary to the Pan Malayan Students' Federation," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 27, 1957, p. 5; and Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 5, August 26, 1982.

[177] "PMSF Executive Goes North," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 23, 1956, p. 2.

[178] "N.U.S. to be Political—Council," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 27, 1957, p. 1; and Karmakar, "An Obituary to the Pan Malayan Students' Federation," p. 5.

[179] "N.U.S. to be Political," p. 1.

[180] Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 5, May 25, 1981.

[181] "This is the NUS Story," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 25, 1957, pp. 1, 8; "Govt. Afraid, Say Students," *Straits Times*, April 8, 1958.

[182] "The Preposterous Claim," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 3, 1958, p. 2; "N.U.F.S. Meets," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 3, 1958, pp. 1, 8.

sharing stories of political derring-do.[183] UMSU and other student association leaders joined study and exposure tours, too, as well as international meetings. For instance, a UM Language Society goodwill mission traveled to Indonesia in 1957 to study local life, and concluded with an audience with President Soekarno and Vice President Hatta.[184] By late 1954, *Malayan Undergrad* had introduced a "foreign universities" page, formalizing coverage of student events worldwide. The inaugural issue reported on students shot dead in Tehran, riots on Canadian campuses, and an antinuclear protest at Japan's Waseda University.[185] Subsequent coverage spanned the globe. At the same time, foreign student media covered developments in Malaya—for instance, in Australia, student publications printed condemnations (tracked in *Malayan Undergrad*) of the expulsion of Chinese school students in Singapore after the May 1954 protests.[186] Moreover, regional universities themselves were networking, for instance in the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, of which UM had been a founding member in 1956.[187]

Malayans were in the thick of Cold War-era student mobilization. UMSU's four-person delegation to a UN Asian Students' Convention at New Delhi in December 1952 returned "wiser but very much disappointed, for nothing concrete emerged from the conference,"[188] apart from their helping to nix a Pakistani proposal for a regional Asian UN Students' Association.[189] More controversial—and perhaps indicative of how seriously students were taken at the time—was the Students' Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, scheduled for May 1956. Designed to parallel the "adult" version, the conference was to discuss the contributions students could make to promoting peace, easing tension, and building friendly relations among participant countries. Delegations were invited from forty-five countries, including both UMSU and the PMSF from Malaya.[190] The Malayan delegation, led by Mahmood Merican, Philomen Oorjitham, and Musa Hitam, was already in Indonesia when the conference was postponed due to Cold War fears—denied by Indonesia, but still trumped up in Singapore's conservative English-language media—that it was "Communist-inspired." The conference finally opened on May 30, although British reports list only Abdullah Majid as attending; it is possible he represented the PMSF, which purportedly made contact there with student organizations in "oppressed" territories.[191]

All along, a cohort of Malayan undergraduates and postgraduates studying abroad—some of them privately funded, others on scholarship—helped strengthen UMSU's international leanings. The most prestigious award available to Malayan students who wished to study abroad was the Queen's Scholarship, founded in 1885 for the brightest students in the Straits Settlements, then replicated in the Federated Malay States in 1901. Ninety-six applicants, including three women, had been named Queen's Scholars by the time war broke out in 1942. All told, the United Kingdom hosted almost three hundred Malayan students in 1941; another hundred were in Hong Kong (where a university had been founded in 1912), and a few were in the United States and Australia.[192] Many of these students maintained ties with peers back home, and some either engaged as activists overseas or seemed likely to do so. For instance, a number of Malay students studied at Egypt's Al Azhar University. In the early 1950s, noting especially their "miserable living conditions," the British sought to counter the students' susceptibility to "dangerous influences" and mobilization in the short term by building a government hostel in Cairo, and over the long term by convincing the Malay rulers (hereditary state-level sultans) to establish a religious university at home.[193] Meanwhile, in Australia, Ong Eng Guan, later elected Singapore's first PAP mayor in 1957, established and led the Asian Students' Federation while studying at the University of Melbourne.[194] But London was the real focal point during this period.

Of particular concern to the British was Lim Hong Bee, a Singapore-born journalist who attended Cambridge on a Queen's Scholarship in 1947 to study law and never left. A founding member of the Malayan Democratic Union (discussed below), Lim may also have been the MCP's representative in London.[195] He launched the allegedly "rabidly leftwing" and unabashedly anticolonial *Malayan Monitor* amid proposals for Malayan independence, covering anticommunist attacks, the economy, parliamentary debates, legal cases, and the like; the *Malayan Monitor* was one of the few sources of such information available to Malayans in the United Kingdom. It also featured information that would potentially interest local dissenters, for instance by publishing details on the deaths of British servicemen.[196] While legal in the United

[183] Interview with Hedwig Anuar, July 13, 2005; *Malayan Undergrad*, April 20, 1953.

[184] Chiang Hai Ding, "Tour to Indonesia," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 4, 1957, p. 3. Yet veteran traveler Musa Hitam found Malayan students comparatively provincial and restricted by an infrastructural disadvantage. "Student Travel in Europe," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 25, 1957, p. 3.

[185] "Foreign Universities" section, *Malayan Undergrad*, December 1, 1954.

[186] "Murhun [Australia] Condemns Expulsion of 70 Chinese School Students," *Malayan Undergrad*, January 22, 1955, p. 7.

[187] ASEAIHL, "Constitution of the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning," pamphlet (Bangkok: 1972).

[188] "U.N. Conference," *Malayan Undergrad* Souvenir Issue (supplement, December 13, 1952), p. 3.

[189] Editorial, *Malayan Undergrad*, January 24, 1953, p. 2.

[190] At the last moment, the Singapore government forbade delegations from the Singapore Student-Teachers' Guild and the Teachers' Training College to attend in light of its ideological overtones. Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 5, May 25, 1981.

[191] "Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya," March, April, May, and September 1956, TNA:PRO CO1030/8; Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 5, May 25, 1981; "Students' 'Bandung,'" *Malayan Undergrad*, March 10, 1956, pp. 1, 7; "45 Countries Will be Represented at Bandung," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 29, 1956, p. 2; and "Did You Say Red, Sir?" *Malayan Undergrad*, May 29, 1956, p. 4.

[192] Cheeseman, "Education in Malaya," p. 46.

[193] Memo of meeting with General Sir Gerald Templer by Sir Charles Jeffries, Mr. Paskin, Mr. Carstairs, Mr. E. R. Edmonds, Mr. Jerrom, and Mr. Baxter, November 11, 1953, TNA:PRO CO1022/196.

[194] Governor of Singapore to Secretary of State for the Colonies (Savingram no. 116), December 27, 1957, TNA:PRO CO1030/702. Others, such as S. S. Gill, joined antiwar protests in the United States from the mid-1960s on (interview with S. S. Gill, January 28, 2006, Kuala Lumpur).

[195] TNA:PRO CO537/4781 and 537/4782.

[196] Indicative of the timbre: the March 1953 cover story was an obituary for "Joseph Stalin—Teacher, Leader, and Friend of the People." See TNA:PRO CO537/4781-2; also Yeo Kim Wah, "The Anti-Federation Movement in Malaya, 1946–48," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4,1 (1973): 48.

Kingdom, the *Monitor* was banned in the federation and Singapore in 1949. Lim was active among Singapore and Malayan students in the United Kingdom, including as a liaison for the British Communist Party's Malayan subcommittee. He convinced Britain's National Union of Students to send over a dozen Malayan students to the World Federation of Democratic Youth conference at Budapest in 1949. Although Lim propagandized actively throughout the event, the students saw it mainly as a cheap holiday, then were rattled on their return by government threats to revoke their scholarships.[197]

Partly in response to such radicalizing influences, colonial authorities worked with local Malayan student leaders to establish a social club, Malaya Hall, in late 1949, barring Lim Hong Bee and his group from using the facilities.[198] At the same time, the students themselves founded the Malayan Forum, a political club open to all Malayans in Britain, but primarily oriented toward students. It aimed to keep its members informed of current events, foster cross-racial solidarity, encourage social responsibility and leadership, and help graduates pursue a "United, Free and Democratic Malaya." Future prime ministers Lee Kuan Yew and Abdul Razak were involved, among other luminaries-to-be. The group hosted well-known speakers from Malaya and the United Kingdom, staged debates, established links with British organizations like the Fabian Colonial Bureau, and campaigned for Labour Party representatives in the 1950 British elections. The group launched a "mildly leftwing" journal, *Suara Merdeka*, in 1950, adding the more political *Suara Bulanan* a few years later.[199] At least some of its members had previously been active in student organizations in Singapore, and some were involved simultaneously with the London-based Malayan Student Union, as well.[200] The Malayan Forum trod carefully to avoid the taint of radicalism in its early days, but soon drifted leftward.[201] Even so, only a minority of the Malayan students in the United Kingdom engaged actively in politics while there (most of the activists attended the London School of Economics); of at least 780 Malayan students in Britain in 1953, the Malayan Forum claimed but 150 members, and its public debates drew an average attendance of fewer than thirty. Only four students joined the English-speaking ABL back home after their interaction with Lim's group in London.[202]

[197] Yeo Kim Wah, "Joining the Communist Underground: The Conversion of English-Educated Radicals to Communism in Singapore, June 1948–January 1951," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS)* 67,1 (1994): 54–56; Khong Kim Hoong, *Merdeka! British Rule and the Struggle for Independence in Malaya, 1945–1959* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2003), pp. 172, 210.

[198] Yeo, "Joining the Communist Underground," pp. 56–57.

[199] Ibid., p. 56.

[200] For instance, after participating in the Raffles and UM student unions, Hedwig Anuar continued as secretary of the Malayan Forum and Malayan Student Union, also working with *Suara Merdeka* and co-organizing weekly forums at Malaya Hall. Interview with Hedwig Anuar, July 13, 2005; also A1717, reel 3, November 28, 1995; and A2036, reels 12 and 14, August 18/25, 1998.

[201] An apparent "coup" by the Eber family in October 1953 accelerated the drift: John Eber was elected secretary, and his wife and brother-in-law became committee members. See "Activities of the Malayan Forum and the publication 'Suara Merdeka' (1951–53)," TNA:PRO CO1022/196.

[202] Yeo, "Joining the Communist Underground," p. 57.

Indeed, despite this proliferation of organizations at home and abroad, activist students were always in the minority. Students themselves complained through the 1950s of the difficulty of drawing crowds for meetings, writers for publications, or volunteers.[203] At UMSU's inaugural annual general meeting in 1950, President Geoffrey Leembruggen pleaded for a more engaged and pro-Malayan attitude among students.[204] That call echoed through the years. For instance, just a year after Leembruggen's plea, the *New Cauldron* implored students to "get rid of our vulgar vanity and preserve the functional status of this University."[205] In 1954, when UM still provided only one political club for over a thousand students, the Socialist Club had to postpone its annual general meeting for lack of quorum of twenty-five.[206] A March 1955 *Malayan Undergrad* editorial complained of "shallow and superficial" students, with "little sign of the spirit that will build a free Malaya."[207] And again, three years later, a similar critique appeared in the same newspaper, complaining that, apart from "the devoted and unstinted effort of a few," the majority of students had a "malignant attitude of apathy and indifference. Not until and unless there is a change of heart can we expect to fulfill our corporate responsibility to the University and the Country."[208] More blunt still is the assessment of committed activist Lim Hock Siew, that "the vast majority were so immersed in their academic studies that they were totally disinterested in politics. I would say objectively, because of their apathy and passivity in politics, they played a reactionary role in our people's struggle for national independence."[209] Even government officials seemed disappointed that, in the words of Singapore's minister for culture, the majority of students "gave the outsider the impression that they were interested in only trite things like ragging and rock and roll."[210]

Meanwhile, amid independence celebrations in the federation, visiting American professor Leon Lederer raised a ruckus by asserting in the *Malayan Undergrad* that "nationalism in this university is nil" and "the part played by university students of Malaya in the local Merdeka movement has been negligible."[211] A frustrated student echoed his comments in the same issue, grousing that overly "lopsided" undergraduates were "dragging this, the highest seat of learning in this country, to the level of a mere Mugging House."[212] Angry rejoinders ensued. One student pointed to Lederer's omissions—Lederer had neglected to acknowledge the nationalistic *Fajar* and Socialist Club—and suggested that "caution" rather than "apathy" prevented students from getting involved. He offered, "give us a sure definition of 'un-Malayan,' 'Healthy atmosphere' and all the other frightening words. Then, and only then, will we Varsity students yell 'Merdeka' without having

[203] For instance, "Apathy and Activity," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 20, 1953, p. 2.

[204] "'You Are the Surge, the Power': What Are You Going to Do About It?" *Malayan Undergrad*, February 9, 1950, p. 1.

[205] "Lest We Forget," *The New Cauldron* (Hilary Term 1951–52), p. 12.

[206] *Malayan Undergrad*, November 12, 1954, p. 3.

[207] "The Challenge," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, p. 4.

[208] S. Kumarapathy, "The Clarion Call," *Malayan Undergrad*, July 1958, p. 4.

[209] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 3, August 12, 1982.

[210] "Cultural Lead Wanting," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 1959, p. 1.

[211] "Nationalism and the Varsity," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 4, 1957, p. 4.

[212] Ramon Navaratnam, "Student Life in Burma," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 4, 1957, p. 6.

to think twice before our action."[213] Another student conceded unhappily, "The repugnancy of many of [Lederer's] assertions, particularly the one that the majority of the Malayan undergraduates are interested only in the attainment of a good job after graduation, is equaled only by their truthfulness." This respondent, too, faulted colonial policies, particularly the "pathological reverence for the British" and the "sense of superiority towards our own people" that the system of English education fostered among students. But for him, primary blame lay with students: "We are concerned with our nation's problems only when they tempt or threaten our own pockets ... Are we content to remain a courageless misguided and convictionless generation?"[214] Perhaps the most damning vindication of Lederer, though, came later that year. Despite the issues at stake, and aware as most students were of political matters, most seats in the campus elections were uncontested—a "Testimonial to Tidapathy" (from the Malay *tidak apa*, "it doesn't matter"), punned the *Malayan Undergrad*.[215] Yet the relatively sparse rate of involvement only highlights the significance of what activism there was: throughout this period, the conventional wisdom was that university students *should* be politically aware and engaged, and the state took students' contributions more seriously than the mere numbers would seem to warrant.

NATIONALISM AND NATION-BUILDING

> My father felt his master's voice,
> Obeyed but hid his grievous, wounded self.
> I have learnt:
> There is an Asian tide
> That sings such power
> Into my dreaming side:
> My father's anger turns my cause.[216]

As Lederer implied, what made the relative quiescence of most Malayan students during this period so remarkable was the context in which they lived. The postwar period brought an invigorated sense across the region that youth "had a special duty to set the pace of national revolution."[217] Students specifically were central to Southeast Asian nationalist movements. Spurred into political awareness by the experience of Japanese Occupation, with their conscience pricked by leaders like Nehru, and inspired by struggles in Indonesia, Indochina, and beyond, many Malayan students ultimately did question what kind of nation they should have. They were perhaps behind the times: Malaya was, declared one observer, a "political anachronism," as "the last major colonial outpost of Europe flaunting itself in an

[213] Lee Yong Hock, "A Malayan Replies," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 25, 1957, p. 6.

[214] Lim Hock Siew, "The Challenge Before Us," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 25, 1957, p. 7.

[215] "Testimonial to Tidapathy," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 12, 1957, p. 2.

[216] The poem from which this stanza is taken, "May 1954," was one of about a dozen Edwin Thumboo wrote in the wake of the *Fajar* arrests, but it was deemed too subversive to circulate at the time. Edwin Thumboo, *Ulysses by the Merlion* (Singapore: Heinemann, 1979), p. 14; Edwin Thumboo, "History, Language, Paradigms, Lacunae?," in *Literature and Liberation: Five Essays from Southeast Asia*, ed. Edwin Thumboo (Manila: Solidaridad, 1988), pp. 132–33.

[217] Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 46.

Asia which has decisively rejected colonialism."[218] Student nationalist agitation was largely limited to the Chinese middle schools and peninsular Malay colleges until after World War II, apart from isolated incidents at Raffles and the Medical College—for instance, medical students resisted instructions to wave from the streets at visiting members of the royal family in 1931, for which six students "were singled out, found, and sacked."[219] Yet UM, like the colleges that had preceded it, was among very few truly *national* entities in Malaya: around one-third of the UM students were from Singapore and the rest from the federation, representing all communities. Campus activities and hostel accommodations were designed to take advantage of this intermingling and facilitate cross-racial interactions.[220] And while the rise of nationalism at Raffles and the Medical College, and then at UM, put the largely British academic and administrative staff in a potentially awkward position, a subset of the staff members was quite progressive and those members supported their students' nationalist aspirations. As Raffles professor Thomas Silcock pointed out, members of the European staff could express their own views freely, but "any common political policy" would be improper. Students, on the other hand, were less constrained: while he agreed that the university should not "propagate either a Malayan consciousness or any other solution of Malaya's problems," Silcock hoped for "plenty of politics among the students, politics full of the natural vehemence and exuberance of young people together ... [and] with a regard for principle and a delight in producing and telling relevant facts."[221]

But approaches to nationalism varied across society. Nationalist sentiment spanned a wide spectrum among different groups of advocates, from anticolonial communists, to proponents of a *Melayu Raya* (Greater Malaya) uniting the ethnic Malays of Southeast Asia, to worriers willing to postpone independence until British tutelage had run its course.[222] More challenging still, a pan-national identity had to be cultivated, to supersede (or at least complement) communal-, subgroup-, or state-level identities. Colonial decentralization (which elevated the Malay aristocracy) and the example of Indonesian nationalism encouraged prewar nation-building: the first Malay political organization began in Singapore in 1926.[223] Students from the Sultan Idris Training College—particularly the fiery Ibrahim Yaacob—came to the fore in the 1930s, launching the anticolonial, Indonesia-inspired Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malay Union, KMM) to press Malays to unite as a nation (*bangsa Melayu*), across ethnic groups, states, and classes. The KMM was the only prewar Malay nationalist organization hostile both to the Malay ruling class and to the British. The group garnered enough support from students, journalists, and others to prompt a

[218] Francis G. Carnell, "Communalism and Communism in Malaya," *Pacific Affairs* 26,2 (1953): 104.

[219] Peter Mayo, A001535/02, reel 2, July 22, 1994.

[220] Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 371–73.

[221] T. H. Silcock, "The University and Progress in Malaya," in *A Symposium on the Carr-Saunders Report on University Education in Malaya*, ed. Lim Tay Boh (Singapore: International Student Service Malaya, [1948]), p. 18.

[222] For instance, PMR 7/1950, July 26, 1950 (orig. 55404/6/50), TNA:PRO CO537/6013.

[223] T. H. Silcock and Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Nationalism in Malaya," in *Asian Nationalism and the West: A Symposium Based on Documents and Reports of the Eleventh Conference, Institute of Pacific Relations*, ed. William L. Holland (New York: MacMillan, 1953), pp. 284–86.

crackdown and the arrest of 150 members in 1940.[224] But by the start of World War II, Malay nationalism remained concentrated among "a small and rather frustrated Malay intelligentsia," educated in the Middle East.[225] During the war, the Japanese encouraged a degree of Malay nationalism and anti-Sinicism to bolster their planned Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.[226] But it was in the immediate postwar years that Malays' "political awakening" largely occurred, under the combined assault of a secular, Malay, and English-educated intellectual and professional class, allied with modernist religious elites intensely critical of the Malay rulers.[227]

These shifting political tides were especially apparent on campus, and not just among Malays. The recent war had piqued students' political consciousness. For instance, Indian-born James Puthucheary served in the anti-British Indian National Army (INA) in Burma, then was further radicalized as a student and INA organizer in India. Feeling out of place, he returned to Malaya to continue his studies.[228] Older than most when he entered Raffles College, and fearless, Puthucheary's bold activism made him a "kind of hero to students."[229] By the time UM was established, nationalism had taken root, even if few acted publicly on these sentiments. As an editorial in the inaugural issue of UM's *Malayan Undergrad* insisted, "All students cherish the desire to see the attainment of ultimate self-government."[230] This locally educated generation was exposed to the pathologies of the colonial order and less deeply steeped in the traditions and system of government they set out to oppose than their UK-trained predecessors had been. Their critiques linked economic, social, and political issues, and ranged from proposing ways to increase women's political awareness and participation[231] to scrutinizing the proceedings underway to secure independence.[232] For instance, members of the University Muslim Society won a formal debate with UMNO's youth wing on whether Malaya was ready for self-

[224] Donna J. Amoroso, "Dangerous Politics and the Malay Nationalist Movement, 1945–47," *South East Asia Research* 6,3 (1988): 256; Cheah Boon Kheng, "The Erosion of Ideological Hegemony and Royal Power and the Rise of Postwar Malay Nationalism, 1945–46," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19,1 (1988): 6–7; Hassan Karim, "The Student Movement in Malaysia, 1967–74," in *With the People! The Malaysian Student Movement 1967–74*, ed. Hassan Karim and Siti Nor Hamid (Petaling Jaya: Institute for Social Analysis [INSAN], 1984), p. 1.

[225] Silcock and Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Nationalism in Malaya," p. 284.

[226] Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004.

[227] Cheah, "The Erosion of Ideological Hegemony," pp. 5–6, 17–19, 24.

[228] J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 1, June 15, 1985; also Dominic Puthucheary, "James Puthucheary, His Friends, and His Time," in *James Puthucheary: No Cowardly Past: Writings, Poems, Commentaries*, ed. Dominic Puthucheary and Jomo K. S. (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 1998), pp. 23–27. Dato Dr. T. Devaraj, part of the large first postwar class at the Medical College, also served in the INA during the war, although he was stationed in Malaya. He, too, decided to remain in Malaya rather than continue the struggle as a doctor in India after graduation (interview with T. Devaraj, March 14, 2006, Putrajaya). And S. S. Gill, who joined the medical faculty in 1950, was likewise stirred by Indian independence, but through a different route: he traveled to India with his father as a teenager in 1947, reaching the Punjab in the midst of the partition. Interview with S. S. Gill, January 28, 2006.

[229] Interview with Mavis Puthucheary, August 14, 2004; Hedwig Anuar, A2036, reel 14, August 18/25, 1998. (Other classmates echoed these sentiments.)

[230] Editorial, *Malayan Undergrad*, January 18, 1950, p. 2.

[231] Elizabeth Choy, "Women's Part in Politics," *Malayan Undergrad*, December 1, 1954, pp. 2–3.

[232] For instance, a reprint of the House of Commons debate on Malayan independence: *Malayan Undergrad*, November 12, 1954, pp. 2, 4.

government in February 1951. The students argued for equality, a common citizenship, and sovereignty; UMNO advocated for a transition to self-government that would take place only after political and economic stability were assured.[233]

Channeling dissent were new organizations that emerged as soon as the war ended. In 1946, the British proposed a Malayan Union uniting all the peninsular states, Penang, and Malacca under a system of centralized, direct rule, with equal citizenship for Malays and non-Malays.[234] The proposal sparked a rash of agitation, especially among Malays: the traditional Malay rulers would cede most real power (advising only on local customs and religious matters) and Malays would likely be outnumbered among the citizens of the Union. The Left, too, opposed the plan as undemocratic and neocolonial. Almost immediately, a phalanx of English-educated Malay bureaucrats and right-wing politicians took charge, upstaging (without intent to depose) the traditional rulers, who had ceded their rights to the British in the recent MacMichael treaties.[235] For the first time, Malays began to assert themselves as a community.[236] Youth and students were key not just to the newly formed UMNO (which Mahathir, having led his schoolmates in Kedah against the Malayan Union plan, joined before entering the Medical College in 1947[237]), but also to more radical groups like the Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (Generation of Aware Youth, API). API drew on Japanese military training, including uniforms and drilling—a sort of "revolutionary militarism" foreign to more established elites.[238] As the debate turned to consider the shape of the new nation-state—who it would include, under what sort of government, and with what defining cultural attributes—emergent communally organized political parties and more-ideologically defined groups recruited avidly among youths.[239]

Among the most notable of these organizations was the Singapore-based Malayan Democratic Union (MDU). One of Malaya's first political parties, the MDU embodied the war's politicization of previously complacent, English-educated, non-Malay professionals. Eleven of its fifteen leaders had a university education, and all spoke English.[240] The MDU decried colonialism, communalism, and the exclusion of Singapore from an independent Malaya. Its December 1945 manifesto called for self-

[233] "Malay Undergrads Win Motion," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 6, 1951, p. 3.

[234] Khong suggests that the British were goaded by a memo from the Malay Students' Society in the UK, which lauded Indonesian nationalism and asserted common cause with Malay peoples of the rest of Southeast Asia. The British felt pressed "to give Malaya a more distinct political identity and the non-Malays a greater stake in the country." Khong, *Merdeka*, pp. 111–12.

[235] Amoroso, "Dangerous Politics," p. 258.

[236] Cheah, "The Erosion of Ideological Hegemony," p. 26.

[237] Mahathir, "The Singapore Years," pp. 42–43C; Khoo, "The Legacy of C. H. E. Det," p. 34.

[238] Amoroso, "Dangerous Politics," pp. 268–70.

[239] Josef Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics: A Preliminary Comparative Inquiry," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1,1 (1970): 12–13.

[240] For instance, member William Kuok Hock Ling (alias Peng Cheng), a graduate of the English College at Johor Bahru and a close friend of James Puthucheary and other UM leftists, edited the MDU's paper, *The Democrat*. He became probably the most important English-speaking member of the MCP before being killed in an ambush in Pahang in 1953. J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 1, June 15, 1985; M. G. G. Pillai, "How Britain Divided the Races During the Malayan Emergency," available online at http://www.mggpillai.com/print.php3?sid=1538, last viewed on January 2, 2007.

government, free elections with universal franchise, civil liberties, reformed and free education, social security, health care for all, and workplace equality. The party also lobbied for a local university. Critical of the Malayan Union plan, the MDU played a leading role in the struggle for a democratic constitution as secretariat for the 400,000-strong All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA), which formed in 1946 to offer a counter-proposal to the constitution then being drafted by UMNO, the Malay rulers, and the existing government.[241]

The MCP may have tried to make use of the MDU, and some members had MCP contacts and sympathies, but the MDU staked out its own positions, diverging at times from the communist party line.[242] When in 1948 the British declared an anticommunist Emergency and banned the MCP, trade union federations, and related organizations, the MDU's leaders dissolved the party in the interest of its members' safety.[243] Until that point, the MDU's message advocating democratic, socialist self-government so appealed to a radical subset of students that the British and moderate locals alike mocked the party "as a Singapore 'school in dialects and grenade-throwing' for the English-educated middle class."[244]

Echoing the MDU, student leaders gave top priority to issues concerned with national unity, from developing a common identity and language to ensuring the rights of non-Malays in a multicultural Malaya.[245] As James Puthucheary explained in 1949, the university "must become the advocate and guardian of the concept of the Malayan Nation and work for the achievement of this ideal."[246] His younger brother, George, elaborated, saying that if "synthesis of the different cultures" proved impossible, Malayans must swear their "undivided loyalty" to the nation-state, choose a national language—most likely Malay—and "start from scratch as far as cultural tradition is concerned."[247] (Malay students tended to agree that Malaya's national and official language ought to be Malay, since it was the native and most common tongue.[248]) The challenge of creating a new nation was modeled on a small scale at UM, an institution "often indiscriminately borrowing from the great historical institutions, but never sure where it is going itself," and beset with "indefinite gestures of faith to our fairy godmothers in the United Kingdom."[249]

Still, student concern with nation-building was well-placed. The gap between Malay ethnic nationalism and Malayan nationalism widened postwar, inflaming

[241] The affiliated PUTERA, formed in February 1947 of predominantly Malay organizations, added another 150,000 members. Pusat Tenaga Ra'ayat (PUTERA) and The All-Malaya Council of Joint Action, *Malaya: People's Constitutional Proposals*, 1947, TNA:PRO CO537/2148; Khong, *Merdeka*, pp. 156–61; Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 349–50; Puthucheary, "James Puthucheary," pp. 4–5; and Silcock and Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Nationalism in Malaya," 304–5.

[242] Silcock and Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Nationalism in Malaya," pp. 306–7.

[243] Yeo, "Joining the Communist Underground," p. 30.

[244] Silcock and Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Nationalism in Malaya," p. 305.

[245] Editorial, *Malayan Undergrad*, January 18, 1950, p. 2.

[246] James Puthucheary, "The University and the Student in Society," in *James Puthucheary: No Cowardly Past*, p. 173.

[247] G. J. [George] Puthucheary, "Building the Malayan Nation," *The Undergrad*, January 24, 1949, p. 3.

[248] Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, "The Case for Malay Language," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, pp. 4–5, 7.

[249] Wang, "Staff-Student Relationship," p. 45.

communal tensions. Matters came to a head in December 1950 with two days of riots in response to a colonial decision to grant custody of a thirteen-year-old girl, Maria Hertogh (aka Nadra binte Ma'arof), raised as a Muslim in Indonesia and Malaya, to her Dutch Catholic biological parents.[250] UM students were relatively little affected by the protests, although some inquisitive students poked about the scene of the outbursts and at least one expatriate lecturer was assaulted.[251]

At UM itself, perceptions of communalism varied. English schools tended to promote ethnic integration, and communalist sentiment was arguably lower on campus than off. Restrictions on communal associations and activities helped,[252] but the change was largely generational: Malayan youth then, and university students in particular, were less attuned than were their parents to ethnic or religious differences.[253] As one student leader of the time describes, "At the university in those days in Singapore, none of us thought of ourselves as Chinese, Malays, or Indians. I was a Malayan."[254] Furthermore, by the mid-1950s, an "anti-yellow culture" movement brought together students, intellectuals, and left-wing political leaders from all communities who were intent on initiating a trans-ethnic multiracialism.[255] Yet student unity retained a certain fragility. Lloyd Fernando's novel *Scorpion Orchid* (1992) set in the heated mid-1950s, captures the vulnerability of even close cross-racial friendships developed in the sheltered Anglophone campus. As one analysis sums up, the protagonists' "artificially imposed colonial education and their growing resistance to its premises are all they have in common, and once they leave the structure of the school, they have essentially outgrown its ability to instruct them."[256]

Particularly for many Malay students, urban, congested, Chinese-dominated Singapore was like nowhere they had ever lived before; these students tended to be the most critical of the status quo. One student complained in 1950 of an anti-Malay bias in student publications and of the need for racial economic parity as a prerequisite for successful self-government.[257] Yet another insisted that communalism "forms the very basis" of student life, notwithstanding the "apparent friendly atmosphere which every undergrad, hypocritically or otherwise, tries to create."[258] He proposed remedies from banning campus religious clubs in favor of ideological ones to reforming primary and secondary education. The debate

[250] Mohamed Ansari s/o Mohd Ali Marican, "The Maria Hertogh Riots, 1950" (BA Honors thesis, University of Singapore, 1973).

[251] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 2, August 12, 1982.

[252] Kanagaratnam, "Corporate Life among Students," p. 8.

[253] J. S. Eapen cites objections to communal student groups at the Dunearn Road Hostels; Kanagaratnam mentions a late-1940s candidate for the position of student-union president who appealed to communal sentiments and lost. J. S. Eapen, "Communalism in the University," in *A Symposium on Student Problems in Malaya*, ed. A. A. Sandosham and T. Visvanathan (Malaya: International Student Service, [1953]), p. 19; and Kanagaratnam, "Corporate Life among Students," p. 8.

[254] Interview with Ronald McCoy, January 17, 2006.

[255] Harper, "Lim Chin Siong," p. 19.

[256] Catherine Diamond, "Maturation and Political Upheaval in Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* and Robert Yeo's *The Singapore Trilogy*," *Comparative Drama* 36,1/2 (2002): 130.

[257] Adi Setiawan, *Malayan Undergrad*, June 23, 1950, p. 4.

[258] Zakaria, "Communalism," p. 20.

continued as independence approached, with recommendations on everything from the national language to interracial marriage[259] peppering student discourse.

Education played a central role in the daunting task of nation-building. The landmark Fenn–Wu committee on Chinese schools pointed out,

> ... to most Chinese in Malaya, "Malayanization" is anathema. In view of the absence of a culture, or even a society, which can as yet be called Malayan, it is interpreted as meaning to make Malay rather than Malayan ... No element can be "Malayanized" for the simple reason that there is no "Malayan" pattern to which to mould it and because such moulding is not produced by fiat.[260]

All the same, student publications and conferences in the late 1940s and 1950s pressed for "Malayanization" as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve the education system. Among the remedies proposed were building more schools to accommodate the rapidly growing population, making basic education free and compulsory, expanding opportunities for higher education (especially for Malays),[261] revising tax laws to make higher education more affordable,[262] emphasizing local content in textbooks, broadening the university curriculum, and, especially, forging a coherent and practical language policy.[263] This last goal sparked a 1956 Kongres Bahasa dan Persuratan Melayu (Congress on Malay Language and Letters)[264] and subsequent cognate events. The status of Malay, the national language since 1948, remained dubious. Author Fernando, a student in the 1950s and later professor at UM, muses in retrospect,

> One of the tragedies of Malaysia before independence was that conditions were never consciously created for encouraging a regard for the Malay language beyond the vulgarly utilitarian ... It is one of the comic ironies of Malaysia that the English language is now being relegated to fulfilling the utilitarian role formerly endured by the Malay language. (Some may see in this a kind of poetic justice.)[265]

The irony cut deeper, though. Recurrent student commentaries lamented the disconnect between students and the nation they were supposed to represent and uphold. For instance, one student noted that that while university graduates were presumed to be "the leaders, the intelligentsia, the vanguard of independent Malaya," in fact they had limited knowledge of "their own vernacular language, literature, music, customs and traditions" and were hardly fit to "blend and distil a Malayan culture rich with the best of the Malay, Chinese, Indian, and European cultures."[266] A classmate of the writer added that English-educated students had been privileged "by virtue of the fact that they were educated in the language of the ruling class," but that this often monolingual pedigree stalled nationalism and stoked hostility between vernacular- and English-educated groups. This author insisted (echoing the 1951 Fenn–Wu report) that Malaya must "devise a way of being all Malayans and yet each community to be its own self," including through bilingual primary and trilingual secondary education.[267] Still, UMSU president Wang Gungwu cautioned against scapegoating education policy, warning, "It is easy to attribute everything that is not going right to the peculiar nature of colonial education and the general feeling of inferiority, real or imaginary, that tends to accompany it."[268]

Most germane to these stirrings was a 1949 proposal to establish a Malayan Students' Party. The party would contest Student Council elections, but was also expected to further Malayan consciousness, culture, and nationalism. It was to be open to all university students, and possibly eventually other tertiary students, who identified with the Malayan nation. Sponsored by former Medical College Union president David Tan Chee Khoon (later "Mr. Opposition" in the Malaysian parliament), GPMS president Aminuddin bin Baki, and the Socialist Club's James Puthucheary and Abdullah Majid, the initiative passed a somewhat reluctant Student Council. The Board of Student Welfare and vice chancellor denied approval, however, concluding that the proposed new organization's useful functions were already provided by other student organizations, and the new party was too likely to engage in national-level political activity or turn communal.[269] Students countered that they *should* engage in and inspire "activity within and without" the university, and that the party aimed specifically to undercut communalism.[270]

General elections in Singapore and Malaya in the 1950s further fueled anticolonialism. A *Malayan Undergrad* editorial in the wake of the 1955 polls defiantly

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[259] Kernial Singh, "Communalism: The Threat to Malayan Unity," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 15, 1958, p. 5.

[260] Fenn and Wu, "Chinese Schools," pp. 4–5.

[261] The Federation awarded state and federal government scholarships to Malays at a rate of three-to-one. The ratio of "academically suited" Malay to non-Malay candidates was about one-to-twelve, though, since more urban, prosperous Chinese had easier access to secondary education relative to Malays. Silcock and Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Nationalism in Malaya," p. 329. Some students supported quotas as at least a short-term fix—for examples, see letters in *Malayan Undergrad* from Azzam (*Malayan Undergrad*, February 9, 1950) or Mahthir [*sic*] Mohamad ("Abolition Too Soon," *Malayan Undergrad*, February 5, 1951, p. 6). Other students proposed need-based awards, lest only the Malay middle class benefit (see James Puthucheary, "Scholarships—Social & National Functions," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 17, 1950, p. 5), while UMSU called for admission and scholarships "based solely on academic merit." See "UMSU Memorandum Requests Constitutional Safeguards," *Malayan Undergrad*, June 1958, p. 1.

[262] "Interim Committee Hits at Income Tax Laws," *Malayan Undergrad*, December 1, 1954, p. 1.

[263] For instance, see G. J. Puthucheary, "Building the Malayan Nation," *The Undergrad*, January 24, 1949, p. 3; "'Orchid' Supports Malayanisation of Education System," *The Undergrad*, February 12, 1949, p. 3; Dali, "Preference and Progress," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 24, 1950, p. 5; and "Role of Graduates," *Malayan Undergrad*, February 5, 1951, p. 1.

[264] "The Malayan National Language," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 29, 1956, p. 3.

[265] Lloyd Fernando, *Cultures in Conflict: Essays on Literature and the English Language in South East Asia* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1986), pp. 86–87.

[266] R. D. Naidu, "The Hollow Bourgeoisie," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 29, 1956, p. 6.

[267] A. Mahendran, "A Blue Print for Education," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 27, 1957, p. 6.

[268] Wang, "Staff-Student Relationship," p. 42.

[269] "Malayan Students Party 'Should be Allowed to Exist,'" *Malayan Undergrad*, January 18, 1950, pp. 1, 4; "Malayan Students Party Not Approved," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 5, 1950, pp. 1, 5; K. Kanagaratnam, "Political Clubs in the University Should be Non-Communal Non-Sectarian," *Malayan Undergrad* Souvenir Issue (supplement, December 13, 1952), p. 10; also Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 5–7; and Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 359.

[270] G. J. P. [presumably George Puthucheary], "Malayan Students' Party Not Allowed," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 6, 1951, p. 7.

proposed that, despite the stifling Emergency Regulations, the politically aware broader public would radicalize the campus:

> The rise of this militant nationalism in Malaya will doubtless have its effects on the University. First, we may expect greater political consciousness, both nationalist and left wing in character, to develop ... Secondly, there should be a defiant change in attitudes on the Staff side of the University as Malayan freedom approaches. The compliant Asian may become less pliable and the expatriate "old guard" may decide to retire. We shall not miss them, if they cannot adapt to changing conditions. The student body would be in a better position regarding student rights. These are welcome changes which will convert a British Colonial University, practically the educational agency of a foreign government, into one that is truly Malayan in character.[271]

The UM Student Council officially dissociated itself from the editorial, declaring that it was too politically biased for an official UMSU publication and "gave a wrong impression to the public." Subsequent changes in UMSU's Publication Policy proscribed editorials on "any matter of a political or religious nature."[272] Yet given the prevailing political climate, this contest would not be the last.

THE RISE OF THE STUDENT LEFT

> We must as students be progressive; we must be in the forefront in the betterment of our country. Colonialism is a sign of our backwardness; it is a spike to us. We must therefore cast off our apathy—shake off our inertia.[273]

The challenge nationalism posed to colonial mercantilist capitalism fed an accelerating left-wing drift across the Malayan student body from the 1930s through the early 1970s. Nearly all activist students leaned left when they first became politically involved, although UMSU itself listed "rather right of center."[274] The cautious right-wing—exemplified by a group led by medical students Tan Joo Liang and Wong Poi Kwong that published the cyclostyled *The Lark*—was in the minority.[275] Communist infiltration was minimal; indeed, argues one former student radical, the MCP had "a very contemptuous view of the English educated," and "would not accept any one of us as members."[276] While more moderate overall than much of the Chinese-educated Left, Anglophone intellectuals were arguably ultimately more influential than Chinese speakers, starting in their undergraduate days.

Even future prime minister Lee Kuan Yew's politics at the time were famously ambiguous. He had connections both with the MCP's Singapore Town Council and, it seems, with the British Special Branch. He stated outright in a May 1955 *Straits*

[271] "Elections and the University," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 6, 1955, p. 2.

[272] "Dissociation and Regret," *Malayan Undergrad*, June 8, 1955, p. 2.

[273] Editorial, *Malayan Undergrad*, February 9, 1950, p. 2.

[274] Ronald Stephen McCoy, oral history, A1538, reel 2, July 23, 1994, NAS, OHC; also interview with Musa Hitam, December 6, 2004, and interview with Ronald McCoy, January 17, 2006.

[275] Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 348–49.

[276] Interview with Dominic Puthucheary, January 27, 2006.

Times interview, "Any man in Singapore who wants to carry the Chinese-speaking people with him cannot afford to be anti-Communist ... If I had to choose between Colonialism and Communism, I would vote for Communism, and so would the great majority of the people."[277] Yet the socialism of even comparatively leftist UM students postwar was akin to that of the British Labour Party. A Socialist Club member explains that his peer group absorbed an "incredible mix of Marxism and Fabian Socialism, the writings of Mao and the words of the American Declaration of Independence," although their primary referent was "British radicalism."[278] Colonial authorities did detain UM students on occasion, not least for deterrent effect, but most "real communists" were deported or escaped to the jungle.[279] Nantah presents a different case. The Nanyang University Student Union (NUSU) was widely perceived to have succumbed completely to communist dictates. Yet even there, the communist bogey was likely exaggerated, given the politics of the time, for during this period the new PAP government tried a number of tactics to discredit its largely Chinese-educated challengers. We return to this story in the next chapter, but the ground was laid in the mid-1950s for the showdown of the early 1960s.

UM's left wing was disproportionately literary in inclination. Edwin Thumboo, now among Singapore's most distinguished poets, speaks of the clutch of university leftists of the mid-1950s as "kindred spirits who used to spend time together and talk about common problems of writing poetry," although some of the more senior students "had a greater sense of socialist doctrine."[280] James Puthucheary penned works while in detention at Changi Prison, for instance.[281] Several students published volumes of poetry—among Singapore's first in English—while still undergraduates: Wang Gungwu's *Pulse* in 1950, Lim Thean Soo's *Selected Verses* in 1951 and *Poems 1951-1953* in 1953, and Edwin Thumboo's *Rib of Earth* in 1956. Trying not merely to emulate English literary models, students rose to the challenge of "expressing a post-colonial consciousness in the language of colonialism."[282] Steeped in debates on language and nation-building, these authors were keenly aware of the shortfalls of an intelligentsia-led culture and of the Western elements mixed in a Malayan identity.[283] To compensate, and to circumvent imitation of Western classics, students experimented (rather fruitlessly) with a new idiom, Engmalchin, a hybrid of English, Malay, and Chinese—essentially "a reproduction of the oral language of one of the first truly multicultural ethnic groups in the region," the *peranakan* or Straits Chinese, into which category many of the "literary intellectuals" of the period fell.[284] More

[277] Quoted in Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, p. 105.

[278] Rajakumar, "Lim Chin Siong's Place," p. 99.

[279] Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004.

[280] Quoted in Ronald D. Klein, "Edwin Thumboo," in *Interlogue: Studies in Singapore Literature, Volume 4: Interviews*, ed. Ronald D. Klein (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2002), pp. 62–63.

[281] For instance, published in *Malayan Undergrad*, May 24, 1951.

[282] Anne Brewster, *Towards a Semiotic of Post-Colonial Discourse: University Writing in Singapore and Malaysia 1949–1965* (Singapore: Heinemann Asia Centre for Advanced Studies, National University of Singapore, 1989), p. 15.

[283] Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 297–98; Koh Tai Ann, "Singapore Writing in English: The Literary Tradition and Cultural Identity," in *Essays on Literature and Society in Southeast Asia: Political and Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Tham Seong Chee (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981), pp. 162–63.

[284] Brewster, *Towards a Semiotic of Post-Colonial Discourse*, pp. 3, 6; also Koh, "Singapore Writing in English," p. 161.

successful was the blending of English and Malay terms and syntax in a distinctive "Singapore-English."[285] Moreover, student publications such as the *New Cauldron* included pieces in English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil, and articulated a specific role for artistic production in the cultural development of a young nation that lacked a common tradition, language, or widespread literacy.[286] In the process, "university verse" developed as a distinctive and lively Malayan literary genre.[287]

Outside the campus, the anticommunist Emergency (1948–60) was a period of literary revival in Singapore, marked by the publication of socially conscious poems and short stories and the proliferation of "pen-friends" associations.[288] Aided by radical journalists like A. Samad Ismail, then assistant editor of the newspaper *Utusan Melayu*, cultural critics united to undermine the British policy of segregating the Malay bureaucratic elite from the masses with a program of "Art for Society." Starting in the late 1940s, *Utusan Melayu*'s offices in Singapore "became the centre for all kinds of visitor—politicians, cultural and literary figures, and also student activists."[289] Those encounters helped UM become "the mouthpiece of an ascendant Malay nationalism at a time when Malay journalists and writers were catalysts of change and reform in Malay society,"[290] and when Malay radicalism, strong enough postwar to worry the British, was being suppressed on the peninsula. A number of leaders of the Malay Left, such as the leaders of SABERKAS (Syarikat Bekerjasama Am Saiburi, General Co-operative Society of Saiburi) or the Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM, Malay Nationalist Party), were themselves English-educated, and the head of the Kesatuan Melayu Johor (Johor Malay Union), launched in 1945, was a Medical College graduate.[291] Samad Ismail and his coterie not only attended campus functions, especially of the Malay Language Society (Persatuan Bahasa Melayu Universiti Malaya, established following the launch of UM's Malay Studies Department in 1953, and with close ties to *Utusan Melayu* and Malay

[285] The contemporary equivalent would be "Singlish" or "Manglish" in Singapore and Malaysia, respectively. Wang was among the first to use a "slightly modified" English, inserting vernacular terms in nearly every poem, in a style other young poets soon emulated. Brewster, *Towards a Semiotic of Post-Colonial Discourse*, pp. 4–7, 9.

[286] "The Creative Artist in Malaya," *The New Cauldron* (Michaelmas Term, 1956), pp. 1–3.

[287] Richard Chia Eng Liang and Robert Yeo Cheng Chuan, "University Verse, 1949–1959," in *Report of Malayan Writers' Conference Singapore* (March 16–18, 1962), pp. 192, 199.

[288] Harper, *The End of Empire*, pp. 301–2; Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origins and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1985), pp. 63–64.

[289] Usman Awang (Tongkat Warrant), "Leader of Malay Literary Movement," in *A. Samad Ismail: Journalism and Politics*, ed. Cheah Boon Kheng (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan, 2000), pp. 49–50; Harper, *The End of Empire*, p. 304.

[290] A. Samad Ismail, "Our James," in *James Puthucheary: No Cowardly Past*, p. 55.

[291] Khoo Kay Kim, *Malay Society: Transformation and Democratisation* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1991), pp. 247–49.

organizations[292]), but also met left-wing students socially, for instance, over dinner at his home.[293]

The extent to which UM had become a significant part of the nation's political fabric grew clear as parties and elections took shape. The Progressive Party was founded in 1947 "to protect the political and business interests of British subjects in Singapore," both Chinese and European. Three Indian trade unionists formed the Labour Party the following year, on the model of its British namesake.[294] A number of students joined each of these organizations, as well as the Malayan Democratic Union, in the early postwar years. In 1949, two Medical College students even proposed a candidate for the first municipal elections.[295] Several years later, UM students helped to form the left-wing, anticolonial PAP. Indeed, while the original "moving spirits" behind the PAP were the attorney Lee Kuan Yew and other "young intelligent anti-colonial dissidents who had learned some socialist ideas during periods of education in the United Kingdom," Lee's legal defense of Socialist Club and Chinese middle school students in 1954 (discussed below) presented him "with splendid anti-government and anti-Progressive Party notoriety, and a mass support which was very highly organised if not always easy to manage."[296] Before taking the students' cases, Lee had cachet among English-educated leftists, for as a junior partner at the law firm Laycock and Ong he had represented clients like Samad Ismail and used workers' grievances to highlight pathologies of the "bullying" colonial regime. But he lacked a mass base.[297] After the 1954 trials, leftist students from UM and the "unruly Chinese Middle Schools" alike were ardent supporters of Lee and his party: around two thousand Chinese school students attended a March 1955 election meeting, students distributed campaign posters, and the Socialist Club hawked copies of *Fajar* at PAP rallies.[298]

It was during those 1955 elections that undergraduates first took part in formal politics on a large scale. The Left overall fared well. The situation seemed so dire that one US official mused (apologizing for sounding "alarmist"): "My personal opinion is that Singapore is probably already lost and little can be done to save it from Communist domination in the near future. If this should occur the effect will, of

[292] Its journal, *Bahasa* (Language), debuted the diphthongs *ng* and *ny*, on the heels of literary group ASAS 50's orthographic innovations. The club also convened a grand Kongres Bahasa dan Kesusasteraan Melayu (Malay Language and Literature Conference) in September 1956, which proposed the soon-established Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Institute of Language and Literature). Abdullah Majid, in "Universiti Malaya: The Early Years," *New Straits Times*, October 6, 1999, p. 5; S. Husin Ali, "A Genuine Nationalist," in *A. Samad Ismail: Journalism and Politics*, ed. Cheah Boon Kheng (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan, 2000), pp. 76–77.

[293] Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006. Samad and the papers he then led, *Berita Harian* and *Berita Minggu*, rekindled their influence in the late 1960s, advocating for the establishment of a new National University. See S. Husin Ali, "A Genuine Nationalist," pp. 79–80

[294] Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Beliefs Behind the Man* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000), p. 19.

[295] Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities," p. 15.

[296] Supplement No. 1 to Singapore P.I.J. 1955 (published with issue No. 4), People's Action Party (orig. FED 62/63/01), TNA:PRO CO1030/316, p. 44.

[297] Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, pp. 48–49; Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, pp. 20–21.

[298] Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, pp. 45–53.

course, be explosive in Malaya and all over Southeast Asia."[299] David Marshall's Labour Front (a spin-off from the earlier Labour Party) won a plurality of seats. The British may have helped to orchestrate that victory once their hopes sank for a Progressive Party win, to fend off the farther-left PAP.[300] Marshall, "a Sephardic Jew who played politics as if it were an Italian opera," lasted only a short while in office, resigning after failed constitutional talks in London; the more moderate Lim Yew Hock succeeded him as chief minister in 1957.[301] Around forty students campaigned for the PAP and its candidates, and a handful helped the Labour Front. Socialist students in particular were skeptical of the Labour Front's anticolonialism and the background of some of its leaders, such as Marshall, whom they judged to be limited by his upper-middle-class background, the "narrowness of his political perspective," and the "flamboyance of his personality."[302] Few supported the conservative Progressive Party or Chinese-communal Democratic Party. Working alongside thousands of Chinese middle-school students, undergraduate volunteers devoted their two-week holiday to organizing rallies and meetings, speaking on corners, canvassing house-to-house, and serving as polling agents.[303] Several academic staff members participated, as well, including a part-time UM lecturer in geography who lost badly to Lee Kuan Yew.[304]

Students remained vigilant beyond the polls. For instance, after the Alliance's landslide in the 1955 federation elections, the Socialist Club called upon it to recognize the MCP and end the Emergency. The appeal was fruitless. Quipped a then-student, addressing Tunku Abdul Rahman, the coalition's "avuncular" but autocratic leader, "modernisation was feudalism with electricity."[305] The club similarly condemned Singapore's Labour government for reintroducing Emergency Regulations—a core election issue—in the form of the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance that October,[306] and *Malayan Undergrad* surveyed parties' views of the enactment in 1956.[307] While the students' political involvement "attracted the attention of the State in a not too desirable manner," students nevertheless enjoyed a degree of latitude.[308]

What makes that forbearance all the more notable is what had come just before. While relations were usually cordial, tensions periodically surfaced between

[299] Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs (Young) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson), February 17, 1956, Department of State, Central Files, 746F.00/2-1756, in Glennon, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States*, p. 765.

[300] James Low, "Kept in Position: The Labour Front—Alliance Government of Chief Minister David Marshall in Singapore, April 1955—June 1956," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35,1 (2004): 45–46.

[301] Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 85; also C. Paul Bradley, "Leftist Fissures in Singapore Politics," *Western Political Quarterly* 18,2, Pt. 1 (1965): 295.

[302] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reels 9–10, August 31, 1982/10 August 1983; also Rajakumar, "Lim Chin Siong's Place," p. 105.

[303] J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reels 2–3, June 15, 1985; Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 10, August 10, 1983.

[304] "Students in Politics," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 6, 1955, p. 1.

[305] Rajakumar, "Lim Chin Siong's Place," p. 108.

[306] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 29–31.

[307] "The Public Security Bill," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 10, 1956, pp. 4–5.

[308] Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities," pp. 15–16.

students and colonial authorities. A *Malayan Undergrad* editorial alleged in 1953, for instance: "It seems clear to us that little short of a cold war exists between the 'Authorities' and the students' Union." According to the writer, it was up to UMSU to unite the students for democracy and against "the evil of paternalism" in order to safeguard the students' rights.[309] These serious, public contests magnified the salience of student activism. Punctuating the early postwar period were two high-profile legal cases involving university students, which took place against the backdrop of grave, ongoing unrest in the Chinese schools.

THE "UNIVERSITY CASE"

The "University Case" of January 1951 threw into relief the links between nationalism and "the Left," and showed that even relatively few university students loomed large in both. Colonial officials identified an English-speaking Anti-British League (ABL) cell at UM. They detained thirty-three alleged members, the majority of them "intelligent young men," "well Straits born and from wealthy upper-class families." Fourteen were employed or enrolled at UM. Of the students, most were from the medical faculty, and three were on the Student Council.[310] According to the government, the students' radicalism was evidenced by their "active discussion of Malayan citizenship and self-government," "anti-staff attitude," support for the Malayan Students' Party initiative and for UMSU as "the bulwark of a united student movement in Malaya," sympathy for a teachers' strike, and "desire for closer contacts with student movements particularly in India, China, and Indonesia, in all three of which countries Communist influence over students is strong."[311] The Colonial Office in London explained that the individuals involved "were in fact an active cell of the Malayan Communist Party and ... were directly responsible for propaganda which was not only 'anti-imperialistic' in tone but definitely subversive and inciting to violence."[312] The last of the detainees, *Utusan Melayu*'s A. Samad Ismail and schoolteacher C. V. Devan Nair (later the president of Singapore), were freed only in April 1953; two others opted for exile to China.[313] The case cast a pall over UM and marked a low point in the anticommunist frenzy that cost Malaya "at least one whole generation of very clever and talented people."[314]

The English-speaking ABL, formed in 1948, attracted some of the same individuals who were at least suspected of having been active in the MDU. Its establishment was part of a change in strategy for the MCP's Singapore Town Council, which had been driven underground by the Emergency and police actions.[315] Although they were for the most part neither communists nor prepared to

[309] "Students and Politics," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 20, 1953, p. 2.

[310] PMR 7/1950, July 26, 1950 (orig. 55404/6/50), TNA:PRO CO537/6013; telegram no. 29, from F. Gimson, Singapore, to Secretary of State for the Colonies (SS), London, January 11, 1951; and telegram no. 104, from F. Gimson, Singapore, to SS, London, February 5, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7. The detainees included Lim Hong Bee's wife, Dr. Chua Soo Cheng.

[311] PMR 7/1950, July 26, 1950 (orig. 55404/6/50), TNA:PRO CO537/6013.

[312] Minutes by J. D. Higham, July 9, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

[313] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," p. 10.

[314] Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006.

[315] Yeo, "Joining the Communist Underground"; Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 35.

accept a strict party line, the English-educated leftists in the MDU considered the MCP and other groups to be allies in a struggle for independence, which was, in turn, perceived as part of a larger, postwar Asian revolution.[316] Harper has pointed out that, since the 1940s, while leftists and communists did form two distinct camps, "the radical Left and the communists ... shared a political language, an internationalist vision, a growing standardisation of activity that stemmed from a keen sense of co-proximity."[317] Shortly before the MDU dissolved itself in June 1948, fearing an imminent government crackdown, several members began meeting in study groups to learn more about Marxism. A few, starting with top Raffles College student Eu Chooi Yip (who later spent twenty-five years in exile in China) and at least one medical student, Lim Chan Yong, apparently came to embrace communism.[318] These were the "pioneer leaders" of, first, the English-speaking ABL, and then the English-speaking branch of the MCP. By 1949, they had been joined by fourteen undergraduates, primarily from the medical faculty, and specifically, from the *Malayan Orchid* group. Indeed, the *Orchid* was their primary organ, although the ABL's (banned) English-language publication was the *Freedom News*, edited by John Eber. The most active participants were medical students Low Wah Lian and Yap Kon Puck, dental student Ong Cheng Piaw, and arts student James Puthucheary.[319] Although the English-speaking members constituted only a small component of the ABL's two thousand members as of mid-1950, they were deeply committed to Malayan unity and independence, contributed "superior intellect, education, and expertise," and made inroads among an enthusiastic minority of UM students. The English-speaking ABL cell at UM was the only one in Singapore, although the MCP had others outside, drawing particularly on former MDU members' organizations.[320]

From 1949 to 1951, explains historian Yeo Kim Wah, these "radicals turned revolutionaries" pursued clandestine political activities at UM: producing and disseminating communist propaganda, collecting donations for the MCP, recruiting new members to the ABL, and generally working to foment communist revolution, while also staying involved in "open and legitimate" university activities.[321] This "leftwing caucus" first gained a foothold on campus in 1948, when James Puthucheary and Tan Seng Lock won seats in the Raffles College Union and Joseph Tan was elected one of the leaders in the Medical College Union. The group reached the peak of its influence the next year, when Puthucheary was elected general secretary of the new UMSU, with Abdullah Majid as sports secretary, and Tan Seng Lock and Low Wah Lian on the Student Council. Yet "there is no evidence to demonstrate that the student radicals had ever attempted to commit the UMSU to a militant leftwing or ABL ideology"; their goal in UMSU was just to raise anticolonial political awareness.[322]

[316] Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, p. 94; Yeo, "Joining the Communist Underground," pp. 35, 37, 49–50.

[317] Harper, "Lim Chin Siong," p. 24.

[318] Leong Weng Kam, "More on the Communist Underground in Singapore," *Straits Times*, October 30, 2006, p. 20; and Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, pp. 95–96.

[319] Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 24.

[320] Yeo, "Joining the Communist Underground," pp. 35–49.

[321] Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 347.

[322] Ibid., pp. 355–56.

Even Ahmad Khan, a police officer at the time and later superintendent of police, scoffed, "I don't think a man like James Puthucheary, a man who is very fond of high life, good food, good clothes, fun, drinks, can be a suitable target for [the] Communist Party to recruit." Ahmad Khan was no more concerned by Puthucheary's "more serious" fellow detainee, Woodhull.[323] David Marshall was even more dismissive: "Puthucheary was an amoral gentleman in my view, who was excited by participation with fellow students in jousting the great British lion from a safe distance ... He has no commitment of any basic kind to any ideology."[324] Indeed, Puthucheary called himself "a maverick" who "didn't understand why the proletariat was the only center of wisdom."[325] He confessed to a journalist that he had wanted to be a communist until he realized that "there was so much thought control by very inferior people; it was something I could not accept—that is probably the most modest way of putting it."[326]

Specific reasons for the ABL group's arrest in January 1951 are hazy. One account indicates that it was an ABL pamphlet condemning the difference in European and Asian civil servants' salaries and benefits, distributed among the Asians, that alerted authorities to the group and led the Special Branch to pounce.[327] A more sensational version suggests a "lady member of the committee" had arranged for a UM chemistry lab assistant and a Singapore Trade School instructor "to rig up a few 'fire bombs' for them in order to give them some experience of the practical side of national liberation." According to this story, the police got wind of the plan and arrested both teachers, along with a clutch of students, after raids on two university hostels turned up "evidence of membership of a disciplined revolutionary body."[328] And copies of ABL publications sent by post and intercepted by the Special Branch may have figured in either scenario.[329] Regardless, the best available case for the prosecution was built on possession of seditious publications (this charge could be brought against only five of the detainees), with a maximum sentence of one year's imprisonment. The authorities feared prosecution and sentencing along these lines would be a "damp squib," given the "youth, background, absence of any criminal record, and ... status as undergraduates" of several defendants, while failure to secure a conviction "would have disastrous effect on the morale of the public."[330] At the same time, the case brought up larger concerns, as "repressive measures against 'intellectual' leaders of this type are bound to give rise to suspicions, however unjustified, that the Government is taking advantage of its powers to suppress true liberty of speech and thought."[331]

[323] Ahmad Khan, oral history, A000150/13, reel 10, February 15, 1984, NAS, OHC.

[324] David Marshall, oral history, A000156, reel 5, September 24, 1984, NAS, OHC.

[325] J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 2, June 15, 1985.

[326] Quoted in Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 40.

[327] Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 365; Puthucheary, "James Puthucheary," pp. 4–10; Michael Fernandez, "Puthucheary—A Brilliant Man Who Was Also a Radical," *New Straits Times*, April 29, 2000, p. 13.

[328] Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 37.

[329] Ibid., pp. 37–38; Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 365.

[330] Telegram no. 514, from F. Gimson, Singapore, to SS, London, June 29, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

[331] Telegram no. 699, from SS, London, to F. Gimson, Singapore, July 13, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

Medical students Lim Chan Yong and Joseph Tan were arrested first; within a week, and on the eve of their school examinations (for which they sat in Assistant Superintendent of Police R. B. Corridon's quarters), the entire ABL group had been corralled.[332] All were dispatched without trial to St. John's Island, a few miles south of Singapore. The students continued their studies there—Devan Nair taught English literature, for instance, and P. V. Sharma lectured on ideology and organized language lessons—but this was mostly a "ritualistic" effort. Readily able to get Marxist literature from the university library through either classmates[333] or officer Corridon, the detainees caught up on their reading.[334] They came to blows—literally and figuratively—over ideology and praxis, debating questions such as whether compromising with the authorities was justified in order to get out and continue their work.[335]

This case made clear both that "intellectual" activists were popularly viewed in a different light than those from unions or even Chinese schools, and that the state deemed the former the "most dangerous of all the Communists in Singapore."[336] In colonial Malaya, as elsewhere, this one category of protesters could claim a right to speak truth to power. They were not the ordinary sort of rabble-rousers, nor could their radicalism be dismissed as, for instance, a quirk of the Chinese character.[337] Detainee John Eber, for example, was "the son of a respected Eurasian family," educated at Harrow and Cambridge, and an apparent "social snob," radicalized by his frustration at facing "all kinds of subtle discriminations against him" in Singapore. If deported, he was likely to raise just as much havoc among Malayan students in England as at home. Indeed, when Eber returned (permanently) to London two years after his release, he did just that, joining Lim Hong Bee and others in the Malayan Forum; a decade later, the UM Socialist Club still maintained informal links with Eber's Movement for Colonial Freedom.[338] Mused one colonial official, "The rehabilitation camp at Taiping [to which run-of-the-mill communists were sent] is clearly unsuitable for men of this intellectual caliber and indeed any deliberate attempt to change their way of thought would probably succeed only in deepening their communist convictions."[339] On the other hand, ASP Corridon's intensive personal efforts were credited with "literally rescuing twenty-one persons ... from the clutches of Communism," thus fostering a "basis of trust which should prove invaluable in the future as an insurance against subversion in the University and the Teachers' community."[340] Lamented one local legislator, "The public, as a rule, does not waste any time or thought on thugs, but ... these recent arrests have caused a good deal of uneasiness."[341]

The Student Council insisted that UMSU must "not support those members proved to have complicity with illegal outside bodies."[342] But despite the vice chancellor's assurances of the detainees' guilt, UMSU found the evidence unconvincing, noting, "infallibility is not [the police's] special quality."[343] Although the union declined to take any official stand on legal aid, it joined individual students in offering material support.[344] Several visited the detainees at St. John's Island. Those visits, and the realization of "the ease with which the government could invade the premises of our university,"[345] proved a politicizing "turning point" for many of them.[346] "Just because the students are loyal to their friends who have been detained, and the University tolerant of free discussions on political subjects, there is no cause for hysteria," assured the editors of *Malayan Undergrad*, worried about impressions that UM was harboring a bunch of communists, rather than just students "very conscious of their responsibilities to the country of which they are proud to be the future citizens."[347] After four months, UMSU both lodged a protest with the colonial secretary, objecting to the continued detention of six students held without trial,[348] and agreed to send a pair of observers to the Singapore Teachers' Union Citizens' Rights Committee after two detained students alleged ill-treatment by police.[349]

Ultimately, while the British made a deterrent example of these students, their careers were hardly cut short. After a year and a half, all were released back to their studies; Abdullah Majid even retained his Federation Government scholarship for

[332] F. C. Gimson, Governor, Singapore, to James Griffiths, Secretary of State for the Colonies, London, September 10, 1951 (Despatch no. 180), TNA:PRO CO717/202/7; and (more colorfully) J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 1, June 15, 1985.

[333] Hedwig Anuar, A2036, reel 14, August 18/25, 1998.

[334] J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reel 2, June 15, 1985; and Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 39. Later detainees likewise honed their Marxist knowledge in prison—for instance, Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 11, May 25, 1981.

[335] J. J. Puthucheary, A000570, reels 1–2, June 15, 1985; and Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, pp. 39–40.

[336] Savingram no. 1207, from Governor Gimson of Singapore, to SS, London, August 24, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

[337] A US Information Agency (USIA) report describes the prevailing assumption: "In addition to the deceptive attractions of communism itself, young Chinese are more easily conditioned to accept propaganda extolling the virtues and achievements of the Communist Party of China, the home of their ancestors." USIA, Office of Research and Analysis, 1959, *The Communist Threat to Malaya*, Records of the US Information Agency, Special Reports, 1953–82, RG 306, SREPS-1959S(41), NA II, p. 9; also, minutes by J. R. Williams, July 17, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

[338] Minutes by J. D. Higham, July 9, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7; letter from F. Gimson, Singapore, to John D. Higham, London, July 12, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7; TNA:PRO CO1022/196, especially "The Malayan Forum"; and Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 11, May 25, 1981.

[339] Minutes by J. D. Higham, July 9, 1951.

[340] Letter no. 180, from F. C. Gimson, Singapore, to SS, September 10, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

[341] Remarks by C. C. Tan, extract from Colony of Singapore Proceedings of Legislative Council, February 16, 1951; also telegram no. 699, from SS, London, to F. Gimson, Singapore, July 13, 1951, TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

[342] Editorial, *Malayan Undergrad*, February 5, 1951, p. 2

[343] Ibid.

[344] *Malayan Undergrad*, February 5, 1951, pp. 1–2; "Detained Students Not Forgotten," *Malayan Undergrad*, February 1, 1952, p. 1; "Arrests in Singapore," *The Times* (London), January 9, 1951. Allegations of police "inconsistency" and distortion of facts continued; see, for instance, "Police Inconsistent," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 25, 1951, p. 1.

[345] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 3, August 12, 1982.

[346] Interview with Hedwig Anuar, July 13, 2005; and Hedwig Anuar A1717, reel 3, November 28, 1995; A2036, reel 14, August 18/25, 1998.

[347] "Emergency and the University," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 6, 1951, p. 4.

[348] "Council to Protest against Students' Detention," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 9, 1951, p. 1. Two other students had been released in March.

[349] "Council Rejects Citizens' Rights Committee," *Malayan Undergrad*, February 25, 1952, p. 1.

another year, before going on to work at Singapore's troublesome Chung Cheng High School in May 1954.[350] The arrests ushered in "a long period now of most unnatural inactivity" for the ABL[351] and made students wonder if they "gambled with [their] life" in being politically active.[352]

THE *FAJAR* TRIAL AND NATIONAL SERVICE PROTESTS

These fears resurfaced a few years later, but with a more reassuring conclusion. The English-language journal of the Socialist Club, *Fajar*, had become "the intellectual forum of the Left and the anti-colonial movement."[353] Its circulation on campus was on par with *Malayan Undergrad*'s: a few hundred.[354] *Fajar* was also available from news vendors, bringing total circulation probably to around a thousand.[355] The articles—written mostly by members of the editorial board—were largely socialist and anticolonial in theme.[356] At the time, in the mid-1950s, there were a number of left-wing magazines on campus, some of them banned, but surreptitiously distributed among students.[357] (For instance, in May 1954, a "large quantity of crudely cyclostyled pamphlets" protesting against a recent national service bill, attributed to the ABL and "full of the usual stock of Communist phrases," appeared in UM buildings.[358]) *Fajar* was produced and distributed openly, and colonial authorities had no complaints with the magazine until its tone started to shift in early 1954, with the reorganization of the Working Committee and editorial board. At that point, *Fajar* came to seem "an excellent vehicle for fellow travelers."[359]

In early 1954, days after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, eight members of *Fajar*'s editorial board—E. P. Arudsathy, Kwa Boo Sun, Lam Khuan Kit, Poh Soo Kai, James Puthucheary, M. K. Rajakumar, Edwin Thumboo, and Thomas Varkey—were arrested for sedition in connection with an article published in Issue 7 (May 10, 1954) of *Fajar*, entitled "Aggression in Asia." Drafted by Rajakumar and revised by Puthucheary,[360] the article condemned the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the implications of continued Western imperialism (i.e., in Indochina) for political development in Malaya and the region. Somewhat perversely, that issue suggests just how much leeway the students were allowed. Other articles in the same issue discuss local left-wing parties, international socialism, a seamen's strike, Indonesian nationalism, the limits to debate in the university, and a new national service policy. But the war in Vietnam was the key issue: leftist students saw it as a "straight colonial war," while the British, panicked at the specter of communist invasion, ordered conscription in Singapore.[361] As for the article, although "not in itself very inflammatory," the fact that copies had been found in a Chinese high school led authorities to believe, without any proof, that the Socialist Club had helped to organize demonstrations against national service requirements.[362] Next, Puthucheary wrote an editorial critiquing both police behavior in those recent demonstrations and the notion of conscription in a British colony—and then the students were arrested.[363] The trial, however, focused mainly on the article "Aggression in Asia."

The police raided the students' residences in the wee hours of the morning on May 28, in the midst of final exams. They searched other members' rooms, as well—"apparently just to terrorize the whole Socialist Club membership"—and confiscated all materials relating to the club and *Fajar*. The detainees were brought before a magistrate and charged with sedition. They pleaded not guilty, then Vice Chancellor Caine bailed them out.[364] While they knew the authorities might take action eventually, the students had not been expecting the arrests. As one describes, some articles in *Fajar* "were thought subversive, anti-British, but nothing particularly savaging."[365] British poet and visiting lecturer Eric Mottram was more blunt:

> For a democracy, or an intended one, to attack a publication by an undergraduate body, would, [*sic*] be an aberration from its principles, since it prejudices the freedom of criticism among the younger men and women upon whom its future depends ... In any case, interference with student opinion is generally slightly ridiculous ... Supposing a student political journal were to make an outrageous statement about some government policy: it would be fundamentally shortsighted, if not stupid, to arrest its editors.[366]

Even the officer who arrested them considered the students' writings, "new things, strange activities, I should say for the Colonial rulers. But it was considered to be a normal political activity in any other country." He worried the students' martyrdom

[350] Director of Intelligence, Federation of Malaya, Monthly Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya, August 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/7.

[351] PMR 4/51 (orig. 55404/6/51), TNA:PRO CO717/202/7.

[352] Peter Mayo, A001535/02, reel 1, July 22, 1994.

[353] Puthucheary, "James Puthucheary," p. 11.

[354] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reels 3, 7, August 12/26, 1982.

[355] Lim Hock Siew, February 2, 2006; Savingram No. 801 from Governor of Singapore to SS, June 8, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361. In an interview, former editor Lim offers a much higher estimate of six or seven thousand copies, which he says were distributed throughout Singapore and Malaya. Santha Oorjitham, "Spotlight: A Fountainhead for Political Leaders," *New Straits Times*, February 23, 2007.

[356] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 7, August 26, 1982.

[357] Mavis Puthucheary, August 14, 2004.

[358] "Red Pamphlets," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 8, 1954, p. 1. Sisters Hedwig and Marie Aroozoo even circulated an anti-Japanese literary letter during the war, before entering Raffles College (interview with Manijeh Namazie, February 2, 2006). Over a decade later, the tradition continued: a 1968 Marxist–Leninist broadsheet on political prisoners, signed "Socialist Students of the University of Malaya," found its way to campus. UMSU's investigation determined that it probably was not produced by students—the standard of English was too high! *Malay Mail*, April 17, 1968.

[359] Savingram No. 801 from Governor of Singapore to Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 9, 1954; and SPR April 1954, April 28, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[360] Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006.

[361] Ibid.

[362] "Note on the meeting held at 11 A.M. on 22nd June, 1954 in Sir J. Martin's room to discuss finance and other matters in connection with the University of Malaya," TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[363] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reels 6–7, August 26, 1982.

[364] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 8, August 31, 1982; and Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 19–20.

[365] Thumboo, in Klein, "Edwin Thumboo," p. 64.

[366] Eric Mottram, "A Note on Academic Freedom and Politics," *Fajar* 12 (October 1954), p. 4.

would just worsen the security situation.[367] Indeed, the fact that these privileged undergraduates were prepared to go to jail put their anticolonial struggle in the limelight.[368]

The students were charged under the Sedition Ordinance, after sharp debate among colonial officials as to whether prosecution were warranted. As one official pointed out, "When we establish universities in the colonies, this is the sort of thing we must expect."[369] On the other hand, UM's chancellor (Singapore's commissioner general), while "very concerned at the feeling aroused in the University by the charges of sedition" (and miffed at having been insufficiently consulted at the time of the arrests), asserted a "need to stop these extreme left moves in their initial stage."[370] The Colonial Office declared itself "satisfied on our side that the Editorial Board, headed as it is by a man who was detained for a long period under the Emergency Regulations [Puthucheary], were determined to see how far they could go in the direction of subversive criticism and persuasion would not have affected them to any degree."[371] Once the charges had been pressed, withdrawing them could have appeared an admission of weakness or error, even as it became clear that conviction was unlikely. The continuing "indiscipline" in Chinese schools seemed to mandate "a firm stand."[372]

After exams, the Socialist Club formed a Fajar Defense Fund, chaired by Lim Hock Siew. Lee Kuan Yew, UMSU's legal council, offered assistance[373] and agreed to team up with D. N. Pritt, a well-known constitutional lawyer whom the students contacted through friends in London. A fund drive to cover Pritt's travel and other expenses drew a good response: MCA president Tan Cheng Lock, many members of the university staff (some of whom used Vice Chancellor Caine's posting of bail as justification), and other public figures, as well as workers, party members, and Chinese school students, contributed.[374] The Student Council as a whole, however, declined to take a stand or issue a statement; the only mention of the trial in *Malayan Undergrad* was a note of thanks afterwards to Lee Kuan Yew.[375]

To the government's chagrin, the *Fajar* trial was set for August 23, 1954, coincident with a World Assembly of Youth meeting and Colombo Plan Aid

[367] Ahmad Khan, A000150/13, reel 10, February 15, 1984.

[368] Interview with Lim Hock Siew, February 2, 2006.

[369] Minutes by J. M. M., June 19, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[370] Telegram No. 328 from John Nicoll, Singapore, to SS, June 14, 1954; and Malcolm MacDonald to John Nicoll, June 29, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[371] J. F. Nicoll to M. MacDonald, Singapore, July 10, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[372] Ibid.

[373] One of the detainees explains that they had a choice between Marshall and Lee, and only hesitated to choose the latter for fear they might "expose him to the attention of the Special Branch." (Rajakumar, "Lim Chin Siong's Place," p. 102.) Yet David Marshall vaguely recalled having turned down the case, as he "foresaw that [the] *Fajar* trial was going to be of that type where the youngsters were going to use the courts for purposes of tub-thumping their political views." David Marshall, A000156, reel 4, September 24, 1984. Barr suggests that Lee, too, dismissed the students as manipulable "brats" and "bobby-soxers" who should focus on studying rather than protests. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 21.

[374] J. F. Nicoll, Singapore, to John Martin, London, July 30, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361; and Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 8, August 31, 1982.

[375] "Lee Kuan Yew—Union's Legal Adviser," *Malayan Undergrad*, January 22, 1955, p. 4; and Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 8, August 31, 1982.

Conference in Singapore.[376] The courthouse was packed with international delegates from both conferences, along with university students and staff, members of the bar, and other locals. Singapore's "most significant political trial" for years "created quite a sensation"—Pritt attracted attention by quoting local leaders and Nehru alike to prove the colonial government's "political bankruptcy."[377] The judge dismissed the charges on the third day. He argued against a broad construal of "seditious intention," lest "legitimate criticisms may be stifled altogether." The English-language articles in *Fajar*, he noted, were hardly seditious, plus had a "very limited circulation ... among the educated class of the population and these people can think for themselves." Moreover, he found the evidence that the accused had even had the issue in their possession unconvincing.[378]

The students were hugely relieved—and surprised. When the judge cut Pritt short to say there was no case to answer, their first thought was that they were to be convicted without a defense. (Just in case, Rajakumar had drafted a document backing up the editorial line by line.[379]) Even the government was basically satisfied. The students' acquittal presented a convincing "practical demonstration of the working of British justice" to locals and international observers alike, and the trial's quick dismissal cost the defense a chance for political grandstanding;[380] the students published an apology for the problematic article, too.[381] At the same time, the government considered the trial to be "a good move to draw attention to the fact that a Sedition Law existed"[382] and was cheered by the prospect that it had scared many away from the Socialist Club.[383] *Fajar* sprang back almost immediately, though, with a much larger circulation than before. While printers were chary—the editors had to duplicate *Fajar* themselves until March 1955—circulation soared to five thousand after the trial, with the controversial Issue 7 in especially high demand.[384] Some officials had foreseen that the conflict might increase interest in the student publication, which they considered inflammatory. Before the trial, Singapore Governor Nicoll complained that not only might some of the articles in the latest issue "well be date-lined 'Moscow,'" but that *Fajar*'s overseas subscriptions and prevalence in local schools belied its being "in any proper sense an undergraduates' magazine."[385] All told, the trial "not only seriously embarrassed the British but vastly

[376] J. F. Nicoll, Singapore to John Martin, Colonial Office, London, July 30, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361; Ahmad Khan, A000150/13, reel 10, February 15, 1984.

[377] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 8, August 31, 1982.

[378] District Judge, F. A. Chua, 1st Criminal District Ct. Case Nos. 113 and 119 of 1954, *Regina vs. Poh Soo Kai & 7 ors.*, "Grounds of Judgment," September 16, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[379] Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006.

[380] Minutes by R. W. Newsam, October 1, 1954; also J. F. Nicoll, Singapore, to John Martin, London, September 24, 1954.

[381] J. F. Nicoll, Singapore, to John Martin, London, September 24, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[382] J. F. Nicoll, Singapore, to A. M. MacKintosh, London, November 6, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

[383] Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004; and Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 8, August 31, 1982.

[384] "Fajar in Printed Form Again," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, p. 2; Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 8, August 31, 1982; and Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 52.

[385] J. F. Nicoll, Singapore, to A. M. MacKintosh, London, August 7, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/361.

enhanced the prestige of the Socialist Club as an anti-colonial democratic-socialist organization within and outside the campus."[386]

Trouble was brewing simultaneously in the Chinese middle schools—part of the reason the authorities lost patience with the Socialist Club. The same week as the *Fajar* arrests, a failed demonstration of Chinese students at Government House in Singapore gave way to bloody clashes between students and police.[387] At stake was a new requirement that all men register for the colonial army and serve from age eighteen to twenty. By the close of registration on May 12, 98 percent had registered. Still, judging the requirement unjust, divisive, and intended to prolong colonial rule, and possibly riled by rumors that draftees were to be sent to Indochina, Chinese students from three schools called for a boycott.[388] The day before registration closed, they petitioned acting governor William Goode for an exemption, insisting that they could not spare the time for military training. Backing up the demand were mass rallies at Chung Cheng and Chinese high schools. Goode granted an eight-student delegation an audience for May 13; on that day, as many as a thousand more accompanied the student delegation, coming along for "moral support." The police ordered the crowd to disperse. When stones were thrown, the Riot Squad (newly formed in the wake of the 1950 Nadra Riot) sprang into action, charging the students with fists, kicks, and batons.[389] Forty-five students were arrested, and over two dozen students and police sustained injuries.[390]

An All-Singapore Middle School Student Appeal for National Service Exemption Delegation (aka the Deferment Delegation) formed within the week, headed by Robert Soon Loh Boon. On the advice of lawyers Pritt and Lee, the group reorganized as a preparatory committee for the Singapore Chinese Middle School Student Union (SCMSSU), which represented ten schools.[391] The battleground shifted to several high schools, where students staged mass demonstrations against police brutality. Several thousand students barricaded themselves inside Chinese and Chung Cheng high schools. In the course of this occupation (a mainstay of the students' tactical repertoire), "one thousand students carried on community life, barring teachers and public alike, conducting classes themselves," circling the campus with a "wooden curtain" of desks and chairs, and organizing everything from a commissary to a police force.[392] Threatened with further demonstrations, the heads of ten middle schools were obliged to advance the summer vacation by two weeks and close the schools early.[393]

The police's harsh initial assault earned the students sympathy not just from parents and classmates, but from the Malayan public and left-wing organizations in Britain.[394] As soon-to-be chief minister David Marshall summed it up, "This was an outburst of Chinese chauvinism, inspired and manoeuvred by Communist subversives. But however wrong the object of the demonstration may be, and however distorted the organisation, the reaction was the height of stupidity."[395] Even the conservative, British-owned *Straits Times* expressed reservations regarding the use of violence against peaceful student demonstrators, while the more autonomous *Singapore Standard* condemned the Riot Squad's response outright and demanded an inquiry.[396] Although the national service issue was specific to Singapore, Chinese schools in the federation raised funds and publicity.[397] The experience strengthened ties among Chinese school students, the UM Socialist Club, the Pan-Malayan Students' Federation, and the future PAP leaders who took up their cause.[398]

The response at UM, though, was ambivalent, both to the policy and to the protests it incited. While not excluded from the National Service Ordinance (eighty-four UM students were themselves affected[399]), younger UM students were less firmly opposed to conscription, perhaps because they felt less marginalized from the society they were being called upon to serve.[400] Some UM students did fault the policy, both on nationalist grounds and for the inadequacy of the training provided.[401] At least two hundred came to an UMSU emergency meeting the evening of May 14, where those attending voted to condemn unwarranted violence and to send protest telegrams to all relevant authorities. But that meeting was subsequently declared unconstitutional at an even better-attended one later that month, and its decisions were judged to be null and void due to procedural errors.[402]

[386] Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, p. 124.

[387] Huang, "Positioning Student Political Activism," p. 403.

[388] Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 429–30.

[389] Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, pp. 190–93; Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, pp. 429–30.

[390] Telegram No. 272 from O.A.G., Singapore to SS, May 14, 1954; telegram No. 54 from Commissioner General for UK in South East Asia to SS, May 14, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/360; Spector, "Students and Politics," pp. 66–67; or, for a more cynical report, see Alex Josey, oral history, A00259/23, reel 2, 16 March 1983, NAS, OHC.

[391] Spector, "Students and Politics," p. 68; Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, pp. 190–93. The rejection of the SCMSSU's registration sparked a one-day boycott of classes in nearly all Chinese schools just before the April 1955 elections. The newly elected Labour Front government approved registration that October in return for Chinese students' support, but proscribed labor-related or political activities. Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, p. 198. Two weeks later, the SCMSSU launched a campaign against those restrictions, followed by a series of other actions, including supporting a December 1955 Singapore Traction Company bus strike that dissolved into a "bloody riot." Spector, "Students and Politics," p. 66. Branded a communist front organization, the SCMSSU was deregistered the following September. See Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, pp. 118–20; "Enter the Defiant Pupils," *Straits Times*, September 25, 1956, p. 1; and "5,000 School Rebels," *Straits Times*, September 26, 1956, p. 1. See also "The Chinese School Students' Strike," *Fajar* 17 (March 30, 1955), p. 2, which supports the students' right to unionize.

[392] Spector, "Students and Politics," p. 66.

[393] Ibid., pp. 67–68; and Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, pp. 82–83.

[394] Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, pp. 190–93; and Ang Poh Kim, "Communist Manipulation of a Chinese Student Body: The Nanyang University Students' Union (1956–1964)" (BA Honours thesis, National University of Singapore, 1983–84), p. 18.

[395] David Marshall, A000156, reel 4, September 24, 1984.

[396] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reels 6–7, August 26, 1982.

[397] Director of Intelligence, Federation of Malaya, Monthly Report on Subversive Activities in Malaya, May and June 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/7.

[398] Yeo, *Political Development in Singapore*, p. 193.

[399] "Red Pamphlets," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 8, 1954, p. 1.

[400] British army counterterrorism specialist-turned-academic Clutterbuck pins the agitation on the MCP, which saw "a godsend" in the fact that it was so easy to mobilize "boys who, because of their Chinese education, would be given the poorest chances in the alien colonial society which they were being called upon to defend." Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, p. 83.

[401] "Students Criticize National Service," *Malayan Undergrad*, January 22, 1955, p. 4.

[402] "Students' Council Resignation," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 12, 1954, p. 1; Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 7, August 26, 1982; and Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, p. 429.

Meanwhile, the students facing trial over the May 13 protest asked to share the *Fajar* editorial board's lawyers. The team of Pritt and Lee agreed to represent them, and Lee "whipped up student enthusiasm by a spectacular if relatively unsuccessful defense."[403] Seven students were found guilty of obstructing the police and given a three-month sentence.[404] Yet ultimately Lee came off as the students' hero, earning their earnest loyalty.[405]

ON CAMPUS AND BEYOND

Such drama notwithstanding, both the Emergency and the ready availability of good jobs upon graduation curbed most students' interest in radical politics. As Kenny Byrne, president of the University of Malaya Society,[406] reflected, political disinterest was to be expected among students frustrated by colonialism and "brought up in a system which has encouraged and expects them to say the right things at the right time to the right people in order to please," such that "any criticism of authority, however well founded, is looked upon as nothing more than a mere indulgence of eccentricity, if not something more sinister."[407] Most students' focus as activists tended to remain on their local communities or the campus itself—although even seemingly mundane local issues could set tempers flaring.

Reaching Out to the Masses

A range of students, albeit especially those on the left, made concerted efforts to identify with the masses, especially the Malay peasantry. Journalists like Samad Ismail and C. H. E. Det (Mahathir) helped this effort by spreading awareness of issues affecting Malays. Student radicals, in particular, embraced the idea that the root cause of Malay poverty was European capitalist exploitation and touted the responsibility of non-Malays to bring redress for injuries resulting from exploitation.[408] By the 1950s, even left-wing Chinese students spoke of replacing English with Malay in their schools and enlisting working-class Chinese to fight for Malay peasants.

Social welfare and outreach activities allowed concerned students to act on their desire to connect with the broader society. The earliest such initiative seems to have been adult-education classes organized by Raffles College economics professor Thomas Silcock and student Chan Kah Hock. In 1947, recognizing that self-government was imminent and that wider English fluency would help, they mobilized students and others to teach for the People's Education Association (later

[403] Spector, "Students and Politics," p. 68.

[404] Telegram No. 366 from J. Nicoll, Singapore, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, London, July 5, 1954, TNA:PRO CO1030/360.

[405] Fernandez, "Puthucheary," p. 13; Spector, "Students and Politics," pp. 66–68.

[406] The University of Malaya Society was launched in 1954 as a political forum for graduates and as something of an incubator for the soon-to-emerge PAP. See Fernandez, "Puthucheary," p. 13.

[407] K. M. Byrne, "Politics in the University," in *A Symposium on Extracurricular Activities of University Students in Malaya*, ed. A. A. Sandosham (Malaya: World University Service, [1954]), pp. 43–45.

[408] Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 377.

renamed the Council for Adult Education), targeting Malay adults across Singapore.[409] Malay undergraduates taught similar classes, too, under the Singapore-based Anglo-Malay Evening School Movement and GPMS.[410] In addition, medical students organized public classes in first-aid and rudimentary medicine, and UMSU started early on to hold annual charity fundraisers.

In 1956, UMSU president-elect Fred Samuel issued a press statement (unilaterally, for which he was nearly censured) urging students to make an effort to "be with the people." To that end, UMSU launched a new, service-oriented "Meet the People" plan in 1957.[411] Exhorting, "Are we to sit complacently and not take up this glorious challenge to contribute our part to the building of our Malayan nation, in return for our privileged position?," Samuel proposed four main initiatives. All would both boost civic consciousness among students and demonstrate undergraduates' commitment to the public interest. These initiatives included the establishment of community centers "to help the less fortunate of our brethren"; the development of a "University on the Air" broadcast featuring educational talks and radio plays; the donation of blood; and the institution of an annual Welfare Week.[412] These efforts encountered little resistance from the administration—in fact, new Malayan prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman was the inaugural patron of Welfare Week, and he, UM vice chancellor R. D. Purchon, and Singapore chief minister Lim Yew Hock sent UMSU well-wishes for its second Welfare Week the following year.[413]

Campus-Level Activism

Not all activities were focused on the population living outside campus. The students' own welfare proved a perennial concern. Several of the most incendiary early campus controversies concerned issues of institutional governance, university autonomy, and, most of all, ragging (hazing). Some of these campaigns tied in with larger concerns regarding, for instance, academic and intellectual freedom. Others were more narrow, yet still helped to crystallize a distinctive and versatile student identity and community.

UM students began to demand greater participation in university governance in late 1949, before such calls came to the fore overseas (although external influences were blamed for similar appeals two decades later). A plea for direct student representation on the Board of Student Welfare ignited UMSU's first major conflict between students and university authorities. Convinced that it would be inadvisable to involve students in disciplinary matters, the administration offered instead a Staff–Student Committee to advise the board. The Student Council rejected that offer in January 1950, citing the inefficacy of a comparable initiative at the Medical College a few years prior. With the *Malayan Undergrad* lambasting the "colonial mentality" of the university authorities and European teaching staff, UMSU framed the debate in

[409] Thomas Silcock, A000180, reel 15, April 29, 1982; and Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 377.

[410] Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 378.

[411] "Be with the People," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 27, 1957, p. 4.

[412] "Unnamed," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 27, 1957, p. 7; also "University on the Air," October 4, 1957, p. 1.

[413] "Tunku Supports Welfare Week," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 12, 1957, p. 1; and *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1958, p. 8.

terms of university autonomy.[414] The issue persisted for years. As a lengthy 1958 UMSU memo to the UM administration asserted, "We would like to feel that this is OUR University and that we are contributing our share in the management of the affairs that closely concern the welfare of students."[415]

Issues of autonomy underlay a host of other student and staff appeals, such as those involving campus media. In 1950, irritated by the sensationalized renditions of *Malayan Undergrad* stories in the outside press, acting vice chancellor Silcock tried to copyright the paper and limit its circulation to the campus. Outraged students decried the infringement of their rights to expression and of UMSU's autonomy. UMSU suspended publication and convened a committee on the issue. Silcock was ultimately forced to concede not only that UMSU and the editorial board had not leaked information to the press (and could not prevent individual students from doing so), but that negative critiques might be the unavoidable price of freedom of speech. Publication of the newspaper soon resumed, with minor editorial adjustments.[416] Concerns over press freedom rose again in 1954, of course, with the *Fajar* trial.

The attention students gave these substantive issues, though, paled in comparison with that accorded the practice of "ragging." While long an institution at the Medical College, ragging was less appreciated by students from Raffles College. Controversy over the practice erupted almost immediately at UM. In 1950, a faction led by UMSU president Geoffrey Leembruggen and James Puthucheary dissociated the union from ragging, to the dismay of medical student supporters. An April 1950 meeting on ragging was UMSU's largest to date, drawing over two-thirds of the student body. The practice was represented, alternately, as "a beautiful thing" that built ties among freshmen and as "bullying" and "exploitation comparable to colonialism." The union voted to retain ragging, albeit with measures to limit its excesses. Facing a (constitutionally dubious) no-confidence motion led by medical student K. Kanagaratnam, Leembruggen and Puthucheary led a mass walkout. This led to the collapse of the first UMSU Student Council.[417]

Again in 1954, just months after the *Fajar* drama, ragging rocked the campus. The police had been summoned to deal with "criminal offenses" allegedly committed in one of the hostels.[418] Not only were four seniors tried in a "kangaroo court" for ragging offenses and suspended from the hostels, but, without consulting the student body, the Arts-dominated Student Council banned ragging to preclude any recurrence of such excesses. The council was forced to resign and was replaced mostly by medical students; the conflict was apparently tied up also with tension between leftist and conservative cliques.[419] The case sparked an emergency *Malayan Undergrad* edition and UMSU general meeting, at which the student body overwhelmingly condemned the disciplinary board's "interrogation" and sentence

[414] Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 357–58.

[415] Quoted in "Representation in Student Welfare," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 15, 1958, p. 3.

[416] Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 363–64.

[417] Yeo, "Student Politics," pp. 359–60, 363.

[418] A classmate insists they "had never done anything bad to anyone." Peter Mayo, A001535/02, reel 2, July 22, 1994.

[419] Ronald McCoy, January 17, 2006; and A1538, reel 1, July 23, 1994.

(which the vice chancellor pronounced final). Melodramatic protests ensued,[420] and dental student Peter Mayo organized UMSU's first ever "day of academic non-cooperation," collecting signatures from over half the student body.[421] Nearly all students participated, skipping their lectures for one day.[422] The interim chair of UMSU explained that lack of confidence in the disciplinary process "has aroused in the student body a feeling of fear and personal insecurity," triggered by the perception that they themselves might be "arraigned on false charges which could be made against them by fellow students." In short, the strike "should not be looked upon as an open defiance of University authority or as an inherent tendency to flout authority in any form, but rather as a method of expressing our great concern in what to us seems a very real danger."[423]

A final testament to the potency of this seemingly minor issue: A few years later, the two issues of *Malayan Undergrad* immediately following the momentous achievement of independence in the federation featured ragging in their cover stories.[424] The practice was finally banned later that year.[425]

WHICH STUDENTS ENGAGED AND WHY

> I suggest that the University is suffering from a very serious variety of schizophrenia peculiar to spineless sprawling creatures.[426]

It would be impossible to sketch a standard profile of the Malayan student activist in this period or any other. Still, reviewing the ranks of activists at the time suggests certain characteristics common to many. Few arrived on campus with radical intentions. Most were men (hardly surprising, given campus demographics), and many were medical students. Most resided in hostels, since hostels facilitated their deeper immersion and access to other students, although a group of senior students founded a Non-Hostelites Organisation under UMSU in 1950 to ensure that commuting students (then about 40 percent of the student body, though numbers were declining) felt included.[427] Overall, what all activists—indeed, all undergraduates—had in common was the intelligence to pass a rather high bar to gain admittance, an at least partial English education, a campus environment, and, importantly, an ever-present awareness that the status quo was soon to end and that they had an opportunity to play leading intellectual and professional roles in establishing a new, postcolonial order.

[420] "Four Students Suspended," *Malayan Undergrad*, Emergency Issue, November 27, 1954, p. 1; "Tears, Green Bands, and a Flag at Half-Mast," *Malayan Undergrad*, December 1, 1954, p. 1.

[421] Some "rabid colonists" among the teaching staff recommended the vice chancellor expel Mayo—until Mayo threatened to sue. Peter Mayo, A001535/02, reel 2, July 22, 1994.

[422] "Union Goes on Strike," *Malayan Undergrad*, December 14, 1954, p. 2.

[423] W. R. Rasanayagam, "Strike is Not Defiance of Authority, Say Students," *Straits Times*, December 8, 1954, p. 6.

[424] The issues of October 4 and 25, 1957.

[425] *Malayan Undergrad*, November 12, 1957. Ragging was proscribed specifically, as well, in the new Code of Conduct at UM in Kuala Lumpur, although freshmen had to wear green ties or rosettes throughout orientation. *Straits Times*, June 3, 1961.

[426] Wang, "Staff–Student Relationship," p. 45.

[427] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 2–3, August 12, 1982; and "Student Statistics," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 23, 1956, p. 2.

Yet even among these activist students, only a minority could point to any initial ideological motive for their engagement, beyond anticolonialism. UMSU and Socialist Club leader Wang Gungwu, for instance, claims not to have been "that political" as an undergraduate, but says he was more "broadly nationalistic" and literary.[428] Similarly, Musa Hitam, heavily engaged in local and international student unions,[429] claims he got involved in politics because he had the "gift of the gab." That said, he had been active on campus and off even as a schoolboy at the English College in Johor Bahru.[430] Lim Hock Siew, who was involved with a range of leftist campus organizations and publications, had striven since he was young to keep abreast of political developments.[431] Similarly, as editor of his secondary school magazine, the Socialist Club's M. K. Rajakumar caused a ruckus by writing a piece calling for more lessons to be taught about Malaya's geography than England's. His principal "murmured something about 'the communists are getting to the boy'"—which was not, in fact, the case.[432]

Globally, science students tend to be less politically involved than others, and students in professional schools, more conservative.[433] Not so in Malaya. From the start, the most radical students were concentrated in the Medical College. In some contexts, it is doctors' incorporation into the political system, through employment processes and other means, that encourages such a pattern.[434] In Malaya, more specific institutional characteristics were more likely at work. For one thing, the Medical College not only predated Raffles College, but attracted the brightest and most ambitious youths. The length of the medical course accentuated these advantages: by their fifth or sixth year, medical students were older and more experienced than their peers in other faculties.[435] In addition, the arts faculty was initially stunted. It lacked a political science department until 1961,[436] and even faculties of law and social studies, whose establishment was hailed as "an essential prerequisite of an independent Malaysia" and supported by UMSU (especially given the cost of legal studies abroad), did not emerge until mid-1955. The first law lectures

[428] Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004.

[429] Musa was the first Asian elected to a full-time position at the ISC's Coordinating Secretariat in Leiden (see chapter 1), as associate secretary in charge of Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. During his two-year term, he traveled widely; he was present in Cuba at the students' ousting of Batista and installation of Castro in 1959, present in South Korea for the students' revolt against Syngman Rhee, present in Algeria to help rebuild after independence, and visited Ceylon, where he discussed communalism with prime minister Solomon Bandaranaike. See "Student Travel in Europe," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 25, 1957, p. 3; and Bruce Gale, *Musa Hitam: A Political Biography* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1982), pp. 7–9.

[430] Interview with Musa Hitam, December 6, 2004; and Gale, *Musa Hitam*, p. 5.

[431] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 2, August 12, 1982.

[432] Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006.

[433] Frank A. Pinner, "Students—A Marginal Elite in Politics," in *The New Pilgrims: Youth Protest in Transition*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Robert S. Laufer (New York, NY: David McKay, 1972), p. 283.

[434] John W. Meyer and Richard Rubinson, "Structural Determinants of Student Political Activity: A Comparative Interpretation," *Sociology of Education* 45,1 (1972): 35.

[435] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 3, August 12, 1982.

[436] Interview with Mavis Puthucheary, August 14, 2004.

were set to begin ten days after *Merdeka*.[437] That said, medical students hardly cornered the activist market, especially with charismatic arts students such as James Puthucheary around. Moreover, as later chapters demonstrate, these patterns changed over time, as university structures, student demographics, and galvanizing issues shifted.

THE STUDENTS' POSITION

> As a child I belonged to the East; as a man I am lost to the West. Between childhood and manhood there was a struggle between the Chinese blood in me and the English education I had received ... For, with Western education, I became more apish than the apes; I grew rich in learning (of a sort) but I became bankrupt in the spirit of my fathers ... With my education had also come an inflated self-respect. Some people call it the White-Collared Mentality. I prefer to use its true name which is Vanity, the daughter of Servility.[438]

> Laugh, youths.
> Worlds are at your feet,
> Sorrows still unseen.[439]

Across the postcolonial world, "post-war politics was a new activity—public, theatrical, confrontational, and self-conscious."[440] Universities were critical to that transformation. In Southeast Asia, scholars and specialists pondered the most appropriate roles and objectives of universities, considering responsibilities far beyond the mere education of promising youths. One Thai scholar, for instance, proposed a characteristically ambitious set of goals: the full development and maturation of youth; conservation, enrichment, and transmission of cultural heritage; study and research; remedies for societal problems; and the extension of educational services to the community.[441] Expectations of students and graduates were correspondingly high. In a speech to the Malayan Forum in January 1950, Lee Kuan Yew enjoined his audience to prepare themselves for political leadership, while the Malayan Democratic Union urged students to emulate progressive, nationalist exemplars in Indonesia, China, India, and Egypt.[442] English-educated students represented a burgeoning new subset of intellectual elites. It was their Western education and orientation that backed their claim to power, not their social background (although, in fact, they were overwhelmingly drawn from the upper echelons), so they were less threatened than traditional elites by shifts in the social

[437] "Law and Social Studies: New Plans Hailed," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 6, 1955, p. 1; and Ernest V. Devadason, "The Law Course and Malaya," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 4, 1957, p. 3.

[438] E. H. Lim, "I Examine Myself," *Raffles College Union Magazine* I (1946–47), p. 18.

[439] Wang Gung Wu, "Mata Ikan Laughter," *The New Cauldron* (Hilary Term 1949–50), pp. 54–55.

[440] Amoroso, "Dangerous Politics," p. 259.

[441] Chirayu Navawongs, "Some Aspects of the Goals of the Southeast Asian Universities," in *Goals for Southeast Asian Universities: A Seminar Report*, ed. Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (Bangkok: ASAIHL, 1968), p. 71.

[442] Yeo, "Student Politics," p. 371.

order.[443] At least in Singapore, this was the stratum that did take charge, substantially remolding society and politics. Their potency in this early stage, however, left universities and students ripe targets for suppression later on, as politics normalized.

In late colonial Malaya, the journey to the Medical College, Raffles College, or UM marked a rite of passage and a moment of mingling for the young men and women involved. Unlike Chinese schools, which were scattered across Malaya and enrolled students who hailed primarily from a local catchment area and were still under their families' control, these English-medium flagship institutions were national in scope and inclined toward a uniquely *Malayan* orientation. Unlike, too, the national-level parties and organizations forming contemporaneously, the university was a primarily residential setting; even those who did not live in hostels mixed daily with their fellow students in lecture halls, on sports fields, and at club meetings in a way then unparalleled in Malaya. All this transpired in an environment that encouraged questioning, learning, and analyzing, marked by earnest addresses from a wide gamut of leaders and by emerging new role models, as Asians displaced Western expatriates among university staff.

All the same, most students felt genuinely ambivalent over what their specific political role as undergraduates should be—whether it was appropriate for them to be political or partisan, whether they should risk upsetting a quite comfortable status quo, whether they could afford to take time away from their studies, and whether they could legitimately identify with the masses they might claim to represent. Indeed, Lee Kuan Yew described students in 1959 as "loyal to the community, honest, and well-behaved, if somewhat too obedient to colonial authority."[444] (James Puthucheary countered that, in India and elsewhere, the English-educated were at the forefront of the anticolonial struggle.[445]) Thus, the fact that, in Malaya, only a minority engaged actively is perhaps unsurprising. Conceptions of politics and nationalism differed: Wang suggests English-educated Malayan students tended to understand "nationalism" to refer to a Malayan nation, premised on democratic norms, while the Chinese-educated associated the same concept with an anti-imperialist, Chinese nation;[446] Malays, however, risked ostracism if their outlook grew "too Malayan" rather than ethnically Malay.[447] Because it lacked a coherent definition, the concept of nationalism was never so galvanizing in Malaya as it was in, for instance, Indonesia or Burma.[448] Even avowedly nationalist students were not necessarily anti-British or anti-elite.[449] A visiting professor in the early 1960s

[443] Harry J. Benda, "Political Elites in Colonial Southeast Asia: An Historical Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7,3 (1965): 233–35.

[444] Text of an address by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at the Singapore Union of Journalists Lunch at the Cathay Dragon Room on Sunday, August 16, 1959 (Singapore Government press statement), TNA:PRO CO1030/702.

[445] J. J. Puthucheary, "English-educated a Reactionary Class?" *Petir* 3,4 (December 1, 1959), pp. 4, 8.

[446] Wang Gungwu, "Traditional Leadership in a New Nation: The Chinese in Malaya and Singapore," in *Leadership and Authority: A Symposium*, ed. Gehan Wijeyewardene (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1968), pp. 214–15, 219.

[447] Dali, "Preference and Progress," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 24, 1950, p. 5.

[448] Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004.

[449] Interview with Manijeh Namazie, February 2, 2006.

described a situation in the university during a time when local leaders had largely supplanted colonial ones: "Mr. Lee's attitude towards the University ... vacillated between accusing it of being an ivory tower and instructing it to be one."[450] The political position of youth—and by extension, students—was contested in Malaya in a way perhaps less evident elsewhere in the region. The newborn UMNO, for example, broadcast a clear message "that adults were responsible for shaping the future, and youth should manifest itself as a helpless child," only to be forced to recalibrate its approach in light of competitor API's far more youth-empowering stance.[451] Even then, however, traditions of deference were hard to shake, especially since so many of the nation's new political leaders were still "well-born."[452]

Nationalist students' writings after World War II convey real angst, even beyond the florid language seemingly endemic to idealistic youths. These painfully self-aware students sought earnestly to "be with the people," and not just to share the benefits those taxpayers had made possible, but to prove to themselves and others that, however culturally and linguistically estranged, they did belong and could add value to the Malayan nation. Yet they were torn by their own personal stake in the system, by their disconnectedness from more radical elements (on account of both language and physical segregation on campus), by their fundamentally colonial education and training, and by fear—both of omnipresent Emergency regulations and of being manipulated (as was so often charged) by outside forces. Students openly brooded that, as Lee Kuan Yew described, English-educated Chinese and Indians had "lost touch with the mass of their own people" and were "devitalised, almost emasculated, as a result of deculturalisation."[453] (Lee absolved the Malays, who remained fluent in their mother tongue.) And the basic fact that the university was located in Singapore—an island removed from the peninsula more than just geographically—undoubtedly dampened the potential for federation-focused agitation, even among the many peninsular students.[454] Moreover, students at the time really did have grounds for anxiety: they saw their peers detained in 1951 and 1954, and thousands off campus were detained or deported throughout the period. Even while railing at university students for "frittering [their time] away around carom-boards and card tables, in canteens and on the dance floors" instead of on politics, a *New Cauldron* editorial insisted, "The main reason for political apathy among students is FEAR. Fear because in the past politics was mixed up with what seemed the muddy business of communism."[455] The editor at that time, Sandra Woodhull, would know—he had been detained in the University Case and his father was killed by communists in 1944.[456] Ironically, the demonized Issue 7 of *Fajar* included a piece on how seriously fear stifled free and active discussion. And that must have been the case, at least to some extent.

[450] Enright, *Memoirs*, p. 138.

[451] Amoroso, "Dangerous Politics," p. 270.

[452] Ibid., pp. 275–76.

[453] Text of an address by the Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, August 16, 1959.

[454] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 9.

[455] "Lest We Forget," *The New Cauldron* (Hilary Term 1951–52), p. 11.

[456] Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, p. 51.

Lim Hock Siew perhaps best captures this ambivalent status and its implications. Acknowledging that *Merdeka* represented "a threat to our own privileged position" (as English-educated undergraduates), he yet decries the

> ... paralyzing fear of our own inadequacy to determine our destiny, a current of inferiority constantly re-charged by the English press ... Quite embarrassingly, we find ourselves constantly hailed as future leaders of our own country [but] we find with alarm an increasing influence of the non-English speaking public—the illiterates. We find our hitherto unquestioned leadership challenged ... Merdeka has landed us in a dilemma. We find ourselves encumbered by a freedom we never desired but which we are ashamed to reject ... we find this freedom eagerly clamored for by our people whom we have forsaken—those people whom we tend to despise and who shall despise us in return.[457]

Or as a self-described (and clearly conflicted) "one of the apathetic" confessed regarding local English-educated middle-class students: "it never occurred to us that there might also have been heroes with names like our own and skin coloured like ours. And nobody told us. ... Our apathy is born of confusion."[458] In Singapore, the English-educated minority—especially more conservative politicians favored by the British—lacked credibility.[459] Yet in the federation, apart from a few Malay exceptions, only English-educated candidates could stand for election for some time after independence, since only they could communicate with each other.[460]

Doubts notwithstanding, especially since the campus was a relatively free space, left-wing students added verve to a national debate dimmed by the combination of labor's suppression and conservative parties' ascendance.[461] Most notable in this regard was the *Fajar* trial, particularly given its coincidence with the trial of the Chinese school students who opposed conscription. The *Fajar* case was covered not just locally; even the *London Times* derided the colonial government's nervous overreaction.[462] Yet the combination of repression and publicity catalyzed a surge of political awareness and activity among the general public, and accelerated the formation of the PAP.[463]

Despite the protection afforded by a tradition of university autonomy, radical students remained frustrated by their few outlets and their hesitant (even if not truly apathetic) peers. They "believed that the Emergency had sealed the fate of constitutional struggle in the country," as the police stifled public life through a relentless campaign of preventive detention, arrest, banishment, and deportation of suspected communists.[464] Some saw the MCP as the only force consistently working to oust the British and were impressed by the party's commitment, political and

[457] Lim Hock Siew, "The Challenge before Us," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 25, 1957, p. 7.

[458] I. Ambiavagar, "Why We Are Apathetic," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 1958, p. 4.

[459] Rajakumar, "Lim Chin Siong's Place," p. 100.

[460] Roff, "The Politics of Language," p. 317.

[461] Yeo, "Student Politics,"p. 378.

[462] Interview with M. K. Rajakumar, January 23, 2006.

[463] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reels 8–9, August 31, 1982.

[464] Yeo, "Joining the Communist Underground," pp. 50–51.

organizational skills, popular support, and perseverance. For most, communist ideology per se impressed them less.[465] Students' enthusiasm for the left-wing, but noncommunist, PAP thus makes sense.

Trade unions offered another outlet. In Malaya, as elsewhere during this time, the links between students and labor were complex and critical. Those connections between Chinese schools and the Middle Road unions[466] were well-known: government sweeps targeted representatives of both together, and students and unionists actively supported each others' campaigns.[467] Moreover, among the most prominent trade union leaders were graduates of the Chinese middle schools, including the fiery Lim Chin Siong, who was expelled from Chinese high school in 1951 for his activism.[468] But left-wing university students, too, had union connections. Not only were officers of the Singapore Teachers' Union among the University Case detainees, but a notable proportion of Socialist Club activists gravitated toward Middle Road after graduation. At the time, as the unions' developed into a more moderate, democratic movement, English was ever more necessary as a language of regulations, communications, and arbitration.[469] These English-educated idealists, willing to pass up the high pay and status their qualifications might command, were thus useful. The Socialist Club alumni in the trade union movement also served as a bridge—which Lee Kuan Yew carefully cultivated—between labor and the newly formed PAP.[470] For instance, with Lee Kuan Yew's help, Sandra Woodhull became secretary to the naval base workers after graduation.[471] In 1954, a year after fellow Socialist Club member Jamit Singh dropped out of university, Lee recruited him to join labor, thus starting him on the path to an illustrious career. As secretary of the Singapore Harbour Board Staff Association, Singh united dock workers for a series of industrial actions, rallied those same workers to support the PAP in the 1950s, then became one of the "Big Six" union leaders who opposed the PAP in the early 1960s, an effort that concluded with his detention in 1963.[472] James Puthucheary went to work for the Shop and Factory Workers' Union, Singapore's largest union and the backbone of the PAP and

[465] Ibid., pp. 51–52.

[466] So-named since the headquarters of the Singapore Factory and Shopworkers Union, where the heads of various unions met, was in Middle Road, in central Singapore. Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, p. 100.

[467] For instance, in September 1956, the unions planned a 50,000 person strike (which several thousand students pledged to support) to protest the arrests of seven trade unionists and teachers. They timed the launch to coincide with the reopening of Chinese schools after the mid-autumn holiday. It was at this point that Singapore banned the "arrogant, aggressive, and supremely confident" SCMSSU. Unrest, which involved the stoning of police stations, occupation of school premises, rioting, and tear gas, continued through October. After thirteen deaths, well over a hundred injuries, and front-page photos of schoolgirls' linking hands against advancing police, order was restored through the arrival of military reinforcements and arrests of over 450 left-wing and union activists (including several Socialist Club graduates). See "Action Taken against Subversive Elements in Singapore during September 1956 and October 1956 (1956–57)," TNA:PRO CO1030/87.

[468] Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence*, pp. 99–100.

[469] Liew Kai Khiun, "The Anchor and the Voice of 10,000 Waterfront Workers: Jamit Singh in the Singapore Story," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35,3 (2004): 464.

[470] Ibid.

[471] Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, pp. 50–51.

[472] Liew, "Jamit Singh in the Singapore Story," pp. 459–78.

anticolonial movement, in 1955, and was elected assistant secretary general the following year.[473]

Still other student activists went on to lead political parties and non-governmental organizations after graduation. Ronald McCoy, for instance, not only formed the Malaysian Medical Association soon after he graduated, but also became a stalwart antinuclear activist, working through the organization International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.[474] And, of course, the preeminent leaders of postwar Singapore and Malaya came from the Medical College, Raffles College, and UM. These included Lee Kuan Yew, Tun Abdul Razak, Mahathir Mohamad, and others. Furthermore, in the postwar era, these institutions were small and intimate; friendships and "old boys' networks" from that period are exceptionally strong still, not least since early graduates went on to establish vibrant graduates' societies and guilds.[475]

More broadly, a collective student identity, cutting across lines of language and ethnicity, began to take shape in this early period among students from all communities. Notwithstanding the students' confusion about what actions or beliefs that identity entailed, and granting this faction's sometimes awkward fit with ethnic, linguistic, class, and other allegiances, a collective student identity came to take on greater significance to Malayan political history than the dominant narrative generally concedes. That narrative misspecifies the relevant activist category as only "Chinese educated," and thereby both overlooks the contribution of the English educated and forgets those Chinese-educated activists who liaised with or themselves attended UM.[476] Undergraduates at this stage were aware and comparatively empowered, even when not actually engaged. Soon, the fact that those students who did take action so often did so *as* students gave that identity category real political significance. And foreshadowing developments to come: from early on, political elites regarded this category of activists with an uneasy mixture of respect and fear, according students real stature and merit, but they could quickly turn coercive when student activists pressed too hard.

By 1957, *Merdeka* had been achieved only on the Malayan peninsula, although Singapore, too, had edged closer. Among the institutions that then developed separately in Singapore and on the peninsula were the universities, following the formation of a second UM campus and the separation soon thereafter of the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur from the newly renamed University of Singapore to the south. It is in Kuala Lumpur that we pick up the main thread of our narrative, although still with an eye to Singapore, where a large number of Malayans continued to study and mobilize.

[473] Puthucheary, "James Puthucheary," p. 15.

[474] Interview with Ronald McCoy, January 17, 2006.

[475] For instance, Frederick Sabapathy, oral history, A001477, reel 2, April 28, 1994, NAS, OHC.

[476] Sai and Huang, "The 'Chinese-Educated' Political Vanguards," pp. 132, 136.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE: 1957–1966

O yonge fresshe folks, I would cry
I would impose the dubieties of John Donne
On those who should be in a language laboratory
Learning how to say "I am a good citizen of
Bahasaland and the kindly British have taught me
How to say so in English"[1]

After independence, the strains of political transition and economic reorientation brought new challenges and reshuffled priorities at all levels of society. Singapore's merger with, then separation from, the peninsular federation in the early 1960s twice recast the parameters of the state and baffled efforts at national unity. New leaders and parties jostled for dominance as a loosely consociational order solidified in Malaya and the PAP (People's Action Party) consolidated its grip in Singapore. Meanwhile, on campus, nationalist students still felt they had a role to play in nation-building, and much of society agreed. Now, however, their recent allies in the fight against domination were themselves in power. Discombobulated by continuing student unrest, these new political elites soon mixed praise with brickbats and occasional repression. They still spoke of undergraduates as special and pushed them to engage, but as aides to the state, not adversaries. Indeed, a sense of shared mission *did* motivate much of the student activism of this period, but far from all of it. It was that tension that kept the state on edge and that most clearly distinguished the campus of the 1950s and 1960s, before intellectual containment had become a serious constraint.

Student activism started to gain momentum on a global scale around 1960. The groundswell started that year, with Japanese student demonstrations against a security treaty with the United States.[2] The University of California at Berkeley's Free Speech movement of 1964–65 marked another key turning point, then antiwar activism carried the surge forward, peaking internationally in 1968. However iconic this phenomenon, though, the majority of students and young people remained comfortably quiescent throughout. Surveys of American students in 1968–70, for instance, found only around 10 percent seriously politically alienated or radical, and only about one-third this number revolutionary or on the extreme Left.[3] But it was

[1] Extract from the poem "I was a Middle-aged Corrupter of Youth" in D. J. Enright, *Foreign Devils* (London: Covent Garden Press, 1972). *Bahasa* refers to the Malay language.

[2] Philip G. Altbach, "The International Student Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5,1 (1970): 172.

[3] This essential moderation applied even to attitudes toward the Vietnam War. National surveys found respondents aged 21–30 to be less antiwar than older respondents (especially

the vocal minority that grabbed the limelight as momentum mounted during the 1960s and into the 1970s. One issue built on another. For instance, in the United States, concern with social-justice issues, including civil rights and the Vietnam War, segued into interrogation of capitalism, the military–industrial complex, increasing presidential power, and institutionalized racism.[4] And the continuing activism and impact of student groups in sites as wide-ranging as South Korea, Japan, Turkey, Iran, and Latin America offered inspiration for postcolonial counterparts elsewhere[5] as political opportunities, or perceptions of the odds that collective action could effect political change, shifted.

The unprecedented breadth and depth of student activism baffled many. As one puzzled observer noted, "Why should those for whom a place in the sun has been more or less guaranteed express greater discontent with society than those for whom life appears to hold far less promise?"[6] Moreover, the wave of protest of the 1960s seemed to come without warning. With respect to US student activism, one analyst pondered:

> even with the best of hindsight, it is difficult to see the origins of this resurrection in the "silent generation" of the 1950s. Joe College was concerned mainly with keeping his political nose clean (if he thought of politics at all) so as to secure that warm niche in the society of middle-class America.[7]

Student engagement was, if anything, even more vociferous in developing states,[8] where an independent political future was just beginning. Malaysia was fully part of these trends. There, the imperative of nation-building colored campus initiatives and debates; the launch of a new campus signaled the migration of intellectual production from cloistered Singapore, and the uneasy balance among campuses mirrored the fragility of the federation. All the while, the scope and complexity of local higher education were growing, obviating study abroad for even the brightest (though oddly, it was then more expensive to educate students locally[9]),

those over age 50) through 1969; among students, self-identified "hawks" outnumbered "doves" as late as 1967. The latter were losing steam by the fall of 1969, but then student mobilization against the war reached record levels when the United States entered Cambodia in May 1970. Seymour Martin Lipset, "Youth and Politics," in *Contemporary Social Problems*, 3rd ed., ed. Robert K. Merton and Robert Nisbet (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 763–70.

[4] James W. Clarke and Joseph Egan, "Social and Political Dimensions of Campus Protest Activity," *Journal of Politics* 34,2 (1972): 505.

[5] Joseph Fischer, "The University Student in South and South-East Asia," *Minerva* 2,1 (1963): 40.

[6] Frank Parkin, "Adolescent Status and Student Politics," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5,1 (1970): 147.

[7] Brian Salter, "Explanations of Student Unrest: An Exercise in Devaluation," *British Journal of Sociology* 24,3 (1973): 329.

[8] David H. Kamens, "'Statist' Ideology, National and Political Control of Education, and Youth Protest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 27,4 (1983): 564.

[9] The federation government spent "no less than $5,000" annually to educate a student at UM, versus $4,000 a year to send her overseas. "Be Loyal to King, Students Told," *Straits Times*, August 17, 1961.

but also repositioning students in society as the university campus became larger and more diverse.

In this era, context was key: we begin with the shifting landscape of higher education and of the Malayan polity broadly. Next, we turn to students' own developing conceptualization of how local students (English-educated or otherwise) fit within the polity and within a global order of students. In some ways, this identity category was especially well-suited for unity, hence students' real angst when Malaysia and Singapore parted ways. Throughout, students staked out their ground, recognizing their unique place vis-à-vis a new political elite, their functions in society, and their potential amid a global wave of similarly situated counterparts who also mobilized *as* students, and as only students could. At the same time, fault lines among undergraduates, particularly between those seeking a more Malay-oriented campus and society and those preferring otherwise—most apparent in struggles over language—grew more clear and volatile. Students not only sought to define and preserve their niche within the polity, but struggled increasingly stridently to defend specific positions on campus as nationalist-era unity and relative homogeneity faded.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The institutional landscape of higher education changed radically in the first decade of Malayan independence. The University of Malaya was transformed, more for political than educational reasons. The university expanded, split in two, then kept growing in scope and student population. These growing numbers still represented only a small proportion of the overall population—in 1966, only .9 percent of secondary-school students matriculated.[10] Moreover, Malays remained a minority at UM: by 1968, they constituted half the national population, but only a quarter of the university's student body. The English-language curriculum and rural Malays' lesser access to secondary education still impeded equity.[11] For now, the atmosphere remained largely friendly, but communal cleavages deepened as the 1960s wore on and student associational life developed.

The Bifurcation of UM

In 1957, a commission under R. S. Aitken revived longstanding plans for a UM campus on the peninsula. The earlier Carr-Saunders report, which advocated establishing a university in Malaya, had initially proposed a site in Johor Bahru, at the southern tip of the peninsula. It vetoed Kuala Lumpur as "essentially an administrative centre dominated by Government ... [where] the University might appear to be, even if it were not, only another department of Government."[12] On the other hand, it deemed Singapore too atypical, allowing one too readily to "forget" Malaya. However, given their expectation that a second university would be needed soon enough, anyway, and finding academics and medical staff reluctant to leave

[10] S. Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity in the University of Malaya" (BEc academic exercise, Universiti Malaya, 1968), pp. 40–41.

[11] Cynthia H. Enloe, "Issues and Integration in Malaysia," *Pacific Affairs* 41,3 (1968): 379–80.

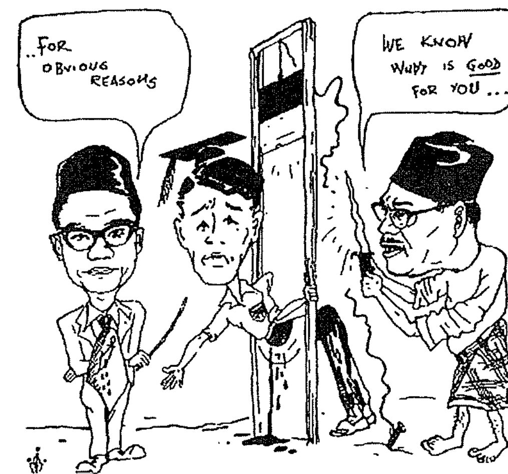
[12] Alexander Carr-Saunders et al., *Report of the Commission on University Education in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, Federation of Malaya, [1948]), p. 83.

Singapore, the Joint Committee of the Governments of Singapore and the Federation decided in March 1954 to abandon the site already purchased at Johor Bahru.[13] They instead launched the university in Singapore, then acquired a second site at Petaling Jaya, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.[14]

The question remained of how to structure the two campuses. The authorities decided on two largely autonomous, equal divisions, offering complementary courses and under a single vice chancellor, but each with its own principal. Legislation to that end came into effect January 15, 1959, although the Kuala Lumpur campus (University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, UMKL) had already started to take shape as of 1957.[15] UMKL got off to a rocky start, with insufficient lecturers, facilities, and students to support all the faculties planned. The student union decried university authorities' relegating first-year arts faculty students to such "appalling conditions"; those students were returned to Singapore in 1958. The campus restarted with just a faculty of engineering.[16]

Student anxieties simmered regarding the contours and administration of the bifurcated institution.[17] A University of Malaya Student Union (UMSU) memorandum to the Joint Constitutional Committee on UM, while plans were being drafted, avowed, "There should be no discrimination whatsoever as regards race, nationality, class, religion, or political belief, but the qualification for admission or award be based solely on academic merit." UMSU insisted most keenly on a united, autonomous student union, since the union was "an important training ground in administration—a very important aspect of University education ... which distinguishes a University from a tutorial college." Administrative autonomy would help ensure "as sound and as useful a training as possible."[18]

The Joint Committee (minus a dissenting minority) decided to reject UMSU's recommendations, with which the university's council, senate, and graduate societies also agreed, and accede instead to the federation government's preference for two separate student unions. Critics blasted the decision as "a threat to student unity" that "strikes at the root of the democratic rights of students of University status to freely organize and govern themselves."[19] UMSU (rather grandiosely) adjudged its own division to be "the most shortsighted and retrograde step in the development of a full-fledged Malaysian nation."[20] Absent any "concrete reasons" from the federation leadership for rejecting a single union, and given continuing mistrust between the two governments, students faulted "political prejudices."[21] The Federal Legislative Council officially divided the union in October 1958, with Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman (a.k.a. "the Tunku") declaring that structure less "cumbersome."[22] The UMKL Student Union was duly launched in 1959.



The Sacrifice.

"Students Oppose Split," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1958, p. 1

The call for unity entwined with demands for academic freedom and autonomy. UMSU president Anthony Lazarus rebuked the Tunku, who could "so complacently trample on the sacred cornerstones of democracy and University autonomy" by invoking his government's financial stake.[23] A *Malayan Undergrad* cover story stoutly accused the Malayan government (and the acquiescent Singapore legislative assembly) of "crucify[ing] student unity to gratify personal pride," trying to make UMSU "subservient to the whims and fancies of the politicians," "collaborating with the British Colonial policy of divide et impera," and "sowing the seeds of distrust and suspicion in the minds of the students from both territories." The government showed "moral cowardice," "intellectual dishonesty," and "colossal ignorance of international student movements."[24] Just in case the message were still unclear, an accompanying political cartoon pictured a student sliced in two on a guillotine.[25] On a practical level, critics noted, the unions' sizes would be disproportionate and Malayan students would have duplicate representation in international bodies.[26]

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[13] Alexander Oppenheim, A000220/08, reel 7, September 18, 1982.

[14] R. S. Aitken et al., "Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the University of Malaya, 1957" (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 10.

[15] Ahmad Ibrahim, "Higher Education in Malaya," *Bulletin of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia* VII,1 (1972): 100; and Josef Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics: A Preliminary Comparative Inquiry," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1,1 (1970): 11.

[16] "U.M.S.U. Disapproves Conditions in K.L.," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 15, 1958, p. 1; "What Price Glory?," *Malayan Undergrad*, April 3, 1958, p. 1; and Alexander Oppenheim, A000220/08, reel 7, September 18, 1982.

[17] "Govt. Accused of 'Infringement' of Varsity Freedom," *Straits Times*, April 9, 1958.

[18] "UMSU Memorandum Requests Constitutional Safeguards," *Malayan Undergrad*, June 1958, p. 1.

[19] "'One Union' Call by Varsity Students," *Straits Times*, September 7, 1958. See also Chiang Hai Ding, "Why Varsity Grads are Fighting for Singapore Union," *Straits Times*, November 8, 1958, p. 8; S. Kumarapathy, "The Clarion Call" (editorial), *Malayan Undergrad*, July 1958, p. 4; and "UMSU May be Split: Blow to Student Unity," *Malayan Undergrad*, August 1958, p. 1.

[20] "We Accuse ...," *Malayan Undergrad*, October–November 1958, p. 1.

[21] "Students Oppose Split," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1958, p. 1.

[22] "Tengku Replies to Protest from U Union," *Straits Times*, November 22, 1958.

[23] "U.M.S.U. President Hits Out at Federation Government," *Malayan Undergrad*, October–November 1958, p. 2.

[24] "We Accuse ...," *Malayan Undergrad*, October–November 1958, p. 1.

[25] "The Sacrifice," *Malayan Undergrad* , October–November 1958, p. 2.

[26] "Khir Johari's Bluff," *Malayan Undergrad*, October–November 1958, p. 3.

UMSU even petitioned the (largely ceremonial) Malayan king to intervene, without success.[27] Nor would the authorities even approve a National Union of Students that included the two divisions of UM as well as Nantah, in light of Nantah's discomfiting radicalism.[28]

This arrangement lasted only two years, until UM divided completely into the University of Malaya (still UM) and University of Singapore (SU) in 1962—ironically, just as the two states were plotting to merge.[29] (Peninsular Malayan students continued to enroll at SU, not least in faculties UM still lacked.) The union in Kuala Lumpur took over the name UMSU (officially renamed with its Malay equivalent, Persatuan Mahasiswa Universiti Malaya, three years later), and its counterpart was named the University of Singapore Student Union (USSU).[30] The University Act of 1961 and new UM constitution retained a similar framework as before: UMSU remained self-governing, with an elected students' council from which an executive committee was selected. Union membership was automatic, with each student assessed a modest membership fee and annual subscription fee. This income provided UMSU with a substantial budget, supplemented through both fines for offenses and contracts for the canteen and other student services. The university provided a centrally located union building, which soon became a focal point of student life. The union provided services, such as helping students find housing and administering emergency loans; facilitated formal and informal communication between UM students and administration, government officials, and peers elsewhere; and offered events and information, including political activities.[31] Student societies that met orientation and inclusiveness criteria could affiliate with UMSU. Affiliated organizations received grants from UMSU, supplementing membership fees, subscription income, and donations. The History and Economic societies and Debating Union, for instance, were affiliated; the Malay Language Society was not.[32] As the university grew, so did the union: UMSU expanded rapidly, from 323 members at its founding in 1959 to 7,777 members in 1970. Other student societies flourished, too, tripling in number over the same period.[33] Regardless, UMSU still struggled to draw enough students for a quorum of just a hundred members for its meetings, and in both 1963 and 1968, UMSU expelled Student Council members for missed meetings and negligence.[34] Despite such overall passivity, the minority of student union members zealously embraced an activist mission.

While intended as a residential institution, UM lacked housing, with hostels available only for around 40 percent of students by the late 1960s. What hostels there were were all multiracial—which was highly unusual in Malaysia. Residents could easily attend meetings and demonstrations, as well as social activities, and many developed close friendships with hostelmates. Conditions for the off-campus majority were more mixed. Despite a reasonably active Non-Hostelites' Organisation and the fact that they constituted the largest bloc in the Students' Council, non-hostelites tended to be less engaged in student and campus activities than were those who lived on campus.[35]

By the time he stepped down as vice chancellor of UM in 1965, Sir Alexander Oppenheim felt the universities "had reached a stage where a certain amount of autonomy did exist in [SU and UM]. There was a fair amount of free speech. There was a liberty to express opinions without hindrance."[36] Yet while less severe than in years to come, constraining legislation already impeded students' political engagement. For instance, the Schools (Post-Secondary) Societies Regulations of 1960 authorized the institution's head to dissolve any student society used for "political propaganda detrimental to the interest of the Federation or of the public." Opposition to this law spurred (fruitless) agitation by UMSU and intercampus union PKPM (Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-Pelajar Malaya, National Union of Malayan Students).[37] Moreover, as UMSU leaders had predicted, federation ministers wanted to have influence in admissions decisions, given how disadvantaged they deemed the Malays.[38] And in Singapore, PAP government minister Toh Chin Chye's installation as vice chancellor in 1968 curbed speech among students as well as among staff members. Impatient with the liberal tradition SU had inherited, Toh undercut prevailing academic norms. His appointment revived student protests for academic freedom and university autonomy.[39]

The Struggle over Nanyang University

The controversial Nanyang University (Nantah) gained university status in March 1959. Colonial officials were concerned that educating university students through courses conducted in their mother tongue would have implications for nation-building, while Lee Kuan Yew (who learned Chinese only as an adult) opposed Nantah as a potential font of Chinese-educated opposition. While most analyses suggest the underground MCP (Malayan Communist Party) had less influence on campus than critics predicted, the university never shook the public's association of the MCP with Nantah. Nantah arguably hardened official suspicion of universities, with repercussions also for left-wing students in other institutions.

The Chinese student movement remained energetic but beleaguered as Nantah developed. Middle-school students were detained under the Emergency Regulations every year through 1960, then, after 1960, under subsequent legislation, the Internal

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27 "U.M.S.U. Petitions the Agong," *Malayan Undergrad*, December 1958, p. 1.

28 "The National Union of Students" and "Letter from the Prime Minister," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 1962, p. 5.

29 A. J. Stockwell, "'The Crucible of the Malayan Nation': The University and the Making of a New Malaya, 1938–62," *Modern Asian Studies* 43,5 (2009): 1186.

30 Lee Meng Foon, "The University of Malaya Students' Union—an Evolution of Student Leadership" (BEc thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1971), pp. 7, 10.

31 Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," pp. 13–14; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 21–26.

32 Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 18–19, 24.

33 Lee, "The University of Malaya Students' Union," p. 10.

34 Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 37–38.

35 Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," pp. 14–15.

36 Alexander Oppenheim, A000220/08, reel 8, September 18, 1982.

37 Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 15.

38 Alexander Oppenheim, A000220/08, reel 8, September 18, 1982. Oppenheim, too, had long proposed scholarships and special colleges for Malays.

39 Lam Peng Er, "The Organisational Utility Men: Toh Chin Chye and Lim Kim San," in *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's Old Guard*, ed. Lam Peng Er and Kevin Y. L. Tan (St. Leonard's, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p. 9; Teng Siao See, "The World of the English-Educated in the 1960s and 1970s: An Interview with Koh Tai Ann," *Tangent* 6 (2003), pp. 261–94.

Security Act (ISA)—for example, "mass arrests" in October 1958, fifteen in 1960, and twenty-one each in 1961 and 1962.[40] After 1962, the rate of arrests and expulsions declined in the middle schools, but increased at Nantah, to at least sixteen in 1963 and seventy-five in 1964. That year, the ISA was amended to prevent matriculation of "undesirable" students: applicants to any local university had to apply for a Suitability Certificate (discussed in more detail below) and be vetted as harmless.[41]

The Nanyang University Student Union (NUSU), which developed out of the small Students' Self-Governing Committee in 1958, caused especial consternation—although UMSU promptly approved an interuniversity alliance with its new counterpart[42] and the 1959 Nanyang University Ordinance made NUSU membership automatic for Nanyang students.[43] Also that year, NUSU launched a publications section. It had produced the *University Tribune* since 1957 without a permit. In August 1959 a permit was granted with the proviso that the paper avoid political subjects. Published first just in Chinese, then also in English and Malay, the *Tribune* critiqued the Singapore and federation governments (especially on education and racial policies) and reprinted articles by local leftists and international student organizations. Circulation topped seven thousand, although the paper was banned in the federation after just two months (despite UMSU protests[44]), then in Singapore in February 1963 for purported links with the Barisan Sosialis (Socialist Front) party, which had recently formed out of a split in the PAP.[45]

Government records posit (with dubious reliability) that 30 to 60 percent of NUSU executive-committee members through the mid-1960s were communists or communist supporters, including a majority on the union's five-member presidium.[46] Clearly on the political left, NUSU was powerful, even though only around one-third of Nantah students were politically active.[47] Even Singapore government estimates found half the students in 1960 indifferent to NUSU and communism both, and the other half was judged ideologically mixed.[48]

By 1961, NUSU had twenty-five affiliated student societies. The leftist Social Science Research, Political Science, History, and Geography societies were especially active, organizing both events and publications.[49] The government singled out two of the most prominent society publications as procommunist: the Social Science Research Society's *Social Knowledge*, which saw just three issues, in 1961–62, and

[40] Koh Swe Yong, *Malaysia: 45 Years under the Internal Security Act*, trans. Agnes Khoo (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2004), pp. 123.

[41] Ibid., p. 124.

[42] "Students to Form New Organisation," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 1958, p. 1.

[43] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University and the Dilemmas of Overseas Chinese Education," *China Quarterly* 20 (1964): 113.

[44] "Government Asked to Explain Nantah Ban," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 1959, p. 8.

[45] Ang Poh Kim, "Communist Manipulation of a Chinese Student Body: The Nanyang University Students' Union (1956–1964)" (BA Honours thesis, National University of Singapore, 1983–84), pp. 4, 31, 40–45; Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 46–47.

[46] Ang, "Communist Manipulation," pp. 24–30; Andrew W. Lind, *Nanyang Perspective: Chinese Students in Multiracial Singapore* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1974), pp. 111–12.

[47] Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University," p. 114.

[48] Ang, "Communist Manipulation," pp. 34–40.

[49] Ibid., pp. 45–48.

Political Science, which lasted thirteen issues, starting in 1959.[50] Only the peninsular student-heavy Commerce Society opposed NUSU, claiming its constitution favored left-wing students.[51] In March 1961, the Commerce Society proposed balancing things out by allowing equal (instead of proportional) representation for each college, sparking Nantah's most significant internal scuffle. Defeated, angry commerce students staged a walkout, then a group of them demonstrated at the vice chancellor's office against NUSU's fees and politics two months later. Initially sympathetic, the vice chancellor reversed his stance after NUSU linked up with sixteen student societies and the "constantly and consistently political" Guild of Graduates[52] to demand disciplinary action against the protesters. Within a week, apparently acceding to these demands, Nantah's administration had expelled six commerce students (including the Commerce Society's president) and reprimanded seventeen others.[53]

A much more serious crackdown a few years later was related to the Singapore and Kuala Lumpur governments' jousting for authority, including over Nantah, as the merger between Singapore and Malaya neared.[54] In February 1963's Operation Cold Store, 107 political, labor, and student leaders (including two NUSU vice presidents and a number of Nantah graduates) were arrested for allegedly pursuing a communist state in Singapore and supporting a December 1962 rebellion in Brunei.[55] Negotiated between Lee Kuan Yew and the Tunku, the arrests were "the price for Singapore's independence within Malaysia."[56]

Far from cowing NUSU's members, the arrests pushed the student body even closer to the opposition Barisan Sosialis. Ten of forty-six Barisan candidates in that year's general elections were Nantah alumni, including the head of the Guild of Graduates—a high percentage, especially considering how new the university was. NUSU not only mobilized over five hundred student supporters to help campaign and contributed $5,000,[57] but took a vehemently confrontational stand in its *Union News* (successor to the *University Tribune*), provoking the minister of education.[58] On

[50] Government of Malaysia, "Communism in the Nanyang University," Ministry of Internal Security white paper, 1964, pp. 12–13.

[51] Ibid., pp. 5–8.

[52] Formed in 1959, the guild linked Nantah with the Barisan Sosialis, middle schools, and trade unions. Ibid., pp. 16–18; see also Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University," pp. 115–16.

[53] UKC Report, May/June 1961, TNA:PRO CO 1030/1090; Ang, "Communist Manipulation," pp. 49–51; Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University," pp. 113–14; Government of Malaysia, "Communism in the Nanyang University," pp. 8–10.

[54] Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University," p. 123.

[55] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Indonesia, Malaya, and the North Borneo Crisis," *Asian Survey* 3,4 (1963): 116. Led by socialist politician A. M. Azahari of the Partai Rakyat (People's Party, which had just won nearly half the seats in Brunei's first and only multiparty elections) and backed by Partai Komunis Indonesia, the movement opposed the sultan of Brunei's plans for affiliation—alongside neighboring North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak—in the Federation of Malaysia. Instead, the movement supported the establishment of an independent Kalimantan Utara (North Borneo) that comprised the three states.

[56] T. N. Harper, "Lim Chin Siong and the 'Singapore Story,'" in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History*, ed. Tan Jing Quee and Jomo K. S. (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 2001), p. 41.

[57] Van der Kroef, "Indonesia, Malaya, and the North Borneo Crisis," pp. 116–18; Government of Malaysia, "Communism in the Nanyang University," p. 16.

[58] Lim Hock Siew, February 2, 2006, and A000215, reel 10, August 10, 1983.

the orders of the Malaysian minister of internal security, five days after the Barisan's defeat in September 1963, truckloads of Singapore and Malaysian police and security forces raided Nantah and arrested five NUSU leaders. In darkness, hundreds of their classmates clashed with the officers; four students were injured as they tried to keep the police on the grounds until their legal adviser, David Marshall, arrived.[59] Six graduates active in the guild (three of them unsuccessful Barisan candidates) were detained simultaneously elsewhere. Tan Lark Sye, who had "provided overt financial support" for all the Nantah graduates contesting for Barisan, lost his citizenship, on charges of collaboration with antinational communists.[60]

NUSU staged a protest the following morning, September 28, on behalf of their classmates and Tan, then began a three-day strike a week later, joined on campus by scores of busloads and truckloads of Singapore Association of Trade Unions (SATU) members. (The students reciprocated when 100,000 SATU members went on strike two days later.) Around 1,200 students participated in a class boycott, joined by university staff (who were members of the Singapore General Employees' Union) who refused to open classroom doors, even though they were contractually barred from political activity. On October 7, as the government warned of mounting communist agitation, at least five hundred Nantah students demonstrated outside city hall, while a delegation inside handed a petition to Deputy Prime Minister Toh Chin Chye. The police dispersed the protesters, making several arrests. Ultimately, over forty more Nantah students were arrested in one massive sweep, then dozens more Nantah staff and students were taken into custody, most under the ISA, as the police "mopping up" activities dribbled on through the following year.[61] One of the detained Barisan leaders, former UM activist Lim Hock Siew, estimates that fully half of his prison mates were university graduates or undergraduates.[62]

The Malaysian government's alarmist 1964 white paper on these events, "Communism in the Nanyang University," asserts that the MCP turned to Nantah after its above-ground front organizations were devastated in 1956. Capitalizing on a blend of "social frustration, cultural chauvinism, and racial appeal," the party drew students into a united front with workers, petty bourgeoisie, and other sympathizers.[63] Other tertiary students were less involved, although students at UM, SU, and Singapore Polytechnic denounced the crackdown.[64]

[59] "Student Arrests in Nanyang," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 1963, p. 5.

[60] Sai Siew Min and Huang Jianli, "The 'Chinese-Educated' Political Vanguards: Ong Pang Boon, Lee Khoon Choy, and Jeuk Yeun Thong," in *Lee's Lieutenants*, ed. Lam Peng Er et al., p. 147.

[61] Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 46, January 23, 1986; Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University," pp. 108, 118–23; Government of Malaysia, "Communism in the Nanyang University," pp. 19, 29; Ang, "Communist Manipulation," pp. 78–84; Sai and Huang, "The 'Chinese-Educated' Political Vanguards," pp. 147–48; Koh Swe Yong, *Malaysia: 45 Years under the Internal Security Act*, trans. Agnes Khoo (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2004), pp. 41–42, 294–96; "Nanyang Students Want Tan to Stay," *Straits Times*, September 29, 1963, p. 1.

[62] Lim Hock Siew, February 2, 2006, and A000215, reel 10, August 10, 1983.

[63] Government of Malaysia, "Communism in the Nanyang University," pp. 1–3.

[64] "'Don't Banish Students' Plea to S'pore Govt.," *Straits Times*, November 24, 1966, p. 13; "'Full Sympathy' for Nanyang," *Straits Times*, December 3, 1966, p. 10; Huang Jianli, "Positioning the Student Political Activism of Singapore: Articulation, Contestation, and Omission," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7,3 (2006): 407.

Potential communist infiltration was not the only problem plaguing the young Nantah, even as enrollments swelled. The university suffered from a lack of planning and tradition, low staff morale, spats with financial backers, the awarding of unaccredited academic degrees (which preclude graduates from securing careers in government or the civil service), and facilities and living conditions far below the standard at UM or SU.[65] Moreover, although Nantah added a College of Graduate Studies in 1970 with courses in Asian studies, mathematics, natural science, and business, the university drifted ever farther from its goal of educating Chinese from across the region. The percentage of students from outside Singapore dropped from 61 percent in 1961 (just over half of them from Malaya) to 38 percent in 1967 and then to 15 percent in 1970. A fair proportion of the non-Singaporeans were from China rather than Southeast Asia—one-eighth of all students in 1969.[66] The Singapore government pondered ways both to improve quality and to assert control. Students lambasted early proposals as intended more to anglicize the institution than to boost standards, yet they did want SU to recognize their coursework and, of course, wanted the civil service to recognize their degrees.[67] S. L. Prescott's 1959 Nanyang University Commission found "a depressing lack of scholarly endeavour and investigation" at Nantah; bemoaned the poor planning, administration, and facilities; and recommended reorganizing Nantah. The ministry of education duly convened a committee, chaired by Gwee Ah Leng. Its findings, published in 1960, echoed those of the Prescott Commission.[68]

Although reorganization began in 1962, with establishment of a broad, new university council under the Nanyang University Ordinance,[69] the university continued to reject government aid, fearing strings. In June 1964, Nantah finally reached an agreement with the Singapore government: the latter would provide supervised assistance, recognize Nantah degrees, and allow education to continue in Chinese, in exchange for a thorough restructuring of the university's administration and student affairs. Students responded with mass protests, resulting in arrests and the suspension of NUSU.[70] Capping off these efforts was a 1965 Curriculum Review Committee, headed by Wang Gungwu. The committee was to review and revise Nantah's courses of study, but also offered broad advice for strengthening the institution.[71] Further student protests ensued, along with petitions to the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce from the Ngee Ann College Students' Union, Singapore Polytechnic Political Society, and SU Socialist Club.[72] But by the late 1960s, "this former volcano of racialist subversion [had] quite suddenly lost its fire."[73]

[65] Lind, *Nanyang Perspective*, pp. 106–8.

[66] Ibid., pp. 127–28, 143–44, 149.

[67] Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University," p. 105.

[68] Ibid., pp. 105–6; Ang, "Communist Manipulation," pp. 52–56.

[69] Van der Kroef, "Nanyang University," p. 109.

[70] Ibid., pp. 110–11; Ang, "Communist Manipulation," pp. 84–86.

[71] Lind, *Nanyang Perspective*, pp. 113–18.

[72] The Ngee Ann College Students' Union, Singapore Polytechnic Political Society, and SU Socialist Club collaborated again against the 1966 Thong Saw Pak Report on Ngee Ann Polytechnic, which declined to recommend the school for university status. After demonstrating at city hall and attempting (unsuccessfully) to form a National Student Action Front to unite Singapore's Chinese schools across levels, Ngee Ann students boycotted their examinations and held a "camp-in," then marched to city hall. Ten were arrested and thirty injured in a scuffle with police. Students then barricaded themselves on campus for over three

By then, Nantah's largely middle-class, locally born students were complaining of an individualistic, apathetic, ivory-towerish, and competitive atmosphere on campus.[74] Singapore's political environment changed particularly after separation from Malaysia in 1965. After having endured years of repression and developed a new, explicitly multiculturalist policy, Nantah students still exhibited cultural pride, but also substantial tolerance toward others. Interest in communism had petered out; most Nantah students were "placid and conformist" compared with their peers across Southeast Asia.[75]

The merger of Nantah and SU as the National University of Singapore in 1980 signaled the death of a unique institution. For Nantah graduates, "the sense of loss is not only over the demise of the University, but also the end of the cultural ambition of business tycoons and hawkers and dance hostesses alike: the ambition of cultural citizenship, of community identity, of historical depth and transnational inspirations including a vision for a socialist future."[76] At stake, too, were dilemmas concerned with national identity, captured in Nanyang students' pleas that the Singapore government "no longer [views] our national education systems as chauvinistic manifestations, but as legitimate rights of the various national groups."[77] Nantah's students' struggles were in many ways emblematic of the pressures facing a new state: they had to deal with competing visions of a national identity, balance claims against resources, and accommodate cultural and political aspirations. As we shall see, the concatenation of ideological and ethnolinguistic alignments and contests remained among the persistent themes in Malaysian politics.

STUDENTS AND DEVELOPING POSTCOLONIAL POLITICS

Dynamics at UM, too, underscored the enduring conundrums of nationalism. Contests over political institutions and culture, on campus and off, continued to challenge the boundaries of both state and nation. Officials initially largely welcomed students' contributions to these debates. By the mid-1960s, though, as political elites settled in, anticolonial alliances receded, and the Emergency initiated a generalized assault on the Left, students' voices began to be marginalized.

One student leader of the early 1960s estimates that only around 5 percent of his peers were politically active, and most of the activists, as before, were from the medical or arts faculties.[78] The largest student societies tended to be dominated by

weeks (helped by sixty expelled Nantah students, led by Lee Ban Chen) before riot police ousted them. Afterward 131 students were detained and 81 expelled, and the student union was dissolved. Huang, "Positioning Student Political Activism," pp. 407–8; Dennis Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse* (Singapore: Times, 1986), p. 298; Asia Forum on Human Rights, *The State of Human Rights in Malaysia: A Collection of Documents Relating to Political Detainees, Political Banishees and Their Struggles and Also to the Laws and Procedures* (Hong Kong: AFHR, n.d.), p. 120.

[73] Lind, *Nanyang Perspective*, p. 276.

[74] Ibid., pp. 159, 236–38.

[75] Ibid., pp. 276–81.

[76] Yao Souchou, "All Quiet on Jurong Road: Nanyang University and Radical Vision in Singapore," in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, ed. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), p. 186.

[77] "The Chinese Schools," *Fajar* III,8 (December 1961): 1–2.

[78] Interview with Michael Fernandez, July 25, 2006.

freshmen, whose interest rarely lasted.[79] Record turnout of nearly 70 percent in the 1958 campus elections seemed a "sign predicting the eventual crucifixion of students' apathy in the face of challenges of various nature thrust upon the student body."[80] It was not. Even a talk on "Undergraduates in Politics," organized by the Law Society in 1963, had "poor turnout." The speaker's admonition that "there was no need for students in the University to waste their opportunities," and that UMSU should focus solely on issues of student welfare[81] was perhaps unnecessary. Concerned students wondered if their cohort "can ever hope to wear the mantle of leadership in a country that is progressing to complete nationhood."[82]

However disinclined the majority was to take action, students could not escape the surrounding political ferment. Causes that rallied supporters ranged from economics, to crises of idealism, to Western-inspired "yellow culture"—the enervating moral decay that comes of bad films, literature, and cultural practices.[83] The Socialist Club, for instance, spent the late 1950s and early 1960s lambasting the governments of Tunku Abdul Rahman and Lee Kuan Yew, in turn, for their inadequacies, and hosted political leaders of all stripes on campus. Other student groups, too, organized political symposia and demonstrations, issued earnest press statements and articles, and liaised with political parties, both in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. For instance, a new, nonpartisan University Political Club was announced at UM Singapore in late 1959 to promote study, discussion, and publishing on political theory and current affairs.[84] At UMKL, five student organizations veered toward matters political: the Debating Union, Historical Society, Economics Society, UMSU, and Malay Language Society.

Despite these alternatives, the Socialist Club remained a hub in Singapore through the mid-1960s. The club was small, with no more than a hundred members and an active core of just twenty or thirty individuals in the early 1960s. However, Socialist Club debates on (for example) the merger with Malaya, self-government, and language and citizenship policies, drew large crowds of students and members of the public.[85] Club alumni remained close, as well, from their berths in academe, unions, and professions. While reliant largely on a few volunteers, the publication *Fajar*, too, maintained a healthy circulation of around 1,500, with around half its subscribers being at Nantah or Singapore Polytechnic.[86] The Socialist Club and UMSU leadership still tended to overlap. Tan Jing Quee, for instance, active in the Socialist Club throughout his time at UM, was elected to the student council in 1962 (despite Lee Kuan Yew's warning—"totally nonsense," Tan insists—that he was on the brink of capture by procommunists).[87] Socialist Club members joined other

[79] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 35.

[80] "Record Polls in General Elections," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1958, p. 8.

[81] G. G. Thompson, quoted in S. Gopinathan, "Politics Not for Students," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 1963, p. 5.

[82] S. Kumarapathy, "The Clarion Call," *Malayan Undergrad*, July 1958, p. 4.

[83] Yao, "All Quiet on Jurong Road," p. 179.

[84] "New Political Club to be Formed," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 1959, p. 1.

[85] Interview with Tommy Koh, A002021/10, reel 4, July 24, 1998.

[86] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006; Tommy Koh, A002021/10, reel 4, July 24, 1998.

[87] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006, and personal communication (via email), August 11, 2007.

organizations, as well. For example, his concern for good works and the "underdog" drew Michael Fernandez to both the Socialist Club and the apolitical Catholic Students' Society.[88]

Meanwhile, in Kuala Lumpur, the Debating Society organized UM's first political symposium—on "Malaysia," featuring politicians Lee Kuan Yew, Khir Johari, Tan Chee Khoon, and Lim Kean Siew—in early 1963. Other symposia followed, for example, on national security, the Malaysian split, and the Malaysian Solidarity Convention, totaling sixteen events in 1965–66 alone, including a talk on American Asia policy by US president Richard Nixon. The club then fell dormant for two years. The History Society likewise organized seminars on socialism, the war in Vietnam, the Philippine claim to Sabah, the Middle East, and other topics, peaking in 1964. The Economics Society's events covered the economic effects of merger and trade unionism, for instance, including 1967's week-long Great Economic Debates. Malay Language Society talks and symposia dealt with such topics as corruption, the Middle East, language, and rural development. And UMSU, too, organized explicitly political talks through its leadership training and freshman orientation programs, complementing discussions within the Student Council on proposals for a Chinese university in Malaysia, riots in Penang, corruption, land rights, and more.[89]

International Dimensions

Malaysian students lagged behind many postcolonial counterparts: given Malaysia's peaceful, structured transition from colonial rule, its citizens' political engagement only escalated a decade after independence rather than in the course of nationalist struggles. Key to this eventual surge were a mix of domestic and external events, from Singapore's separation from the federation and the ouster of Indonesia's Soekarno, both in 1965, to student protests elsewhere, in both Asia and the West.[90] A relatively free press—both English-language and vernacular, on campus and off—was also key. And a sense of shared postcolonialism appealed to students' idealism and kept developments in places like Algeria, South Africa, and the Congo on these students' agendas. *Fajar* even ran a special issue on Patrice Lumumba, the Congo's first democratically elected prime minister, who was executed—apparently on Belgian orders[91]—in 1961. Anti-imperialism motivated Socialist Club support for Japan's Zengakuren, too; visiting Japanese students later informed the club that it was the *only* one to telegram encouragement![92] In the same spirit, USSU sent cables condemning the US arms blockade in Cuba to US president John Kennedy, UN Secretary-General U Thant, and the Federation of Students in Cuba.[93]

[88] Interview with Michael Fernandez, July 25, 2006.

[89] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 6–9.

[90] Muhammad Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa Menggugat: Suatu Analisa Dan Peninjauan Dari Dalam Terhadap Kegiatan Mahasiswa-Mahasiswa Negeri Ini* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1973), pp. 43–44.

[91] Following the findings of a Belgian commission of inquiry, Belgium apologized to the Congo in 2002 for its role in Lumumba's death. "Lumumba's Son Hails Belgian Apology," *BBC News*, February 6, 2002.

[92] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006.

[93] "USSU Statement on the Cuban Blockade," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 1962, p. 1.

Students continued to study and travel overseas, as well. For instance, the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY) sponsored three Socialist Club members to attend its December 1961 seminar in Mysore, India. (At first the students hesitated to accept the invitation, since the PAP youth wing was also invited, but ultimately they went and participated actively.[94]) The following year, Tan Jing Quee joined over six thousand youths from over sixty countries at the IUSY's executive committee meeting and "work camp" in Copenhagen. He introduced a resolution (which passed) against the Malaysian merger scheme, while marveling at how "playful" many delegates from elsewhere were, and how diverse their causes.[95] Other students maintained a Malaysian activist identity and network while studying abroad. The Federation of United Kingdom and Eire Malaysian and Singaporean Student Organizations (FUEMSSO), for example, launched in 1963, organized cultural, social, and political events for members across the UK. And still other students traveled from elsewhere to Malaysia, such as visitors in 1966 from the Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia (Indonesian Students Action Front, KAMI), who UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) believed had encouraged opposition to 1967's National Language Bill at several heavily Malay colleges.[96]

Texts reflecting an international experience profoundly influenced students and other activists, many of them quite well-read. Works by and about Gandhi and Nehru, for instance; sympathetic writings on China and Mao (such as Edgar Snow's 1936 *Red Star over China*); and left-leaning novelists, such as Jack London, were particularly important to many Malayan leftists. Still, as before, few undergraduates read or studied starkly political tracts, although they could obtain most, with some limitations.[97] Specifically, "restricted access" was first instituted at the SU library in the 1960s, requiring that borrowers have written permission to access certain materials. Similarly, at UM students needed their department head's clearance to access any of about a hundred proscribed books, although in 1968 the vice chancellor at least released UM's librarian from having to submit those students' names to the ministry of home affairs.[98]

Most momentous in this period, though, was the war in Vietnam. While the *Fajar* trial in 1954 broadcast the local significance of the hostilities, Vietnam War-oriented activism only really took off at UM and (less prominently) among other local activists with protests over the bombings at Hanoi-Haiphong in mid-1966.[99] That July, UMSU charged the United States with escalating the war and risking Soviet entry into the conflict, upheld the Vietnamese people's right to self-determination, and asked the Malaysian government not to provide recreational facilities to American military personnel serving in Vietnam. Later that month, police intercepted a UM demonstration, stopping participants en route to the US embassy and escorting them to the police station; they were released with a warning. Only

[94] Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 11–12, May 25, 1981.

[95] "Work Camp at Copenhagen," *Fajar* 4,5 (August 1962): 5; Tan Jing Quee, "Notes on the IUSY International Camp," *Fajar* 4,6 (September–October 1963): 8, 10; and interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006.

[96] "Indonesian Influence among Malay Students?" *Rocket* 2,4 (April 1967): 6.

[97] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006; and interview with Michael Fernandez, July 25, 2006.

[98] Interview with Manijeh Namazie, February 2, 2006; *Malay Mail*, October 26, 1968.

[99] Interview with Mano Maniam, March 25, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

about thirty demonstrators reached the embassy: they rallied, submitted a memorandum, then dispersed. The vernacular press, radio, and television made much of the incident, but not the pro-regime, English-medium *Straits Times*.[100] (Later that year, students challenged the *Straits Times*'s skewed coverage and dismissive attitude, burning copies of the paper on campus.) Subsequent protests ranged from burning US President Lyndon Johnson in effigy to campus exhibitions of Vietnam War-related photos, speeches, and songs in 1967 and 1968.[101] We return to these events in the next chapter.

Writing the Nation

In the years after independence, questions of nation-building, investigated through language, literature, and cultural production, still preoccupied undergraduates now keen to align their newfound statehood with a shared identity.[102] First, as the boundaries of university and polity changed, questions about whom the students represented, and in what language they ought to speak, smoldered and occasionally sparked. The place of the English-educated—especially those in that category who "held themselves aloof as members of a Western-educated group"[103]—remained ambiguous. More broadly, Malays' increasingly aggressive fight for full inclusion in Malaysian modernity and Chinese Malaysians' struggle for consideration as fully vested co-nationals reverberated at the intersection of class, experience, and language.

Ismail Hussein, an early product of UM's literary scene, first as a student in the 1950s and then as a staff member, marveled in 1974 at "the alienation of the new modern literature of the modern literary elite from the huge masses of the peasantry that make up the population of the region." He wondered "what these people are going to read as they emerge from illiteracy ... [and] are they going to be able to participate actively, with confidence and on their own terms in the new culture?"[104] Particularly as merger loomed, many students grappled not just with learning Malay, but with situating it in a broader culture. For instance, the Socialist Club targeted an August 1959 Seminar on the National Language mainly at the English-educated, mulling (in English) ways to foster national identity and develop Malay language.[105] Three years later, the SU Malay Society organized a similar seminar, together with other cultural and literary bodies. Stippled with debates, elocution contests, and poetry readings, the week-long fest was to "bring together a glittering congregation of Malay scholars and other well known personalities from Singapore and Malaya" in order to promote Malay culture and expedite implementation of

[100] *Straits Times*, July 22, 1966; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 47–48; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 12.

[101] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 13–14; Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," pp. 16–17.

[102] For instance, Kernial Singh, "Unity and Diversity in Malaya," *Malayan Undergrad*, May 1958, p. 7.

[103] Ismail Hussein, *Statements on Malay Language and Culture* (Bangi: Institut Bahasa, Kesusasteraan dan Kebudayaan Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1989), p. 27.

[104] Ibid., p. 28.

[105] "The National Language Seminar," *Fajar* II,3 (September 1959): 5; Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 34–35.

Malay as the national language.[106] As the federation splintered and as the 1960s wore on, questions of whose culture and language should predominate grew increasingly contentious.

Undergraduates were widely expected to join these debates. Singapore's minister for culture, S. Rajaratnam, chided students in 1959 for failing intellectually "to meet the challenge of creating a Malayan culture," deeming their literary efforts prolific, but linguistically un-Malayan.[107] The last issue of *New Cauldron* (August 1960) closed by invoking government leaders' assertion of UM's centrality in a Malayan cultural project. The final editorial of the shorter-lived undergraduate literary magazine *Write* (1957–58), entitled "Towards a Malayan Culture?," was similarly inclined.[108] Throughout, UM and SU remained nodes for nationalist literary production, particularly of poetry. Indeed, through the early 1980s, local poetry was still predominantly "university verse," by students and graduates of UM or SU, most connected with the department of English.[109] Ironically, it was British SU lecturer D. J. Enright who especially encouraged student poets of the 1960s, urging them to recount distinctly local experiences in their poetry, even if in English.[110] Outlets included the SU Literary Society's *Focus*, then *Poetry Singapore* in the 1960s, and well-attended Literary Society poetry and music nights.[111] Yet these writers became increasingly alert to tensions between upholding "a literary tradition of artistic autonomy" and mere "banner-carrying or self-conscious flag-waving."[112]

The campus remained a hub for less-literary publishing, as well, facilitated by UMSU's prized mimeograph machine, engine of the student press. Publications by and for students faced only loose regulations; those for outside circulation required government permits. Only three student publications had permits to circulate outside campus (*Mahasiswa Negara*, *Varsity*, and *Suara Mahasiswa*), although no others seem to have been denied.[113] The most prominent among these publications was *Mahasiswa Negara*, which replaced *Malayan Undergrad* (which continued in Singapore) as the union's official organ in Kuala Lumpur as of October 1959, to plaudits from both the vice chancellor and the prime minister. UMSU president Azizan Ariffin enthused in the inaugural issue, "On a campus where there is an accepted complacency and apathy, the advent of the students' press signifies a progressive step—the realisation of one important aspect of extra-curricular student activities in the University."[114] Also significant were UMSU's weekly *Berita Campus* and the Malay Language Society's *Suara Mahasiswa*, but almost every student organization had at least a newsletter. Moreover, even the UMSU annual, *Varsity*, and residential colleges' magazines carried explicitly political articles. Most

[106] "Seminar on National Language and Culture," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 1962, p. 1.

[107] "Cultural Lead Wanting," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 1959, p. 1.

[108] Koh Tai Ann, "Singapore Writing in English: The Literary Tradition and Cultural Identity," in *Essays on Literature and Society in Southeast Asia: Political and Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Tham Seong Chee (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981), pp. 162–63.

[109] Ibid., pp. 177–78.

[110] Among those he mentored was future Malaysian poet laureate Muhammad Haji Salleh. Muhammad Haji Salleh, "A Quid of Betel," *Mānoa* 18,1 (2006): 50.

[111] Koh, "Singapore Writing in English," pp. 169–72.

[112] Ibid., p. 164.

[113] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 30–32.

[114] "1st. Issue of Our Union Newspaper," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 1959, p. 1.

independent, however, were renegade mimeographed pamphlets that appeared mysteriously (and illegally, per the vice chancellor) on campus. Among these were two 1967 issues of *Truth*, edited by "Progressive Students of the University of Malaya," one on racial discrimination (always a heated issue in Malaysia) at the university and the other targeted at a visit by US Vice President Hubert Humphrey. In another example, an issue of *Land* focused on the cause (detailed in chapter 4) of squatter leader Hamid Tuah.[115] In 1970, the Home Affairs Ministry launched, but then dropped, an investigation into documents with the same byline that pressed for a boycott of campus polls and unity with the masses against "fascism."[116]

The proliferation of publications raised issues of press freedom, representation, and voice. Editorial policies were relatively relaxed—students controlled all the editorial boards, and the editors of *Mahasiswa Negara*, for instance, promised they would "not suppress a contribution because of subject matter unless it violates the law of the country"[117]—but differences of opinion flared up periodically. The culprit was neither the state, as in 1954, nor university administration, which acted only against unsigned pamphlets, but factions among students themselves. For instance, a group of SU students rebuked the editorial board of *Malayan Undergrad* in June 1962 for having published an editorial by recent graduate Tommy Koh on ragging and the orientation process, which drew adverse outside publicity.[118] At stake was whether the paper's editorial must represent the opinion of the Student Council. (The title "Official Organ of the University of Malaya Students' Union" had been removed some time before from the masthead.) Denying any such requirement and insisting it was "free to express its views without any direction or control," the editorial board, already facing broader tensions in the student council, voted unanimously to resign.[119] Similarly, the student council in Kuala Lumpur temporarily withdrew from circulation an October 1967 edition of *Mahasiswa Negara* that covered an inquiry into the campus canteen contract, while a subset within UMSU decried a satire on the Tunku and Lee Kuan Yew published in the 1965 edition of *Varsity* as antinational and unrepresentative of the union's views.[120]

Cognate issues of voice and authenticity reverberated among the academic staff, as well, especially as Malaysian staff came to outnumber expatriates by the early 1960s. The crucial such case, underscoring the nexus of language, legitimacy, and academic freedom, was the "Enright Affair." Visiting English professor D. J. Enright arrived in Singapore amid a sweeping assault on "yellow culture" by the newly installed, "schoolmistressy" PAP.[121] He began his November 1960 inaugural lecture

[115] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 5, 10–11, 27–28, 32–34.

[116] *Malay Mail*, July 4 and 6, 1970; *Straits Times*, July 8, 1970.

[117] "A Statement of Purpose," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 1959, p. 1.

[118] Koh also continued to write for *Fajar*, including a lengthy piece "to call attention to the intellectual dishonesty, and to detect the self-induced blind spots in the thought processes" of fellow contributors. He faulted the magazine for carrying "only views which coincide with those of the editors," including ones "whose statements of facts are manifestly untrue." The editorial board disputed Koh's charges, insisting that they had never rejected an article for presenting views different from their own. "A Critique of *Fajar*" and "The Editorial Board Replies ..." *Fajar* IV,6 (September–October 1963): 5–7.

[119] *Malayan Undergrad*, June 22, 1962, pp. 1, 4, 8.

[120] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 29–30, 45.

[121] D. J. Enright, *Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), pp. 122–23.

"with a few topical remarks on culture, its equivocal nature, and the acquisition or creation of it."[122] For that apparent criticism of the Singapore government's cultural policies—which even a student sympathetic to his argument found "condescending, racist and provocative"[123]—as well as for earlier remarks in *Malayan Undergrad*, Enright was chastised by both the *Straits Times* and the ministry of labour and law, and warned to stay out of local politics or risk deportation.[124] To Enright's surprise, this "unprecedented rebuke" became a cause célèbre, earning him enduring support and attention from opposition parties, local and international media, and sundry members of the public.[125] UMSU voted overwhelmingly to condemn the government's "attempt to strangle free discussion in the University and to cow an individual into silence for expressing views which do not coincide with the official ones."[126] The government responded with a "dressing down"—delivered, ironically, by former student activist Woodhull, then political secretary to the minister of health—but UMSU stood firm and the "shell-shocked" university authorities did nothing.[127]

By the mid-1960s, the list of violations of university autonomy and academic freedom was lengthening: the challenge to Enright, cancellation of a lecturer's visa for distributing material on Russian literature, removal (then reinstatement after protest) of a local lecturer for his political views, purported cancellation of politically active students' scholarships, and more. Even when few students took concrete action, or when most treated a class boycott as "only a holiday and nothing more,"[128] concern for academic freedom kept stewing. Indeed, the September 1966 issue of *Malayan Undergrad* declared on either side of its masthead (in place of the usual advertisements): "A FREE UNIVERSITY IN A FREE SOCIETY" and "Academic Freedom is Our RIGHT." As we shall see, the issue resurfaced with each subsequent generation.

Singapore: Choosing Sides and Carving Out a Niche

> The face of Mr Lee
> Prime Minister and Stepfather of his people
> Who visited the University
> Stalking through its whitewashed cloisters
> Like a dyspeptic tiger

[122] Ibid., p. 124.

[123] Teng, "The World of the English-Educated," p. 267.

[124] Enright, *Memoirs*, pp. 124–29. The minister berated Enright in a letter (also released to the press): "We have no time for asinine sneers by passing aliens about the futility of 'sarong culture complete with pantun competitions' particularly when it comes from beatnik professors." Quoted in Enright, *Memoirs*, p. 128.

[125] Enright, *Memoirs*, pp. 131–35, 147.

[126] Ibid., p. 130.

[127] Tommy Koh, A002021/10, reel 5, July 24, 1998.

[128] Ai Pee Ram, "Academic Freedom and University Autonomy," *Malayan Undergrad*, March–April 1966, p. 7.

In pursuit of Utility
And the filling of the national belly[129]

The end of the colonial era and Singapore's swerve from self-government, to its merger with Malaya, to its gaining full sovereignty, brought unforeseen changes to campus life and activism. Undergraduates' energies wavered between campus and national levels, marked by a new partisanship, frustration, and uncertainty over the proper scope for engagement. The Socialist Club and, to a lesser extent, the union (UMSU, then USSU) remained the most activist-oriented of student groups, but the field widened as the student body grew larger and more diverse. Whereas up until then an "enlightened and courageous" UMSU could congratulate itself on having maintained an "intransigent stand" against both discrimination and predations by government,[130] so staunch a posture could be problematic.

Perhaps the most buffeted by political winds after 1957 was the Socialist Club. Lim Yew Hock's newly installed, vehemently anticommunist Labour Front government demanded that articles in *Fajar* be approved before publication. The club suspended publication rather than accept censorship, costing the student Left its most effective communicative tool. The students maintained ties with the working class, however, by speaking at strike sites and befriending trade unionists. The vetting requirement was waived as the PAP came to power.[131] As merger debates heated up the next year, "events rather than pure ideology" propelled *Fajar* further left.[132] Around that time, *Fajar* lost its permit to circulate in the federation for violating official conditions and for its "objectionable and Communist-inspired" content.[133] Perhaps not coincidentally, *Fajar* served as a forum for the federation's opposition Socialist Front leaders[134] and openly supported them as the anti-imperialist, anti-communal "spearhead of the socialist movement."[135] Meanwhile, the editors built on alumni connections to cultivate ties with trade unions, collating news on workers and their problems in *Fajar*, and helping to distribute union newsletters among students.[136]

Fajar's leftward drift reflected a wider trend, on and off campus. By late 1960, the Socialist Club's affinity for the PAP was weakening, dampened by the party's continuing colonial influence, use of detention without trial, and acquiescence to the Alliance's capitalist, communal framework.[137] The Tunku's plan for merger, outlined in May 1961, prompted the PAP's most serious factional split to date. A disenchanted faction launched Barisan Sosialis that year. Differentiated by its commitment to

[129] Extract from "Yusoff the Bold," in Enright, *Foreign Devils*, p. 12. The title character is a student who dares reveal to Lee Kuan Yew his intent to become a poet; all his peers "wisely" aspire to teach (then end up becoming administrators).

[130] "Malayan Student Unity," *Malayan Undergrad*, June 1958, p. 4.

[131] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 33–34.

[132] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006.

[133] "Inspired by Reds? That's Slander, Say Fajar Publishers," *Straits Times*, September 17, 1960, p. 6.

[134] For instance, Ahmad Boestamam and N. R. Lolan, "Democracy Raped!!!" (joint press release, Party Rakyat and Labour Party of Malaya), *Fajar* IV,7 (January 1963): 3.

[135] "The Socialist Front in Parliament," *Fajar* II,3 (September 1959), p. 1.

[136] Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 11, May 25, 1981.

[137] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 36–37.

socialism and approaches to industrialization and labor, the Barisan was rooted largely in Singapore's militant unions and Chinese-educated community, no longer connected by shared anticolonialism with Lee Kuan Yew's more heavily anglophone, middle-class base. Meanwhile, the PAP shifted away from radicalism, prioritizing nation-building over socialism and downplaying class struggle to appease elites on the peninsula, where class and race intertwined precariously.[138]

At the time, the Socialist Club was especially close-knit and energetic, dominated by arts students, almost all of them male, but multiracial. Around a half-dozen members lived together in a clubhouse near campus, which provided a ready venue for discussions and meetings and encouraged visits by alumni.[139] Club leaders maintained contact with overseas student unions, local trade unions, and UMSU, as well as Nantah's and Singapore Polytechnic's political science societies,[140] with which the Socialist Club formed a loosely structured Joint Activities Committee (JAC) in 1960, under the inaugural presidency of Tan Jing Quee.[141] The committee met at least monthly, mixing English and Mandarin as needed; previously, the institutions had interacted little, except for sports.[142] The JAC quickly became "a powerful platform for the expression of Socialist views on political developments in Singapore," issuing statements, rallying student sentiment, and plotting a journal, *Bersatu* (United), only to be denied a publication permit.[143] A rough division of labor developed: the Socialist Club focused on international issues and the JAC, domestic.[144]

Yet the Socialist Club was effectively muted by the mid-1960s, particularly after the arrests that decimated NUSU in 1963. Only one issue of *Fajar* came out that year, then the government banned it as a platform for Barisan leaders.[145] After 1963, the club scrambled for a niche in an increasingly PAP-dominated Singapore. Its refusal in 1964 to enroll over a hundred UM students en bloc spurred formation of a rival Democratic Socialist Club.[146] Enjoying a "direct line to the government," the latter was "the campus equivalent of 'Young PAP,'" opening channels between students and government.[147] The club (primarily founding member Koh Tai Ann) produced a

[138] C. Paul Bradley, "Leftist Fissures in Singapore Politics," *Western Political Quarterly* 18,2, Pt. 1 (1965): 292–93, 297–99.

[139] Interview with Michael Fernandez, July 25, 2006, and A000076/20, reel 8, May 25, 1981.

[140] Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 11, 25 May 1981; and interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006.

[141] Singapore students had appealed repeatedly since 1958, but in vain, for approval for a National Union of Singapore Students comprising NUSU and USSU. USSU ultimately allied officially just with the less controversial Polytechnic and Ngee Ann College students' unions. "A Stronger Voice," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1966, p. 4. The JAC linked political clubs, not student unions.

[142] Interview with Michael Fernandez, July 25, 2006, Singapore, and A000076/20, reel 10, May 25, 1981; Tommy Koh, A002021/10, reel 5, July 24, 1998; interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006; and Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," p. 38. Sports *did* bring together the two UM divisions as well as Nantah: the first All-Malaya University Soccer Team, for instance, lost to Indonesia in the late 1950s. Interview with team captain Khoo Kay Kim, March 17, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006.

[145] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 46–47.

[146] Ibid., p. 50.

[147] Interview with Chandra Muzaffar, February 7, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

newsletter, the *Socialist Democrat*, and a journal, *Demos*. Koh served, too, as USSU's publication secretary, working on the union's *Bulletin* and *Singapore Undergrad*. Most importantly, she explains, the "left-of-centre" Democratic Socialist Club and more leftist Socialist Club contested USSU elections "like unofficial political parties."[148] The Socialist Club was deregistered in 1971 for refusing to supply its annual report to the Registrar of Societies—a decision taken in 1969, in the wake of student protests for academic autonomy.[149] Even as the club faced suppression, it continued to denounce the Societies Ordinance and pledged to sustain its struggle.[150] The Democratic Socialist Club persists today.

Battling Merger, then Separation

The inauguration in 1963 of the Federation of Malaysia, formed of the union of Malaya with Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak, under differing conditions, met with uneven support at home and the fierce policy of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) from Indonesia, which opposed the apparent powerful British puppet state. Leftist Singaporean students in particular contested the plan early on, for varying reasons. Some labeled merger an anticommunist "colonial conspiracy" designed to counter the influence of Indonesia;[151] others either stressed Singapore's independent viability and incompatibility with peninsular Malaya or suggested (with Barisan Sosialis) that Singapore should join the federation, but as a normal state.[152] National student union PKPM supported self-determination if it was implemented through a United Nations-supervised vote in the territories to be annexed.[153] Peninsular students were generally more favorably disposed toward merger than were students in Singapore. (But had a greater proportion of peninsular students been Malay, sentiment may have been more mixed: much opposition in the federation focused on how majority-Chinese Singapore's entry would tilt the ethnic balance.)

While shared exasperation with the Malaysia scheme united socialist students, as a Socialist Club forum on merger at SU in June 1961 revealed, the issue sharpened factional splits in the PAP. Speakers from the PAP, Workers' Party, and what became Barisan, as well as the club itself, defended clearly distinct positions. Barisan faulted repressive laws and the skewed distribution of authority, David Marshall and Tommy Koh called for Singapore's independence, and the PAP saw no viable choice but merger on "fair" terms.[154] With the launch of Barisan later that year, the Socialist Club shifted its allegiance from the PAP—and in fact, four of twelve Barisan committee members were former club leaders: S. Woodhull, Poh Soo Kai, Lim Hock Siew, and Jamit Singh.[155]

Without rejecting "reunification," the club denounced the official plan for merger as "a right wing and colonialists' conspiracy to ensure right wing supremacy and prolong colonial interests."[156] The intercampus Joint Activities Committee deplored continuing British control over security, economic, and other matters, and insisted that full internal self-government must come first, lest Singapore "become an appendage or a protectorate."[157] The Socialist Club worried, too, about the extent of "autonomy" promised Singapore—for instance, whether the federal or Singapore government would have final say in education policy and regulation of student life (bearing in mind that *Fajar* was then banned in the federation).[158] The lack of real political integration, explained Tan Jing Quee, demonstrated a yen more for control than for integration: "the basic motivation is to mount up anti-communist hysteria with the purpose to rush through a freak arrangement whereby socialist strength would be excluded from the constitutional arena in the larger Federation," likely dragging the whole into the cold war in the process.[159]

Opposition to merger focused on the processes involved. The Socialist Club rejected all three schemes proposed in the Singapore National Referendum Bill that parliament passed in July 1962. In what the government branded a subversive communist ploy, the Socialist Club joined Nantah's Political Science Society to conduct public opinion polls in two Singapore constituencies shortly before the September 1962 referendum.[160] Four hundred students participated over four days, mostly from Nantah, but under Socialist Club leader Tommy Koh's supervision. Both that survey and a follow-up found overwhelming popular opposition to the government's plan: just under 90 percent were against the proposals and only around 6 percent in favor. The actual vote a few months later was far more positive, boosted, perhaps, by intimidating threats from both governments—yet even then, nearly one-quarter of those who voted cast blank ballots.[161]

Yet once merger had happened, students resisted the soon-imminent prospect of separation. For one thing, "no one was very clear what an independent Singapore would mean ... Independence seemed to mean being part of Malaysia."[162] The old student Left was "saddened," having been "brought up believing that the island belonged naturally with the peninsula, that we were one people with a common destiny."[163] Students in Singapore (many likely from peninsular Malaya) organized a colorful anti-separation demonstration and procession through the city.[164] USSU and

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[148] Teng, "The World of the English-Educated," pp. 270–73, 281.

[149] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," p. 50.

[150] Socialist Club press release, in *Singapore Undergrad*, October 21, 1970.

[151] For instance, Said Zahari, "Malaysia—Colonial Conspiracy," *Fajar* III,8 (December 1961): 3.

[152] Tommy Koh, A002021/10, reel 5, July 24, 1998.

[153] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 15.

[154] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006; Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 9, May 25, 1981.

[155] Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," p. 40.

[156] "Malaysian Socialists Conference," *Fajar* IV,2 (March–April 1962): 7; and, in the same issue, "Opposition to 'Merger,'" pp. 1, 12.

[157] "Joint Statement Issued by the Joint Activities Committee of Nanyang University Political Science Society, Singapore Polytechnic Political Society, and University Socialist Club," *Fajar* III,8 (December 1961): 10.

[158] "Report of Education Study Group of the University Socialist Club," *Fajar* III,8 (December 1961): 6.

[159] Tan Jing Quee, "Merger and Malaysia," *Fajar* III,8 (December 1961): 8, 11.

[160] UMSU and the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union were initially involved, but withdrew.

[161] "Gallup Poll in Tanjong Pagar," *Fajar* IV,4 (July 1962): 1–4; Lim Hock Siew, A000215, reel 36, November 29, 1985; Ang, "Communist Manipulation," pp. 59–64; Koh, "University of Singapore Socialist Club," pp. 44–45.

[162] Interview with Wang Gungwu, December 16, 2004.

[163] M. K. Rajakumar, "Lim Chin Siong's Place in Singapore History," in *Comet in Our Sky*, ed. Tan Jing Quee and Jomo K. S., p. 111.

[164] Interview with Johan Saravanamuttu, February 15, 2006, Penang.

UMSU issued a joint statement bemoaning the breakup,[165] and residual tensions from the failed merger simmered. Malaysian political scientist K. J. Ratnam, for instance, stepped down as SU's dean of social sciences after Lee Kuan Yew criticized the field's domination by Malaysians; he took up a comparable post at the new university then forming in Penang, instead.[166] Many of those who were activists during that period still harbor hope of reunification someday, however unlikely.

The University in Malay(si)a

> [T]o be allowed to seek knowledge, to disseminate knowledge one has to be left free of any shackles. One must not be told what to study and how to study it. This is the right for which we have been fighting, and it is this right that we call academic freedom. If interfered with, our society will not have the benefit of objective thought and research—resulting in the attendant bigotry and thereby the institutional decay of our society.[167]

After the agitation over UMSU's bisection, the Kuala Lumpur branch got off to a relatively quiet start. Initially, its activities remained low-key: blood drives, welfare activities, and campus initiatives. Within just a few years, however, it had become a critical vehicle for student aspirations and the engine of much of campus life.[168] Linked closely with UMSU from its launch in 1958 was the National Union of Malayan Students (PKPM, introduced in chapter 2). Headquartered in UMSU's Union House, PKPM initially represented around 1,650 post-secondary students from four peninsular institutions, alongside observers from other institutions in Malaya and Singapore.[169] Undergraduates, though, constituted over half its membership, and at least a quarter of PKPM officers were also senior officers in UMSU.[170] Yet in some ways, PKPM was "more political than its member units," for instance, regarding its international ties as a national student union: PKPM was affiliated with the International Student Conference and resolved in 1967 also to seek membership in the International Union of Students.[171] Moreover, it sought earnestly, but without success, to establish a Pan-Malaysian Students' Organization.[172]

Still, even as UMSU sought to become more widely engaged in Kuala Lumpur, students kept their gaze close to home through the early 1960s. The Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam (Muslim Students' Society) kicked things off, appealing (successfully) to the government for a mosque on campus in 1960. The first actual protest at UMKL was similarly narrow, challenging the denial of a police permit for certain Welfare Week activities. Students sent the prime minister a telegram requesting intervention; he complied, and permission was granted.[173] Peppering both campus and mainstream news through the mid-1960s were exposés on inadequate student housing, the annual Welfare Week[174] and choice of a Welfare Queen, and even panty raids. For instance, a small incident the *Straits Times* reported in late 1966 involved hostel residents who threatened to picket if not refunded the cost of meals that the university had failed to provide on Christmas and Boxing Day. The students got their money and a crisis was averted.[175] A year later, over five hundred students protested a proposed increase in hostel fees; the plan was promptly shelved.[176]

Students' behavior proved both a sticking point and a segue to issues of autonomy and rights. The persistent issue of ragging surfaced yet again: over one thousand students demonstrated in 1964 against the suspension of five perpetrators, styling the protest as a defense of student welfare. Wearing black armbands, they trotted a coffin labeled "Death of Justice" past university council members arriving on campus. Sneered Vice Chancellor Oppenheim, "It is from this type of people who rag that come the members of the secret police, the Gestapo, and the Kempetai." Yet the suspensions were lifted.[177] Two years later, the Tunku complained to the UMNO General Assembly about students' jeering at public lectures (like opposition parties, he implied) and proposed tighter supervision. UMSU replied that only a small minority acted offensively, students were entitled to express their views, and students should be able to handle their own affairs autonomously, without political parties' intervention. (Regardless, Democratic Action Party Secretary-General Devan Nair endorsed the students' cause.)[178]

By 1963, matters were heating up at UM, paralleling developments at SU. Indonesia's anti-merger *Konfrontasi* sparked a series of loyalty actions, often under the aegis of the PKPM. Local responses to *Konfrontasi* had as much to do with communism and opposition to it as with Malaysian self-determination and Indonesia specifically: condemning Indonesia was tantamount to denouncing the radical, "anti-national" left. Students could simultaneously assert their commitment to the Malaysian nation-state and disprove possible fears of communist infiltration (especially given contemporaneous developments at Nantah). Initially, local students appealed to their Indonesian counterparts to reduce tensions, to no avail. Once hostilities began, UMSU changed course, appealing to the Malaysian government for military training and army units on campus.[179] Backing up those requests were demonstrations—for instance, a lively rally at UM in September 1963 of around three thousand (mostly female) students, condemning Indonesia and pledging to defend Malaysia to the death. Director of Information Services Mohamed Sopiee complimented the students' inspiring loyalty in organizing the largest such demonstration ever, "without any direction from the Government or any other

[165] *Straits Times*, November 22, 1965.

[166] Interview with Johan Saravanamuttu, February 15, 2006.

[167] UMSU presentation at 1964–65 Freshmen Welcome Convention, quoted in Ai Pee Ram, "Academic Freedom and University Autonomy," *Malayan Undergrad*, March–April 1966, p. 7.

[168] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 32–34; Hassan Karim, "The Student Movement in Malaysia, 1967–74," in *With the People! The Malaysian Student Movement 1967–74*, ed. Hassan Karim and Siti Nor Hamid (Petaling Jaya: Institute for Social Analysis, 1984), p. 1.

[169] "We Nationalise," *Mahasiswa Negara*, May 1960, pp. 5–6.

[170] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 14.

[171] Ibid.

[172] "P.M.S.O. to Enhance Our Position," *Mahasiswa Negara*, February–March 1963, p. 1.

[173] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 32–34.

[174] Plans included having the Royal Malaysian Air Force airdrop fifty thousand pamphlets on Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. Police nixed that idea, lest citizens run into the streets and be injured. *Malay Mail*, August 10 and 19, 1963.

[175] *Straits Times*, December 28–31, 1966.

[176] *Straits Times*, December 12, 15, and 16, 1967.

[177] "Varsity Students Demonstrate," *Straits Times*, June 12, 1964; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 35; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 14–15.

[178] *Straits Times*, August 3, 5, and 6, 1966; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 54.

[179] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 16.

authority."[180] UMSU continued to pledge fealty to the Malaysian government and to condemn both Indonesia and Russia, which had vetoed a UN Security Council resolution affirming Malaysia's territorial integrity and independence.[181]

The administration acceded, introducing voluntary, coeducational military training for university students and staff, to form a two-company Territorial Army (volunteer reserve force) unit on campus. Training would be full-time during the holidays and part-time during the term. Six members of the academic staff and forty-three students signed on.[182] As an added gesture, UMSU invested part of its reserve funds in national defense bonds.[183] In Singapore—newly part of Malaysia—USSU and the Nantah Student Fellowship requested similar facilities so that they, too, might "demonstrate our loyalty and allegiance to the country." The government considered extending military training across academic institutions.[184]

Yet in 1964, in the very midst of this patriotic fervor—and showing the close alignment of nationalism and anticommunism in the eyes of the state—officials worried about a possible upsurge of left-wing activity on campus, especially given Singapore's accession to Malaysia. The government required that all applicants for university or college admission pass a loyalty test and obtain a "Suitability Certificate" (*Sijil Kelayakan*) from the chief educational officer. The requirement mimicked a recent, unpopular amendment to Singapore's Internal Security Act, enacted to curtail political activism at SU and Nantah. Dr. B. R. Sreenivasan, SU's first Asian vice chancellor, resigned in protest in November 1963—with the full support of USSU—rather than enforce the regulation (which remained in force until 1979, although used only rarely).[185] A five-member USSU delegation, too, met with Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in mid-1966 to request that the loyalty test be repealed, stressing academic freedom and university autonomy. They quoted Lee himself, who had argued in the legislative assembly in 1955 that no individual should be deprived of fundamental rights on account of his political beliefs. Lee replied that times had changed. Students, he insisted, "did not appreciate the complexity of security problems," nor could university staff members take full responsibility for their students. He offered to meet the students again for a televised forum—but declined a debate on campus, lest he be heckled. When the delegation complained of the inconvenience for students of an offsite event, Lee "deplored the fact that students in the University had 'no guts' and wished they had the spirit of the Nanyang Students."[186] The students relented and set a date, then cancelled after Lee rescheduled the event to take place during final exams. It never happened. Lee did at least promise to look into matters such as a recent police action on campus and scholarships that had been revoked, and said *Fajar* could resume publication under a different name.[187]

The Suitability Certificate proposed for implementation on the peninsula evoked similarly angry reactions from UMSU and PKPM over the next two years, including demonstrations, public discussions, and debates.[188] The opposition Democratic Action Party, too, denounced the "obnoxious" and "unsuitable" requirement, arguing at UM that it would "produce a cowed and frightened people, and easier prey for subversive and professional agitators."[189] UMSU resolved in mid-1964 to urge the government to withdraw the measure in the name of university autonomy and academic freedom. It joined forces with USSU the following year, invoking the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to reinforce calls for academic freedom and merit-based admissions.[190] The unions encouraged international student groups also to lend support, which they did.[191] Spooked by the recent anticommunist sweep at Nantah, UM's Student Council made a point of condemning subversive elements in student organizations and urging the latter to stay out of politics, but PKPM still declared the Suitability Certificate "negative and short-sighted."[192]

In the same vein, and likewise belying the happy unity of Malaysia, the federation government also restricted travel by Singapore students to the peninsula as of September 1962, with the Internal Security (Educational Institution Visits) Order. Groups of five or more students from any secondary or tertiary school in Singapore (rather than just Nantah, per previous restrictions) required a written permit to cross the causeway. (A similar 1957 amendment to the Education Act had limited federation students' interstate travel.[193]) UMSU and USSU denounced the enactment's presumption that Singapore students were "security risks" and the infringement on their freedom; international student organizations chimed in via telegram. Even Lee Kuan Yew agreed in a letter reprinted in the *Malayan Undergrad* that, while the federation government did need to take precautions, "selective and judicious screening" would be more effective than a blanket ban.[194]

Meanwhile, the political situation was heating up: challenged especially by disagreements about the state's racial balance and character, the federation was collapsing. Government and opposition leaders brought these debates to campus, honing student awareness and interest.[195] The year 1964 saw an important early

[180] "Rally Condemns Jakarta Action," *Straits Times*, September 23, 1963.

[181] "Be Dedicated to Nation, Students Told," *Straits Times*, September 21, 1964; and "Students' Union Dedicated to Cause of Malaysia," *Malay Mail*, September 21, 1964.

[182] "More Support Arms Training for Students," *Straits Times*, December 17, 1964; "Varsity 'Call-up,' so Holidays Curtailed," *Straits Times*, February 17, 1965; and "Varsity Dons Start Military Training," *Straits Times*, March 23, 1965.

[183] Abdul Majid bin Ismail et al., *Report of the Committee Appointed by the National Operations Council to Study Campus Life of Students of the University of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Chetak Kerajaan, 1971), p. 19.

[184] "Military Training May be Extended to Other Varsities," *Straits Times*, March 11, 1965.

[185] P. A. Tambyah, "Selection of Medical Students in Singapore: A Historical Perspective," *Annals, Academy of Medicine, Singapore* 34,6 (2005): 150C; "Intimidation by Government," *Malayan Undergrad*, 2005: 150C November 1963, p. 6; and Malcolm Wicks, A001683/07, reel 3, November 1, 1994.

[186] "Meeting the P. M.," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1966, p. 4.

[187] *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1966, pp. 4, 7; also Teng, "The World of the English-Educated," p. 265.

[188] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 16; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 34–35.

[189] "Goh Hock Guan: Suitability Certificate 'Obnoxious Device,'" *The Rocket* 2,8 (August 1967): 8.

[190] *Malay Mail* and *Straits Times*, July 9, 1964 (several articles); "Govts Urged: End This Screening of Students," *Straits Times*, November 23, 1965; "The New President Speaks: — ," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1966, p. 1.

[191] "ISA Conference Condemns Suitability Certificate," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1966, p. 2.

[192] "Varsity Students Back the Government," *Malay Mail*, July 6, 1964.

[193] Lim Teck Hui, "Students Travel Restrictions," *Fajar* IV,6 (September–October 1963): 9.

[194] *Malayan Undergrad*, November 1962, pp. 2, 5.

[195] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 43–44.

demonstration as the field of dispute widened: a protest against the Duke of Edinburgh, who was visiting UM. The university registrar detained students who put up placards, then handed over those students to the Special Branch (police intelligence) for questioning.[196] Authorities called in another student for questioning the following year after a spate of procommunist posters and red-painted slogans appeared at the Faculty of Education.[197] By mid-1966, nervous about upcoming forums on the Suitability Certificate and university autonomy amid mounting discontent, the government broke with precedent and forbade politicians from speaking on campus.[198]

All this while, two sets of issues gained ascendance. First, as students arrived on campus from increasingly diverse backgrounds, including more Malays and former teachers, issues of language and education policy grew ever more critical and contested. Second, UMSU's struggle for autonomy fed into a prolonged campaign for student representation in university administration.[199]

Language and education policy remained among the most fraught issues in negotiating a postcolonial Malaysian identity. Malay schoolteachers were both well-organized in the Federation of Malay School Teachers' Association (FMSTA) and keenly influential in UMNO. For instance, soon after independence, facing Chinese demands and continuing neglect of Malay secondary education, FMSTA instructed its ten thousand members to resign from UMNO (of which 80 percent were members). The political cost to UMNO in the 1959 elections was "incalculable," especially on the east coast, FMSTA's stronghold. Chinese schools (and Chinese associations of graduates, teachers, and school committees) likewise pressured the MCA and alternative parties, and nearly all non-Malay opposition parties demanded recognition of four official languages and support for vernacular education.[200]

Undergraduate language societies carried these struggles to campus. In 1963, PKPM affirmed its support for maintenance of all the languages and cultures of Malaysia, but with Malay as the national language.[201] UMSU tended toward a similar stance. Non-Malay students generally gravitated toward either UMSU or the Tamil and Chinese Language Societies (TLS and CLS), both affiliates of UMSU and almost exclusively cultural and academic in focus.[202] Malay students flocked to the Persatuan Bahasa Melayu Universiti Malaya (Malay Language Society, PBMUM), formed in Singapore in 1955, then reconstituted in Kuala Lumpur in 1959. Like the CLS and TLS, PBMUM focused primarily on issues concerned with language and culture through 1964. Unlike these other language societies, however, it declined to affiliate with UMSU.

Led by bold new leaders, PBMUM changed tack as of 1965. Pro-Malay state policies were causing an influx of students from poor, rural, especially east coast Malay areas. This demographic shift not only transformed the student body within a short period (discussed further in the next chapter), but exacerbated ethnic cleavages

[196] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 11.

[197] Ibid., p. 12.

[198] *Malay Mail*, August 27, 1966.

[199] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 34, 43–44.

[200] Margaret Roff, "The Politics of Language in Malaya," *Asian Survey* 7,5 (1967): 319–21.

[201] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 15.

[202] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 20.

and forced new priorities to shape student involvement. PBMUM pressed identification with "the people"—informing, for instance, its opposition to the PAP's "Malaysian Malaysia" campaign in 1965, seen to undercut Malays' special standing.[203] Starting before Singapore's ouster, PBMUM began to articulate a far more Malay-centric and proactive vision of the nation and polity.

While hardly massive, PBMUM was larger and more energetic than most other clubs. Its membership was already around three hundred by 1968. (The politically engaged Debating Union, by contrast, had only fifteen members in 1963–64 and peaked at about one hundred two years later.[204]) The concentration of Malay students facilitated mobilization: as of 1959, while Malays constituted only 19 percent of the student body overall, 93 percent of them were enrolled in the arts faculty, most in its largest department, Malay Studies.[205] The number of Malays soon soared, particularly after 1966, when UM established an institute to help Malay-stream students adjust. Given their generally less privileged background, these students tended to be less invested in, and hence deferential toward, the elitist order than were their predecessors.[206]

PBMUM soon came to play a leading role both on and off campus, holding forums on (for example) socioeconomic issues, nationalism, and the role of intellectuals; organizing demonstrations; and raising political awareness.[207] A 1965 protest against the television drama *Oh! Awangku Sayang* was pivotal. The show portrayed a Malay undergraduate who molests a village girl. PBMUM took offense at this portrayal of Malay university students, lest it sour public opinion. The club summoned the show's producers to debate. Uncomfortable with censorship, PBMUM's response, and being upstaged by the smaller club, UMSU was less than supportive. The case helped PBMUM to crystallize a Malay pressure group.[208] PBMUM ramped up its campaign with an October 1966 Seminar Bahasa Kebangsaan (National Language Seminar), echoing similar initiatives by student clubs organized since the mid-1950s. Two government ministers participated, discussing such topics as the challenges of converting UM to Malay-medium instruction and how differences of language isolated students from society. The consensus was for a five-year bilingual transition period, starting in 1967, before UM shifted completely to Malay. In what became a core refrain, PBMUM challenged the status of English as Malaysia's second official language, and especially the Tunku's claim that the wheels of government could not turn without it.[209] That opposition presaged the increasingly vociferous struggles in the late 1960s, at UM and nationwide.

Struggles over university autonomy, too, echoed developments off-campus, where increasing government control sparked resistance. The quintessential such

[203] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 36–38.

[204] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 36–37.

[205] Ibid., pp. 47–48.

[206] Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Pelajar Melayu Dan Politik Kebangsaan Di Universiti Malaya 1964–74," in *Budi Kencana: Kumpulan Makalah Memperingati Persaraan Professor Tan Sri Dato' Ismail Hussein*, ed. Nik Safiah Karim et al. (Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya, 1994), pp. 158–60.

[207] For instance, "PBMUM Hari Ini," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 18, 1971, pp. 2, 18.

[208] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 38–40; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 43–44.

[209] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 49–54.

case was a 1961 strike at *Utusan Melayu*. Concerned that editor Said Zahari was taking too leftist a line, UMNO installed a new managing editor and claimed a say in editorial policy. Said refused and led his staff on strike. The SU Socialist Club supported them in the name of freedom of the press. Club members liaised with friends in local media, leafleted, collected donations from students and lecturers in Singapore, and visited the strike area.[210]

Yet such students resisted the assumption that these activities demonstrated their inherent subversive potential; in their view, they simply held to a strong line on civil liberties. They joined members of the academic staff, under the direction of history department head Wang Gungwu, in a working group to investigate infringements on rights and democracy on campus. In July 1966, before that report's release, a referendum found 88 percent of students in favor of taking action.[211] Hence, in early September, UM held its first Autonomy Day; the annual event became a centerpiece of an energetic campaign. On the first Autonomy Day, over 2,500 undergraduates (of around 3,000 total) voted to condemn the Internal Security (Amendment) Act—which required the hated Suitability Certificates—as an encroachment on autonomy. Students "boycotted" their classes (the administration preempted them by declaring a holiday), paraded around campus, then gathered at the newly opened Dewan Tunku Canselor (Tunku Chancellor Hall, or the Great Hall) for UMSU's largest extraordinary general meeting (EGM) yet. A memorandum to Minister of Home Affairs Ismail Abdul Rahman followed, then a similar protest in Singapore the next month. The next year's program likewise centered around repeal of the Suitability Certificate, including a political symposium, another EGM, and a procession. A thousand or more people marched around campus, then about fifty continued by scooter to the ministry of education—the first mass student rally outside the UM gates.[212]

Unlike in Singapore, UMSU's efforts succeeded. Minister of Education Mohamed Khir Johari reassured students that only two applications for Suitability Certificates had so far been denied on security grounds, and pointed out that students' ability to demonstrate against the Internal Security Act affirmed their still-substantial freedom.[213] Within a month, the government announced a two-year trial suspension of the regulation.[214] Soon after, as if to confirm their commitment, university authorities approved the formation of Forum Mahasiswa (Students' Forum) as a platform for political discussion.[215]

The process, however, highlighted both students' confusion about their appropriate role and the increasing bifurcation of the student body. PBMUM did not support the Autonomy Day protests or UMSU's campaign against the Suitability

[210] Michael Fernandez, A000076/20, reel 11–12, May 25, 1981; and interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006.

[211] *Straits Times*, June 14 and August 6, 1966; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 55–56.

[212] "Varsity Students Condemn Security Laws," *Straits Times* September 4, 1966; also September 16, 1966, and July 19, 22, and 23, 1967; *Malay Mail*, July 23, 1967; interview with Khong Kim Hoong, March 9, 2006; interview with Mano Maniam, March 25, 2006; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 14; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 55–56.

[213] "Student Freedom Assured by Govt.," *Straits Times*, August 9, 1967.

[214] "Varsity Students Condemn Security Laws," *Straits Times*, September 4, 1967; Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 18.

[215] *Malay Mail*, September 25, 1967.

Certificate, and disagreed with UMSU also over such issues as the National Language Act of 1967 and reunification with Singapore (which UMSU supported). Overall, even though all students were members, UMSU seemed increasingly to represent non-Malay views, and PBMUM seemed to be its Malay counterpart.[216] UMSU even had to scrap plans for a student solidarity rally after December 1967 race riots in Penang, partly due to exams and the fact that the violence did not extend to Kuala Lumpur, but also for fear that PBMUM would abstain, delegitimizing the event. Similarly, when eleven Chinese men were condemned in 1968 for having landed with Indonesian troops during *Konfrontasi*, Malay students spoke out in favor of execution. Inclined to plead for clemency, but worried about aggravating an already tense situation, UMSU chose to refrain.[217] Student council elections reflected this split, becoming riddled with communalism, however officially discouraged, as Malay and non-Malay perspectives diverged. The 1966 and 1968 UM elections, for instance, were rife with charges of race-based voting and related procedural irregularities.[218]

Most dramatically, upset with the Suitability Certificate protests, 320 Malay students signed a "Declaration of Independence" from UMSU in 1966. They proclaimed the union's leadership to be irresponsible and divisive, dominated by political activists, and prone to stir up "hysteria." The union, they charged, was headed by a narrow clique, insufficiently inclusive of Malays, and driven by the small minority of members who attended annual meetings. The Malay students saw "no alternative except to declare ourselves independent from the political activities of the students' union and oppose the use of members' money for political purposes."[219] While this show of dissent soon faded,[220] similar debates recurred.

As these developments suggest, UM students grew increasingly engaged in the mid-1960s, but encountered debilitating hurdles. Already by 1962, a UM Debating Union event on the future of Malaysia—featuring leading lights from the PAP, Alliance, Socialist Front, Barisan Sosialis, and Ipoh-based People's Progressive Party—could draw a crowd of over two thousand.[221] Student concern for national-level issues continued to rise after that. Yet with the bane of colonialism banished and nation-building underway, many students felt pressed to defend their engagement. Government leaders chastised them for criticizing the state that supported them, presuming students to be manipulated by opposition parties. UMSU president Loh Kay Huat retorted defensively, "Spending money on the education of students is a national investment in manpower which is an absolute necessity to the nation. To equate this to the recent legitimate protest made by us implying ingratitude on our part towards the government is unfair."[222] Similarly, when the Tunku complained about what he thought was unwarranted criticism in a convocation address (as the prime minister is also chancellor of the university), the then-UMSU president scoffed "We fail to see how such a civilized and restrained

[216] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 56; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 44.

[217] Interview with Khong Kim Hoong, August 23, 2007; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 44, 49–50.

[218] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 44, 45–47.

[219] Ibid., pp. 44–45; "Varsity Union Split over Politics," *Straits Times*, September 3, 1966.

[220] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 18.

[221] "10 Years from Now," *Sunday Times*, August 19, 1962.

[222] Loh Kay Huat, "The Students' Protest," *Straits Times*, November 29, 1965.

manner of expressing our views can so disturb the prime minister of a democratic nation as to warrant him to advise [that] ... some students had been trying to assume the role of a political party."[223] Rumors of "government spies" planted among the students started to proliferate,[224] and in 1966 the government forbade scholarship students from engaging in oppositional political activity and tightened restrictions on off-campus protests.[225] Political leaders argued, explicitly or implicitly, that the tradeoff for students' exceptional liberties as coddled intellectuals was containment—that they "accept certain restraints."[226] The opposition, not surprisingly, was more generous. Goh Hock Guan of the newly launched Democratic Action Party insisted that students *should* engage and be nonpartisan opinion-leaders, lest Malaysia create a new educated class aloof to popular needs, as had happened in so many other Asian and African countries. He cajoled, "Surely the plant of Malaysian democracy is not so fragile that it would wilt at student criticism or dissent."[227]

In fact, students at the time *were* in political parties of all stripes. A number (a precise count is impossible) were in UMNO, the MCA, and the MIC—components of the governing Alliance—although none held important office. Several were active in the opposition Parti Rakyat (People's Party, PRM), including in such posts as national treasurer, publications and information secretary, and branch chairman. Indeed, two-thirds of the editorial board of PRM's *Banting* were undergraduates in 1968.[228] Parti Islam se-Malaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS) had little initial cachet on campus, but that soon changed. Malay students were engaging increasingly as Muslims, particularly after the Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia (National Association of Muslim Students of Malaysia, PKPIM) formed at UM in 1961.[229]

Students enjoyed greater channels for participation and voice outside political parties than most other citizens: they had greater access to political leaders (as through student-organized debates), they could read otherwise-banned texts, and they could join political clubs of a sort far less readily available in the broader society (where the Registrar of Societies regulated associational life and the memory of the Emergency was still fresh). As official anxiety over students-as-opposition mounted, the space for their engagement on campus—safely out of the public purview—increased, even as they were scolded for less-bounded initiatives. These campus venues remained surprisingly inviolate, at least until they came to be used more consistently to launch off-campus protests.

The most important such space was the Speaker's Corner, inaugurated on May 27, 1966. As one observer describes it: "While the government refused the students

[223] "Student Leaders Answer Tengku: We Cannot Make Concessions," *Straits Times*, June 28, 1966; also Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 17.

[224] For instance, "Seminar Told of Rumours About Govt Spies Among University Students," *Straits Times*, February 22, 1966; interview with Khoo Kay Kim, March 17, 2006.

[225] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 26.

[226] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 17.

[227] Quoted in "Students and Politics," *Rocket* 1,1 (August 1966): 6.

[228] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 15.

[229] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 40–41. The group's name was Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar-pelajar Islam Persekutuan Tanah Melayu (National Association of Muslim Students of the Federation of Malaya) until 1965.

permission to organize a political club, with a constitution and a requirement to register, an informal one, with no constitution or rules of procedure, grew up and served a real need of the students."[230] Initially just a concrete platform by the library (a stone dais was built a year later), the Speaker's Corner was launched with a small ceremony, speeches, and skits.[231] Debating issues that ranged from the excesses of government ministers, to the Vietnam War, to political crises across the region at weekly gatherings, local undergraduates gained political consciousness and a sense of common purpose among Asian students engaged in struggles concerned with freedom, liberty, and (American) imperialism.[232] Usually around one hundred students attended, although especially interesting topics (advertised in advance on a notice board) drew several times that number. Far fewer spoke: even key themes seldom drew more than ten speakers, and the same people tended to speak every week.[233]

For instance, the *Straits Times* reported on an October 1966 teach-in at the Speaker's Corner: several hundred undergraduates listened to tape-recorded antiwar songs and speeches, then burned *Time* magazine cover photos of the US president and vice president, the US secretary of state (Dean Rusk), the US Army deputy commander (General William Westmoreland), and the South Vietnamese premier (Tun Ky).[234] The event preceded a visit by US President Johnson to Kuala Lumpur; annoyed government leaders castigated the students for their subversion and disloyalty. The Menteri Besar (akin to a chief minister) of Perlis state was especially vehement, seeing in the event "the best evidence of the kind of political thinking" to be found at UM: "It is very clear from this demonstration which side they are on." Students at a government institution, he fumed, should not abuse the chance to learn and study, nor meddle in foreign politics—especially concerning an ally to Malaysia.[235]

REPOSITIONING STUDENTS IN SOCIETY

Slowly he ticks off their names
On the long list:
All the young political men.
As he was once himself.
He thinks of how he despised the others
the a-political,
the English-educated,

[230] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 17.

[231] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 17–18.

[232] Interview with Mano Maniam, March 25, 2006; Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," pp. 16–17.

[233] Interview with Hishamuddin Rais, March 30, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 36–37.

[234] *Straits Times*, October 29, 1966.

[235] "Mentri: Ban the Labour Party," *Straits Times*, November 4, 1966; and "I Stick By that 'Subbersive' Charge," *Straits Times*, November 7, 1966.

the students he called "white ants
In their ivory tower."[236]

These tensions over the legitimacy of student protest reflected a noticeable shift in the timbre of activism, its reception by the government, and students' sociopolitical position once sovereignty had been achieved. Critical students now were complaining not of a mutually disliked occupying force, but of the alleged wrongs perpetrated by their own, homegrown leaders. Already within a decade of UM's launch on the peninsula, its initial mood "of confidence and progress" was in doubt.[237] One constant, though, was the appeal of *not* engaging: English-educated undergraduates, regardless of background, faced bright futures. Hence, "for the most part, they just kept their noses clean, and cleverly kept out of politics simply because they had too much to lose otherwise."[238] Moreover, many of those students now felt adequately represented. As Enright describes, with mingled regret and admiration for his students' relentless pragmatism: "Why engage in politics when you have politicians all ready to engage for you?"[239]

A growing proportion of students, however, represented a new demographic. By the mid-1960s, the subset of students who had been previously employed, 80 percent of them as teachers (a group always present to some degree), was large enough to constitute a phenomenon: the *mahasitua* (a play on the Malay *mahasiswa*, undergraduate, and *tua*, old). As before, when those who spent longer on campus (for instance, medical students) tended to be more active, *mahasitua* were now increasingly among the most engaged. Usually from Malay *kampung* (villages), they were aware of their communities' social problems and issues.[240] It was in this period, amid (re)negotiations of the nation-state, that communalism truly pervaded the campus. Malay consciousness had been developing among students since at least the 1940s (represented, for instance, in Mahathir's newspaper columns), but relatively quietly, given the small number of Malay undergraduates. Now, with discussions over whether Singapore "fit" in Malaysia, questions of identity took on new urgency. It was this generation—coming to political awareness and activism amidst the muddle of independence, merger, and separation—that was most manifestly torn by the shifting sense of who was truly "Malaysian."

Both the university community and the formal political sphere then remained small. Like the university, the nation and its leaders were young and still finding their way. Explains a student leader of the late 1950s, at that point "everybody knew everybody, and everybody was accessible. And in our youthful arrogance, we thought that we could actually influence events."[241] As colonialism waned, students enjoyed more freedom than they would later under the PAP or UMNO and its partners, when not just rules about permits and permissions, but also prophylactic self-censorship and confining sedition laws, came to stifle the intellectual atmosphere. Furthermore, politically inclined students considered indifference

[236] Extract from "Prime Minister" (clearly Lee Kuan Yew), in D. J. Enright, *The Old Adam* (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), p. 29.

[237] "Stand up against Political Vagaries," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 1959, p. 8.

[238] Teng, "The World of the English-Educated," p. 287.

[239] Enright, *Memoirs*, pp. 180–81.

[240] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 27–28.

[241] Tommy Koh, A002021/10, reel 4, July 24, 1998.

inexcusable, particularly in light of examples across Asia of students' weighty contributions to movements for independence and political change. Rather, explained one student on the eve of merger, "We are part and parcel of our country, and our country's development is as much our concern as anyone else's."[242]

Along those lines, although most students recognized their privileged status, access, and voice, as the campaigns described above attest, many increasingly claimed validation in terms of their ties with the broader public. In other words, however distinctive the dynamics and environment of student activism or how well-conceptualized a student identity, many undergraduates saw their own mobilization as aligned in key ways with other groups' efforts. It is hardly surprising, then, that the most active students remained active after graduation. The tradition of socialist students' entering trade unions in Singapore, for instance, persisted, particularly as the increasingly complex political field encouraged students to hone their ideological commitments. Moreover, the PAP crackdown of 1963, which swept away so many top leaders in the labor, student, and cultural fields, pressed other left-wing students to the fore. Plus, unions remained reliant on English-educated negotiators and thus welcomed university graduates, even though Chinese-educated unionists led organizing efforts among largely non-anglophone workers.[243] Law graduate Tommy Koh, for instance, clerked for a year with David Marshall, then became legal advisor to three unions, including the powerful Naval Base Workers' Union (in which post Michael Fernandez succeeded him).[244] Indeed, Fernandez first encountered the Socialist Club and intercampus PMSF before he entered UM, through the Singapore Teachers' Union and Catholic Student Teachers' Guild.[245] And the arrests of February 1963 "changed everything" for Tan Jing Quee, active in the Socialist Club in the early 1960s. Having dropped writing jobs and plans for postgraduate study to work with the decimated unions, he rose quickly within the Singapore Association of Trade Unions (SATU) before joining most of SATU's previous leaders in detention that October after calling a general strike.[246]

The same trends pushing student activists toward trade unions nudged several toward political parties. Tan Jing Quee, for instance, not only ran in 1963 as a Barisan candidate, but helped recruit Socialist Club alumnus Philomen Oorjitham to stand, as well.[247] Others from UMSU went on to shine in the PAP, such as deputy prime minister S. Jayakumar and diplomat Tommy Koh. And still others helped to pioneer new modes of engagement through nongovernmental organizations: consumers' advocate Anwar Fazal (president of UMSU and the PKPM) or environmental activist Gurmit Singh, for example.[248]

Yet, as noted above, particularly in peninsular Malaysia, students' relation to society was murky, starting with the university's inauguration at the height of the Emergency. From early on, UM students were warned against joining any outside

[242] T. H. L., "Students and Politics," *Malayan Undergrad*, November 1962, p. 2.

[243] Interview with Michael Fernandez, July 25, 2006.

[244] Tommy Koh, A002021/10, reels 3–4, July 24, 1998.

[245] Interview with Michael Fernandez, July 25, 2006.

[246] Interview with Tan Jing Quee, January 15, 2006.

[247] Ibid.

[248] Interview with Mano Maniam, March 25, 2006.

organizations without the student council's permission.[249] Political leaders cautioned students frequently to focus on studying and earning their degrees, reminding them that the country spent too much money on undergraduates to let them turn UM into a "political hub." Scholarship students (of whom there were many) were even discouraged from participating in UMSU, since it sometimes took antigovernment positions. Constant rumors of Special Branch surveillance increased students' reluctance to participate or express opinions—and the minister of education's denials just confirmed how prevalent the rumors were. In this environment, many students feared extracurricular politicking might compromise not just their exam scores, but their future prospects.[250]

Yet officials simultaneously lauded students for their efforts to "venture beyond the 'ivory tower,'" in the words of Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak in his Welfare Week kickoff address. "Our college students today are conscious of the larger world outside of their campuses and are endeavoring to participate in the life and activities of the society in which they are growing up,"[251] he beamed, elaborating in the souvenir program, "As political leaders, they should combine their academic studies with a practical understanding of affairs in their immediate community and in their country."[252] Minister for Health and Social Welfare Ong Yoke Lin concurred, lauding the students' "truly magnificent example of public spirit and civic consciousness"; and the Tunku, too, offered, "No university worth its salt can live in a vacuum of pure academic knowledge; it must have some relation to the community; there must be an identity between the university and the nation."[253] The following year, Vice Chancellor Oppenheim praised students' engagement anew and urged them to keep it up year-round.[254] Moreover, these efforts were newsworthy. Not only did the mainstream media report, generally favorably, on student activities, but following the example of Mahathir in the 1940s, a number of students themselves wrote for the papers. For instance, Tan Jing Quee in Singapore and Kannan Kutty in Kuala Lumpur had a "Campus Notes" column in the *Sunday Mail*, covering developments from ragging to welfare.[255]

Seemingly benign community outreach activities provided part of the impetus for burgeoning engagement despite such bewilderingly mixed messages. Various programs developed by student organizations from the late 1950s on extended the sort of activities so happily sanctioned at Welfare Week by top government and university officials. These initiatives dispatched student volunteers to rural areas for community development work, educational outreach, and related activities.[256] USSU

[249] "Students Warned," *Straits Times*, November 17, 1960; and "Varsity Student Union to Adopt New Policy," *Straits Times*, November 19, 1960.

[250] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," pp. 39–41.

[251] "U Attempt to Venture beyond the 'Ivory Tower' is Praised," *Sunday Times*, November 20, 1960.

[252] Quoted in ibid.

[253] Ibid.

[254] *Straits Times*, September 30, 1961.

[255] Their column dated May 20, 1962, for example, touches on both topics.

[256] Kee Poo Kong, *Tertiary Students and Social Development: An Area for Direct Action—Student Rural Service Activities in Malaysia* (Singapore: Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development, 1976), pp. 29–31, 41–43; M. K. Gopikumar, "The National Student Service Corps: Volunteers in the Kampongs," *Synergist* 1,3 (1972): 22.

was even made a full member in the Singapore Council of Social Service—"testimony itself of our welfare efforts."[257] More enduringly, this focus on community service (to which we return in the next chapter) reflected a growing concern among many students for the sociopolitical environment outside campus and their place within it. They increasingly sought to understand and identify with poor, oppressed peasant masses. This was a distinctly political project, carried out against a backdrop of rising critical awareness and shifting campus demographics—a nexus exemplified, for instance, in a 1969 rural Kempen Kesedaran (Awareness Campaign) organized by an alliance of Malay and Muslim student organizations.[258] Yet when this sort of activity grew more political, the state got nervous, given the issue's potential to incite class-based challenges or ratchet up expectations.

And the Malaysian state now had a decidedly harsh set of examples to which to refer. The mid-1960s saw a trend toward increasing government control over students across the region, especially with the rise of military and authoritarian regimes in Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, and elsewhere. These regimes tended to tolerate students' political engagement only when their activities aligned with or could be exploited by military and political elites. Otherwise, student activism was "considered inherently oppositional ... and therefore dangerous."[259] In Malaya and Singapore, too, student involvement was welcomed for useful, "apolitical" welfare purposes, yet to many students both on the left and from the very communities targeted, those activities were hardly neutral, and simultaneously reflected and stirred ideological commitments. Moreover, political leaders' pronouncements ratified activist undergraduates' own felt difference even from other students. A case in point: when Malaysia's minister of education insisted in late 1961 that students should avoid engaging in politics, UMSU agreed—but insisted he was referring to schoolchildren, not undergraduates and their unions.[260]

Overall, these early years of independence were pivotal in honing students' consciousness as they negotiated among identities and objectives and chiseled out a political niche in society, but also in priming the state to beware of that niche. Compared with what was to come, the environment for student activists was then relatively permissive. Overall, most students felt encouraged to engage—note the near-complete participation for or against the autonomy campaign—and suffered no ill consequences for doing so. The government's reaction to students' carping "was one of hurt and then of suspicion and threat," particularly fear that students might be enticed by opposition parties.[261] Yet while university authorities discussed punitive action and launched the occasional investigation, nothing really came of it. Some student leaders claimed to have been interrogated, for instance over 1967's Autonomy Day activities, but none was then charged or detained.[262] What stymied further mobilization was not so much repression, but divisions and disinterest within the student body itself.

[257] "The New President Speaks: — ," *Malayan Undergrad*, September 1966, p. 8.

[258] Kee Poo Kong, *Tertiary Students and Social Development*, p. 43; Yahya Othman, "Siswa Turun Kedesa," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 7, 1971, p. 2; and, in that same issue of *Mahasiswa Negara*, Syed Mestaddin, "Satu Kenangan yang Abadi," p. 13.

[259] Fischer, "The University Student," p. 50.

[260] "Politics: Varsity Union in KL Backs Minister," *Straits Times*, December 9, 1961.

[261] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 17.

[262] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 52.

Three potentially countervailing factors came to structure aspects of student mobilization. One was "a willingness among students to sacrifice principle for student unity" if Malay and non-Malay sentiment were divided, given students' concern with racial harmony.[263] The second was the "indifferent attitude" of most students, which led student organizations to avoid actions they thought might flop.[264] The final factor was the possibility of alienating public opinion.[265] What differentiated mobilization among Malaysian and Singaporean students in the period, compared both with processes among other local activists and with students elsewhere, was how self-contained negotiations over these concerns were.

Unlike student organizations in Burma, for instance, the major Malaysian student organizations avoided capture by political parties. Indeed, many students felt themselves to be "intellectually superior" to most politicians and resented their sense that "anyone not in the University was welcome into the political arena while they who were better informed and equipped—in their own estimation—were denied entry."[266] Yet really, the disdain was mutual. As PAP minister Rajaratnam explained, when his party "looked around for lieutenants, all those who were willing to come forward were those who were not English educated ... The English educated were too reluctant to leave their well-paid jobs in order to work with us. They ... were content to join hands with the British and remain a 'privileged class.'"[267]

Even more critical—and ever more evident in this period—was campus ecology. Close ties, both physical and intellectual, facilitated mobilization among students in a way seldom found among other activists. The Socialist Club house in which a cluster of activists lived is one example, but classmates and roommates broadly wielded symbiotic influence. The fact that so many student activists stuck around campus past graduation—whether just by choice, for further academic training or employment, or through family ties—accentuated the sense of shared legacy and purpose: of a viable collective identity. Such continuity facilitates transmission of particular understandings and repertoires (and carried especial significance later, with the official narrative purged of activism). Most importantly, the development of sites such as the Speakers' Corner and Dewan Tunku Canselor (Great Hall) facilitated mobilization to an extent that only really became clear in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the period to which we now turn.

[263] Ibid., p. 50.

[264] Ibid., p. 51.

[265] Ibid., p. 53.

[266] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 18.

[267] "Cultural Lead Wanting," *Malayan Undergrad*, October 1959, p. 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HEYDAYS OF PROTEST: 1967–1974

> The Universities have been to this nation, as the wooden horse was to the Trojans ... The core of rebellion, as you have seen by this, and read of other rebellions, are the Universities; which nevertheless are not to be cast away, but to be better disciplined.[1]

Student activism reached its apex in Malaysia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with a global student protest cycle. By the end of the 1960s, "the Asian university student" had "transformed himself—or been transformed—from passive bystander to assertive activist, from servile minister to myths to sassy kicker of sacred cows."[2] Ground zero for the region was Japan, where an estimated 350,000 students and trade unionists marched in every major city in October 1969. Disdaining the consumerism and standardization of contemporary society, these students attacked first their universities, then society as a whole, to the "outraged indignation" of their elders. A scandalized *Newsweek* described Tokyo University teachers "set upon and beaten, kicked and stoned by hyper-leftist student zealots." Four Japanese professors committed suicide over the course of a few months in 1969; scores of others were "hospitalized with a form of academic shell shock."[3] While matters were less heated elsewhere, the difference was only of degree. Thus, in Malaysia, a government report concluded in 1971 that local students had increasingly shifted from their previous focus on "parliamentary means of protest" and "negotiation-consultation" techniques to "direct action," partly in response to media reports on counterparts elsewhere. Though the tumult in Malaysia might have been less intense than in Paris or Berkeley, "this is not to suggest that all is well in the campus at the University of Malaya."[4] This agitation was tied to specific issues; it was not merely "for the sake of rebellion and the intention to disrupt university life."[5] And yet it was, indeed, disruptive.

[1] Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies, with introduction by Stephen Holmes (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 40, 58.

[2] Francisco Dalupan, "Students and Politics," in *Student Problems in Southeast Asian Universities*, ed. Chatar Singh and Tan Beng Cheok (Bangkok: Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, 1969), p. 130.

[3] "Student Strife: A Warning Bell," *Newsweek*, November 3, 1969, pp. 59–60.

[4] Abdul Majid bin Ismail, et al., *Report of the Committee Appointed by the National Operations Council to Study Campus Life of Students of the University of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Chetak Kerajaan, 1971), p. 124.

[5] Ibid., p. 125.

This period in Malaysian history might be characterized as "post-nationalist." The defining event of the period was Malaysia's first general election since separation from Singapore, in May 1969. The elections themselves went off reasonably smoothly, apart from the police's shooting of a Labour Party worker and a tense funeral procession (which some students joined) through Kuala Lumpur on the eve of the polls. Few voters heeded opposition calls for an election boycott.[6] The aftermath was less benign. The incumbent Alliance suffered its worst result to date, even with opposition-leaning Sabah and Sarawak yet to vote. The coalition won 63 percent of seats but just under half the popular vote. The Tunku's margins were embarrassingly slim in his home state, Kedah, and the coalition's Chinese partner, the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), lost over half its seats. At the state level, while the Alliance had controlled all but Kelantan previously, its representatives now lost in Penang and Perak, as well, and the vote in Selangor was precariously tied.

It was there that violence broke out between Malay and Chinese "have-nots" shortly after the polls closed.[7] An angry crowd of several thousand Malays assembled on May 13 at the home of Harun Idris, the Menteri Besar of Selangor state. From there, they launched a rampage against Chinese people and property in the Chow Kit neighborhood of Kuala Lumpur. An interim National Operations Council took charge of the government, ushering in a twenty-month period of emergency rule. The restoration of parliamentary rule in 1971 saw the Alliance reconstituted as a more encompassing and UMNO-centered Barisan Nasional (BN, National Front; UMNO, United Malays National Organization) under the leadership of Tun Abdul Razak Hussein (a.k.a. Tun Razak); the formal opposition was, for a time, almost entirely subsumed in this new coalition. New laws soon came into effect curbing civil liberties in the name of maintaining political stability and interethnic harmony. While it is beyond the scope of the current study to detail these events in full, the roots and aftermath of "May 13th" are a central part of the political story of this period. Perhaps most important to this legacy, though, were the shrinking space for dissent (including from students) and Tun Razak's launch of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971. This program of economic restructuring set Malaysia on a course not just of purposeful development, but of growth with equity, specifically for the advantage of a newly created category of *bumiputera*, the Malays and indigenous peoples so critical to UMNO's success. (We return to specific implications of the NEP shortly.)

For their part, as the imperative of nation-building faded, students turned their attention to particular policies, interacting with a burgeoning phalanx of professional politicians and bureaucrats. Several threads ran in tandem: leftist or communal support for the (Malay) poor; concern for international causes, particularly the Vietnam War; and spiraling racial tensions, refracted especially through contests over language. Most campaigns lacked a clear ideological line, apart from a vaguely socialist bent, as was true in many other countries at the time. Moreover, students

[6] Cynthia H. Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics: The Case of Malaysia* (Berkeley, CA: Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, University of California, 1970), p. v; Junaidi Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa, Politik, Dan Undang-Undang* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993), p. 18.

[7] For details of these events see, for instance, National Operations Council, *The May 13 Tragedy: A Report* (Kuala Lumpur: National Operations Council, 1969), for the official story, or Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*, on the centrality of education policy.

were not inflexibly anti-establishment: theirs was "a pragmatic and basically sensible attitude responding to positive and imaginative moves by government to enlist student support in tackling national problems."[8] Indeed, a first-ever opinion poll at UM in 1967 found that fully three-fourths of students deemed their parents liberal and understanding, a likely reason why local campuses did "not harbour such anti-establishment groups as the hippies and their other flowery 'sit-in's,' 'teach-in's,' and 'love-in's.'"[9] Campus and state authorities wanted and expected students to take part in national development, yet deplored increasingly common (and increasingly communally tinged) "agitation demonstrations, rabble-rousing, and resistance movements,"[10] at a time when social harmony had so recently and traumatically dissolved. Even the generally level-headed UM vice chancellor, Ungku Aziz, fretted at a 1971 graduation ceremony, "I am afraid we might soon hear of burning of buildings, using of bombs, or killing of lecturers and students as happened in other countries last year."[11] Students responded to his comments with quick demurrals. Education Minister Hussein Onn's fears were similarly apocryphal: that students were claiming rights "which are not reasonable and which have no legal or moral basis," or "which in the context of a multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural society will inevitably lead to violence and the breakdown of law and order in the campuses, and which will cause destruction, physical or otherwise, of institutions of higher learning."[12]

The unrest came to a halt with a far-reaching crackdown on students and universities in 1974. A new institutional framework and, particularly, the reinforcement of the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), first tentatively introduced in 1971, allowed for rapid expansion of higher education, transformed mechanisms for campus management and control, and eviscerated the student Left. The mobilizational intensity of 1967–74 is unlikely ever to resurface. Critical both to the upsurge of mobilization in the late 1960s and to its rapid decline in the mid-1970s were not just shifts in the broader political milieu, as the initial postcolonial order yielded to the more hard-edged Barisan Nasional regime, but, also, radical changes in the campus environment, in terms of both the number and structure of universities and the profile of students and staff. These developments set the stage for a new sense among students of their position and potential in society, feeding initiatives ranging from a pivotal electoral campaign to intensive grassroots engagement. In the background were a heated international environment and a rising communal tide at home, as a distinctly Malay nationalism overwhelmed more unifying variants. As the period drew to a close in Malaysia in 1974, the first seeds of the soon-massive Islamic revival sprouted in the substrate of a newly subdued polity and campus; Singapore's government cracked down at the same time, but left less fertile a wake. All told, student activism in 1967–74 was significant not only for its scale and exuberance, but because dynamics on campus so strongly reflected and furthered shifts in Malaysian political alignments, confirming the triumph of communalism over class and the institutionalization of a strong, resolute state.

[8] Abdul Majid, *Report*, pp. 125–26.

[9] "Report on the Findings of the Opinion Poll 1967," *Prima* 1,3 (1967–68): 8.

[10] Institut Teknologi MARA director Arshad Ayub, in *Straits Times*, June 19, 1971.

[11] *Malay Mail*, June 25, 1971; *Straits Times*, June 29, 1971.

[12] *Straits Times*, August 14, 1971.

We explore this pivotal period in terms first of institutional development, then of students' electoral engagement, outreach activities among the rural poor, and internationally focused engagement, all of which reached their peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s. We then turn to consider the rising tide: first, mounting communalism among students, then the development of Islamist activism, and, finally, solidification of a new regime that brought the era to an end and obliged students fundamentally to rethink their place in the polity.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The stage on which this drama played out was an increasingly elaborate and expanding university system. A Higher Education Planning Committee under the Ministry of Education (which included no representatives from an opposition party[13]) advised in 1967 that higher education should ultimately accommodate 20 percent of secondary-school graduates. It recommended upgrading and expanding the Technical College and faculty of agriculture; establishing a university college in Penang; increasing tertiary-level courses in Malay; and boosting facilities for advanced training in such pragmatic fields as accountancy and veterinary science. The report helped to launch a new phase in Malaysian higher education, with more universities, a greater focus on science and technology, and a shift away from British academic models.[14]

The University of Penang, soon renamed Universiti Sains Malaysia (Science University of Malaysia, USM), was established in due course in 1969, and offered broader schools of study than did UM's rigid system of departments and faculties. The university was intended both to reassure the mostly non-Malay citizens of Penang of the federal government's concern and to "arrest fears concerning possible Malayization" of UM.[15] Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia, UKM) was established next, with faculties of arts, science, and Islamic Studies, in 1970.[16] The launch of UKM—initially housed at a borrowed campus in the Pantai neighborhood, near UM—satisfied demands from UM's Malay Language Society (Persatuan Bahasa Melayu Universiti Malaya, PBMUM) and others for a Malay-medium, centrally located national university.[17] (UMSU, the University of Malaya Student Union, had preferred that UKM be located on the east coast.[18]) Starting with under two hundred students, UKM grew rapidly, with an enrollment exceeding one thousand (still far fewer than UM) by 1973. USM was smaller, growing from 57 students, in 1969, to nearly seven hundred in its third session.[19] The College of Agriculture and the Technical College, established in 1931 and 1925, respectively, were made universities in 1971 and 1972: Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Agriculture University of Malaysia, UPM) and the National Institute of Technology (NIT), renamed Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) three years later. The National Association of Muslim Students (PKPIM, Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia), backed by other advocates, also pressed for the government to fulfill its promises to establish an Islamic university, rather than just Islamic colleges and faculties, although, for now, without success.[20] Five additional tertiary institutions also joined the ranks: The Rural and Industrial Development Authority's Training Centre was upgraded to become MARA College,[21] then MARA Institute of Technology (ITM) in 1967, to train *bumiputera* for middle-level management and technical positions;[22] and, in 1969, several polytechnics were launched, plus the business-oriented Tunku Abdul Rahman College (KTAR, Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman) as a Chinese counterpart to ITM. Starting with around five hundred students, KTAR exceeded four thousand by 1975, notwithstanding protests by UMSU, PBMUM, UMNO Youth, and other Malay groups over its MCA links, English-language curriculum, and predominantly non-Malay enrollment.[23]

Establishing these institutions required new legislation. UM was the only university established by a discrete act of parliament, the University of Malaya Act, 1961; all others were ultimately established under the UUCA, which came to serve as a common blueprint for all universities. Initially, though, respected Justice Mohamed Suffian Hashim chaired cabinet committees in 1968 and 1969 to draft constitutions

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[13] Goh Hock Guan, "A Critique on the Higher Education Planning Committee Report," *The Rocket* 3,7 (July–August 1968): 4–5.

[14] Viswanathan Selvaratnam, "Change amidst Continuity: University Development in Malaysia," in *From Dependence to Autonomy*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Viswanathan Selvaratnam (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), pp. 191–95; Tham Seong Chee, "Issues in Malaysian Education: Past, Present, and Future," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10,2 (1979): 330.

[15] Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*, pp. vi–vii.

[16] Their respective publications reflect the differences between UM and UKM. UKM's *Gemasiswa*, launched in May 1972, carried more serious articles, on balance, than UM's *Mahasiswa Negara*, including pieces on Islam, the role of the university, and social problems—for instance, working papers on socioeconomic issues by Rafidah Aziz (June 20, 1972) and Sanusi Osman (December 31, 1972), and translations of pieces by Syed Qutb (November 2, 1972) and Said Ramadán (October 10, 1972). Moreover, *Gemasiswa* articles were written entirely in Malay from the outset.

[17] Abdul Jalil Ishak, "'Universiti Kebangsaan mesti diIbu Kota," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 18, 1971, p. 5; "Arah Aliran Pelajaran Tinggi," *Gemasiswa*, July 19, 1972, p. 6.

[18] Muhammad Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa Menggugat: Suatu Analisa Dan Peninjauan Dari Dalam Terhadap Kegiatan Mahasiswa-Mahasiswa Negeri Ini* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1973), p. 115.

[19] Interview with Rahman Embong, March 29, 2006, Bangi; Ahmad Ibrahim, "Higher Education in Malaya," *Bulletin of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia* VII,1 (1972): 107–8.

[20] Letter from Anwar Ibrahim to Prime Minister Tun Razak, "Penubohan Universiti Islam," September 23, 1970, PKPIM archives, Gombak.

[21] MARA stands for Majlis Amanah Rakyat, or Council of Trust for the People.

[22] ITM students' fight for their institution to be upgraded to a university shut down the school for a month in 1974. Interview with Ibrahim Ali, March 21, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[23] On the formation of these institutions, see: Tham Seong Chee, *The Role and Impact of Formal Associations on the Development of Malaysia* (Bangkok: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1977), pp. 338–40; Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Pelajar Melayu Dan Politik Kebangsaan Di Universiti Malaya 1964–74," in *Budi Kencana: Kumpulan Makalah Memperingati Persaraan Professor Tan Sri Dato' Ismail Hussein*, ed. Nik Safiah Karim, et al. (Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Melayu, Universiti Malaya, 1994), p. 169; Viswanathan Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality, and Higher Education in Peninsular Malaysia: The Sociological Implications*, Working Paper #78 (Singapore: Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 1987), p. 7; Selvaratnam, "Change amidst Continuity," pp. 192–93; Ahmad, "Higher Education in Malaya," pp. 101–2, 110; Rabeendran Raghavan, "A Study of the Political Attitudes of Students from the University of Malaya" (PhD dissertation, Rutgers University, 1975), pp. 140–42, 174–75; Kamarazaman Yacob, *Bersama Anwar Ke Penjara* (Petaling Jaya: Transgrafik, 1994), pp. 82–83; M. Kalyubi Ghazali, "KTAR: Hussein Dituntut Berdialog," *Gemasiswa*, September 1, 1972, p. 1; "'Do Not Misunderstand Us'—Presiden PMUM," *Mahasiswa Negara*, December 19, 1972, p. 11.

for the University of Penang and National University, respectively. The committee for the University of Penang recommended that government intervention be kept to a minimum in these new institutions, apart from government appointments to the university court and council in light of the "huge amounts of public funds" at stake.[24] The report endorsed university autonomy, but suggested that Malaysia still lacked "sufficient sophistication to permit total freedom" for academics; it advised teaching staff "to play down racial and religious animosities," specifically.[25] Curricular matters, entry requirements, and selection of applicants would be the domain of the university alone, apart from automatic admission for holders of government scholarships or loans.[26] Moreover, not only would academic staff be lured with higher salaries and vetted by outside referees to ensure quality, but the committee advised that local universities "strive to attract persons of calibre, be they teachers or students, whose mere presence on the campus serves to dissipate any parochialism that may exist and to open our eyes to the world outside."[27] The report called, too, for a Students' Representative Council (SRC). While the SRC could neither affiliate with nor support any political party, trade union, or other organization, students could do so on an individual basis.[28] The UUCA as passed reflected most, but not all, these parameters; we return shortly to this critical legislation.

University administration evolved apace. Economist Ungku Aziz, a specialist on poverty and rural development, became the first Malaysian vice chancellor of UM in 1968. By then, Malaysians (often educated abroad) headed most departments, although many Europeans remained on staff.[29] Trained in the British tradition, Ungku Aziz believed firmly in a university free from government interference. The 1967 Higher Education Planning Committee agreed, asserting that, "Universities, to be worthy of that name, should be allowed complete autonomy in internal administration and full freedom in all academic matters."[30] Against that backdrop, Prime Minister Tun Razak's December 1973 announcement of the appointment of Abdullah Ayub, head of the civil service, as the new UKM vice chancellor—seemingly to tighten government control—met with vehement protests and boycotts by students and staff. He was obliged to withdraw the appointment within ten days.[31] Indeed, as Malaysianization of the teaching staff progressed, and as the state's developmental objectives increasingly impinged on university autonomy, a growing subset of lecturers, many of them former student activists, openly espoused the same sort of reforms as their students.[32]

[24] Mohamed Suffian Hashim et al., "Report of the Cabinet Committee on the Constitution of the University of Penang" (Kuala Lumpur: Government Press, 1969), pp. 1–2.

[25] Ibid., p. 2.

[26] Ibid., p. 3.

[27] Ibid., pp. 3–4.

[28] Ibid., pp. 19–20.

[29] Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*, p. 164.

[30] Quoted in Selvaratnam, "Change amidst Continuity," p. 196.

[31] "Upsurge of Democratic Struggle ... Shakes Fascist Razak Regime to Its Foundation," *New Malayan Youth* 2,12–3,1-2 (December 1973–February 1974): 4.

[32] Selvaratnam, "Change amidst Continuity," p. 200.

THE NEW LEGAL LANDSCAPE

Cartoon, from "Guess Who?" *Mahasiswa Negara*, December 3, 1971, p. 8

The tightening of controls on campus was part of the state's consolidation of authority over society as a whole. Well before the resounding crackdown in 1974, the political environment for activism of any sort had clearly changed. The first act of the reconvened parliament in 1971 was to push through a set of constitutional amendments removing "sensitive" issues—regarding the special position of Malays, the national language, and the sovereignty of the Malay rulers—from public debate.[33] Parliament then abruptly amended the Internal Security Act (ISA), allowing the detention without trial of anyone considered a threat to Malaysia's economic life or essential services, despite objections from the PKPM (Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Malaysia, National Union of Malaysian Students) and affiliated student groups, among others. PKPM and UMSU lobbied government ministers Tun Ismail, Ghazali Shafie, and Hussein Onn to no effect.[34] As the newly constituted Barisan Nasional faced not only encroachments by non-Malay opponents, but also PAS's (Parti Islam se-Malaysia, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) puncturing of ethnic ranks, Alliance-era cooperation "gave way to a dramatic strengthening of internal security, political centralisation, and control," especially with the rise of a cohort of young, chauvinistic "ultras" in UMNO.[35] Moreover, the rise of these Malay-nationalist party leaders corresponded with the rise of a cognate (and partly allied) cohort on campus.[36]

[33] Tham, "Malaysian Education," pp. 321–22.

[34] Anne Munro-Kua, *Authoritarian Populism in Malaysia* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 81; Vijayan Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act 1971: A Study of Government Motives and Student Reaction" (BEc thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1972), pp. 58–59.

[35] Judith Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change: The Islamic Revival in Malaysia," *Pacific Affairs* 53,3 (1980): 407.

[36] Tham, "Malaysian Education," pp. 331–33.

Especially after the 1969 elections and the evidence they gave of racialism and disaffection among youth, the increasing number of students in higher education, including from poor and rural backgrounds, worried the government. The National Operations Council named Dato' Dr. Hj. Abdul Majid bin Ismail to head a committee to study campus life at UM, particularly the adequacy of social and cultural facilities for promoting racial unity.[37] The committee—which lost its only representative from UM when Ungku Aziz stepped down (for unspecified reasons) and failed to consult with UMSU directly—was skeptical that the "too big and impersonal" UM was up to the task of fostering real unity. UM's constitution remained largely intact from its colonial-era Singapore days, and little in the institution's statutes or academic courses focused on "fostering national culture, national values, national consciousness, and national unity." Moreover, most of UM's student societies (of which there were more than thirty) were "essentially mono-racial," apart from UMSU (which included all 7,700 students), the UM Athletic Union, and the Socialist Club. Non-Malays predominated among elected leaders of affiliated societies. And since most students were "so examination-conscious that they [were] not willing to take time off from their studies to participate in student activities," UMSU had trouble even mustering a quorum for its general meetings; the November 1969 one, for instance, had to be postponed twice.[38] The few activist students running things were overburdened, sometimes to the detriment of their studies.[39] It is true that UMSU presidents Anwar Fazal and Khong Kim Hoong were each named Best All-Round Student in 1963 and 1969, respectively, but, for instance, fellow student leader Syed Hamid Ali failed his first year.[40]

Most importantly, the committee found UM to be dangerously divided: Malays saw PBMUM "as the more primary body of their allegiance, particularly in relation to national political issues," while non-Malays identified more with UMSU. The two societies with predominantly Malay membership—PBMUM and PMIUM (Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Malaya, UM Muslim Students' Society)—were not affiliated with UMSU, nor were smaller Malay-based clubs. PBMUM opted not to affiliate, the committee learned, because it felt itself superior to the other language societies and preferred to maintain a distinct identity and autonomy, and because UMSU "had shown little, if any, leadership and initiative in popularising the use of the national language in the campus." The committee granted the merit of this last concern, but noted that only PBMUM and the also-unaffiliated Russian Language Society lacked clauses in their constitutions about promoting understanding and appreciation of other Malaysian cultures. Fearing a worsening ethnic rift, the committee proposed that there be greater centralization under UMSU, along with more organization-specific changes—for instance, that the language societies plan

[37] Abdul Majid, *Report*. The committee's findings were widely publicized and debated in local media. See, for example: "Pemimpin2 Penuntut Gagal Ujudkan Sefahaman Kaum," *Utusan Malaysia*, May 26, 1971, pp. 1, 12; then Lau Lee Ching, "Benar-kah PMUM Gagal Suarakan Hasrat Mahasiswa," *Utusan Malaysia*, June 4, 1971; also *Malay Mail*, January 16, 1970; *Sunday Mail*, April 5, 1970.

[38] *Straits Times*, November 24, 1969.

[39] Abdul Majid, *Report*, pp. 10–11, 15–17.

[40] *Straits Times*, July 26, 1969; interview with Mano Maniam, March 25, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006, Batu Pahat.

joint activities and that UMSU launch a Current Affairs Club (although the vice chancellor had rejected a student proposal for such a club in 1964).[41]

Institutionally, the aim was that the student population should mirror national demographics, overall and by faculty, even if that meant earmarking scholarships or changing admissions criteria to boost Malay enrollments. In conjunction, the committee insisted, UM should take immediate measures both to assist Malay-educated students and to ensure English-educated ones learn Malay. Moreover, all should be better incorporated within the hostel system and discouraged from "excessive preoccupation with examinations," to the exclusion of sports and games.[42] Importantly, urged the committee, students' "right of political participation should not be denied unless there are overwhelming reasons for such denial" (which it found was not the case). Nor should lecturers face the same constraints as civil servants, since they are neither privy to government secrets nor engaged in direct political service. So long as their affiliations did not impinge on their academic duties and were "publicly known so that any bias can be discounted," lecturers should face no extraordinary restrictions, the committee recommended. Indeed, far from silencing them, the government should invite students and lecturers onto boards and commissions. Consultative processes at all levels at UM should be improved, since frustration at being ignored or disregarded "can build up to the point of fury and violence."[43]

The Majid Committee's findings became the basis of the University and University Colleges Act (UUCA), proposed by Minister of Education Dato' Hussein Onn shortly after parliament reconvened in 1971, and passed (with minimal public debate or consultation) the following day.[44] The UUCA created a common legislative framework for the establishment and maintenance of all Malaysian universities. Each would retain a court, council, and senate, but the manner of appointments and powers shifted with the implementation of the act. The student council president and secretary would now serve on the "primarily formal" university court. (The heads of state of Singapore and Brunei, though, would no longer enjoy assured appointments to the court.) The vice chancellor (still appointed by the council) gained additional powers over campus welfare and student discipline. The unwieldy council was cut nearly in half, retaining only limited faculty representation, with a clear government majority, while a shrunken senate, too, included far fewer lecturers.[45] From an administrative perspective, the UUCA made sense: Malaysia needed more universities; the act made their establishment less cumbersome and introduced some structural uniformity.

[41] Abdul Majid, *Report*, pp. 14–15, 18–20, 27–28, 52–53, 122, 128.

[42] Ibid., pp. 44–45, 100–3, 110, 123.

[43] Ibid., pp. 54–56, 112–13.

[44] See Junaidi, *Mahasiswa, Politik*, pp. 15–16; Hassan Karim and Siti Nor Hamid, eds., *With the People! The Malaysian Student Movement 1967–74* (Petaling Jaya: Institute for Social Analysis [INSAN], 1984), pp. 6–7; and *Mahasiswa Negara*, May 24, 1971 ("New Act Weakens Student Body," pp. 1, 7; "Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti 1971," p. 10) and June 7, 1971 ("Construed or Misconstrued," pp. 1, 14), (especially) December 3, 1971 ("UMSU Will Oppose Any Interference," pp. 1, 5; "Students' Council Meets Acting Vice-Chancellor for Clarification," pp. 1, 8; and "Declaration," p. 8), and May 29, 1972 ("Hamid and Annuar Condemn Act Again," pp. 1, 8).

[45] Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," pp. 16–22, 27–28.

But the UUCA addressed a host of other issues, as well, in ways sometimes at odds with the Majid Committee's recommendations. Its most controversial provisions would temper student activism. As Education Minister Hussein Onn clarified in parliament, "It is not that we love the students less, but that we love the institutions more. We are not going to destroy our institutions which we have so painstakingly built to produce dedicated citizens of the future. We do not want the students to be turned into rabble-rousing crowds."[46] UMSU would be dissolved and replaced by a Students' Representative Council (SRC, Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar), an idea borrowed from the Suffian committee report on the University of Penang. Explained a student, "The rejection of the word 'union' is an obvious acknowledgement that it carries uncomfortable connotations."[47] UMSU's nine-member executive committee would be pared back in size and duties. The SRC was to be basically a welfare body and aide to the vice chancellor, with all activities subject to his and the University Council's approval.[48] Sniped the PKPM, "In effect, this reduces the SRC to the equivalent of the Prefects Board in the Secondary Schools."[49]

More tendentious still were clauses in the UUCA that forbade student organizations from affiliating with, or doing anything that could be "construed" as expressing support for, sympathy for, or opposition to any political party, trade union, or unlawful group. University authorities were designated the arbiters of what was acceptable.[50] As UMSU secretary-general Jai Mohan groused, "The law does not stop us from commenting on national issues but it is extremely likely that some political parties or trade unions might express their opinions on the same issues we have commented on, thus making us innocent victims."[51] Moreover, individual students were prohibited from holding office in any party or trade union, although they could still be ordinary members of such organizations—despite the fact that the committee reports on which the UUCA was largely based had advised only that the SRC itself not be allowed to affiliate with a party or union.[52] The UUCA, in short, baldly reflected the state's post-1969 inclination toward containing challengers.[53]

Joining university students in excoriating the UUCA were academics, international student bodies, and politicians—and not just from the opposition. In mid-1971, the PKPM resolved unanimously to demand repeal of the most contested bits of the act—Clauses 15 and 16 and Sections 48 though 51—then launched a signature campaign. A four-member delegation led by PKPM president Sidek Nontak met with the ministers of home affairs, information, and education, who

[46] Ibid., p. 53.

[47] Ibid., p. 25.

[48] "New Act Weakens Student Body," *Mahasiswa Negara*, May 24, 1971, pp. 1, 7.

[49] Quoted in Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," pp. 29–30.

[50] "Construed or Misconstrued," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 7, 1971, pp. 1, 14.

[51] *Sunday Times*, February 28, 1971.

[52] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 136–38; Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," pp. 23–24.

[53] Teng Cheng Siong, "The Loss of Autonomy in Malaysian Universities and Its Consequences and Impact on Administration, Personnel, and Students: The Case of the University of Malaya" (MEc thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1985), pp. 60–61.

promised to consider the PKPM memo.[54] UM vice chancellor Ungku Aziz weighed in, too, on the students' behalf.[55] UMSU was ultimately allowed to retain its name and structure,[56] and student bodies were allowed to affiliate across institutions.[57] UKM and the University of Penang were not granted the same exemption, and the word "construed" in Section 15 remained. UMSU officers traveled first to Penang, then Singapore, issuing joint anti-UUCA statements. UMSU also issued "The Right to Independent Action," a six-point declaration (included subsequently in UM's orientation manual) insisting that since students have an obligation to "actively involve themselves in this national construction and political process," their union should be more autonomous.[58]

Protests continued through the early 1970s, even as students simply ignored the UUCA's more stringent provisions. For instance, when Education Minister Haji Mohamed Yaacob visited USM in November 1973, students "made militant speeches and burnt pieces of paper bearing the letters 'UUCA' and 'Akta' (Act) in front of him."[59] All the same, particularly since most in the student council assumed the government would exempt UM from the UUCA's requirements (and the government continued to equivocate), UMSU did little to keep the student body informed and mobilized.[60] More than a year after the UUCA's passage, over three-quarters of students polled denied they had been affected by the UUCA, although the majority opposed at least certain sections and 85 percent thought the government was afraid of students.[61]

At the heart of the conflict were conflicting views on the university and its place in society. The authorities considered the university to be an educational institution that should function to develop the skills of an educated cohort needed by the country. Student activists, on the other hand, argued "that students are not the leaders of tomorrow. They are the leaders of today who should grasp the opportunity of political struggle."[62] UMSU president Sim Kim Chew protested at a 1972 forum on the UUCA, "How can we act responsibly if we are suppressed and

[54] *Malay Mail*, March 2, 1971.

[55] "Twenty-two Unions Oppose Act," *Mahasiswa Negara*, November 22, 1971, pp. 1, 5; Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," pp. 3, 8–11; also Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 138–44; "Students Unite," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 21, 1971, p. 6. For other lengthy critiques, see, among others: "Siswa Tidak Patut Dibendong," *Mahasiswa Negara*, December 3, 1971, p. 2, and "Akta Universiti Perlu Dikaji Semula," December 13, 1971, p. 8.

[56] *Mahasiswa Negara*, December 3, 1971, p. 1; Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," p. 25.

[57] *Straits Times*, March 19, 1971.

[58] "UMSU Will Oppose Any Interference," *Mahasiswa Negara*, December 3, 1971, pp. 1, 5; and "Declaration," p. 8 (the Malay translation of the declaration, on "the right to independent action," followed in the next issue); *Straits Times*, December 4, 1971; Lee Chee Keong and Hermani Hj. Abdullah, *Buku Panduan PMUM '72* (Kuala Lumpur: Jawatan Kuasa Orientasi, PMUM, 1972), pp. 46–48; Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," p. 62.

[59] "Militant Students of Universiti Sains Struggle for Their Democratic Right to be Political," *New Malayan Youth* 2, 7–8 (July–August 1973): 12.

[60] Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," pp. 61–63.

[61] Ibid., pp. 70–80.

[62] Op-ed by Noordin Sopiee, "Campus Act and Student Politics," *New Straits Times*, November 24, 1973.

treated like school children?"[63] His classmate Mohamed Farid Ariffin likewise worried that the pressure to "concentrate on studies and leave politicking to others" would create mere "yes-men."[64] Asserted PKPM,

> The Act arose out of a total lack of perspective of student unionism in this country, and it represents a very convenient tool for the suppression of student rights ... [The prohibition of party or union office] is a brazen discrimination and a violation of the rights of the individual. There is no reason for this—except that students are deprived of rights merely because we are students.[65]

Academic staff also figured in both the UUCA and other new legislation. Already in 1970, UM's Academic Staff Association—accustomed to collective bargaining to set terms of service and salaries—complained that rules and regulations for government servants were being imposed inappropriately on university teaching staff. Staff members boycotted convocation in protest,[66] but the UUCA maintained the same guidelines,[67] supplemented by even more contentious disciplinary rules as the decade wore on.

Yet a primary impetus for the UUCA was merely to pave the way for the efficient expansion of tertiary education. Despite the launch of UKM and USM, by the early 1970s more students were receiving federal and state scholarships than could be accommodated. Article 153 of Malaysia's 1957 constitution reserved a proportion of those awards for Malays (regardless of class background), and the UM constitution guaranteed admission to recipients, encouraging states to offer "token scholarships" just to ensure those students' admission (for instance, for hundreds of Malay students from PAS-led Kelantan[68]). More university places were needed.

The UUCA thus became entwined with a network of policies composed, in part, to deal with Malaysia's potentially volatile multiethnic makeup. Central to that program was the New Economic Policy, spelled out in the Second Malaysia Plan of 1971–75. The NEP aimed to eradicate poverty, equalize employment opportunities, and restructure society to end economic specialization along ethnic lines, targeting distribution of resources and opportunities rather than growth to redress economic inequality. Increasing access to tertiary education, especially via a preferential quota system for rural Malays, constituted a core plank of the program. The government

[63] "Hamid and Annuar Condemn Act Again," *Mahasiswa Negara*, May 29, 1972, p. 1.

[64] *Straits Times*, June 7, 1972.

[65] Quoted in Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," pp. 29–30. In the same vein, reports that the Special Branch was infiltrating the campus (particularly the Speaker's Corner and Union House) and interrogating student leaders escalated. This phenomenon was not entirely new, but the practice grew increasingly open as of mid-1971, and may have involved actively riling up students to justify arresting them. Concerned students censured these incidents as intrusions upon university autonomy and insults to campus administration and security, even though university authorities, too, shared information with police. "Special Branch Quiz Students," *Mahasiswa Negara*, September 6, 1971, pp. 1, 10; interview with Khoo Kay Kim, March 17, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and interview with Khong Kim Hoong, August 23, 2007, Kuala Lumpur.

[66] *Malay Mail*, June 18, 1970.

[67] Teng, "Loss of Autonomy," pp. 83–84.

[68] Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, December 5, 2005, Washington, DC.

established a Central Universities Admissions Unit (Unit Pusat Universiti) within the ministry of education to ensure conformity with the NEP, eroding the longstanding tradition of merit-based admissions, and also set up new residential science schools and pre-university foundation courses, primarily to help Malay students prepare for university.[69] Coupled with changes in admissions policies was the larger indigenization of the content of higher education. Taken together, these adjustments aimed to further national unity as well as productivity and income.[70]

While quotas might relieve intraethnic inequality among Malays, they exacerbated the "deep sense of frustration and political alienation" among non-Malay youths now subject to ever more institutionalized discrimination.[71] Moreover, despite the near-trebling of the university development budget, the universities still could not meet demand. It cost thirty-three times as much to educate a student in university as in primary school in the 1970s; critics argued that greater expenditures at the elementary level would have been a more sure investment.[72] Fewer than half of university applicants in 1972 and 1973 were admitted—and that proportion rapidly declined, especially for non-Malays. By 1978, Malays constituted two-thirds of students across the five universities, with especial gains in natural sciences (and Islamic Studies). These changes helped to develop a new Malay middle class, but the gap between Malay elites and masses remained wide.[73]

Recognizing systemic inadequacies, in 1973 vice chancellor Ungku Aziz proposed a partial solution. Not only did scholarships sometimes go to well-off families, but the vast majority of recipients, he complained, "Do not seem to show gratitude for the aid that they have been given, and after they have graduated they do not feel any responsibility to serve society in some way."[74] He recommended that the government economize by substituting loans for scholarships, administered by a public *Tabung Siswa* (Student Fund), and supplemented by prizes to commemorate especially laudable achievements. In exchange for tuition assistance, students would be obligated to serve the government. In the program's second phase, *Tabung Siswa* could also serve as a repository for parents' savings.[75] UMSU rated the idea "sound."[76]

Overall, the combined effect of the UUCA and NEP was firmer state manipulation of the scope and direction of higher education. Yet these institutional changes alone were not sufficient to quiet the campuses; the stridency of students' sociopolitical engagement only increased through the early 1970s. It took a two-part crackdown, first through the imposition of these legislative changes after the events of 1969, then, more forcefully, with December 1974's ISA sweep, to yank the campus

[69] Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality, and Higher Education*, pp. 16–17; Teng, "Loss of Autonomy," pp. 335–36.

[70] Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality and Higher Education*, pp. 9–13.

[71] Raghavan, "Political Attitudes of Students," p. 157.

[72] Donald K. Sharpes, *Education and Malaysian Development: A Social Science Inquiry* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1977), p. 124–25.

[73] Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality and Higher Education*, pp. 15, 18–20.

[74] Ungku Abdul Aziz, "Memo to the Government of Malaysia: The Establishment of Tabung Siswa (Fund for Students) to Replace the System of Government Gratis Scholarships (a Comprehensive Reform Proposal)," 1973, pp. 2–3 (archived at UM's Za'ba Memorial Library).

[75] Ibid., pp. 7, 13–20.

[76] *Sunday Mail*, May 13, 1973.

into line, and a determined legal and discursive strategy of intellectual containment thereafter to keep it that way.

Associational Life

Throughout, UM remained the focal point of mobilization. Even there, however, student council elections saw voter turnout fall from a high of 78 percent in 1962 to below 50 percent by 1970. Of students surveyed in 1967, 81 percent claimed that they did not participate in student politics; that year, every candidate for student council was returned unopposed.[77] Concerned with such trends across campuses, UKM's vice chancellor convened a committee to investigate the low levels of student participation in social, sports, and cultural activities.[78] By one estimate, although plenty turned up for the occasional meeting, only around 2 percent of students participated in routine student society or student union work;[79] another study offers a more generous, but still modest, estimate of 5 to 8 percent, primarily students from arts and economics.[80] Malay students, especially former teachers, tended to be most active; women and students who lived outside hostels were the least so.[81] That the overwhelming majority of vocal, visible activists were men is not surprising: UM was over 70 percent male in 1972, and UKM, UPM, and ITM, over 75 percent. While those numbers slowly evened out, by 1975, just 32 percent of UM undergraduates were women, and they were concentrated in certain fields (and constituted a majority only in, oddly, dentistry).[82]

Regardless, inspired now in part by American and European examples, students stepped up demands for inclusion in university decision-making and administration.[83] By mid-1968, observers noted an atmosphere of "simmering discontent" at UM: undergraduates resented being treated like "school children."[84] At the same time, complaints of bad behavior by an unruly minority persisted, citing acts that ranged from ragging to general indiscipline.[85] In 1971, one student was expelled after a violent altercation at a campus talent show, and a student journalist

[77] "Report on the Findings of the Opinion Poll 1967," *Prima* 1,3 (1967–68): 10–12.

[78] Udadara, "Mahasiswa dan Kegiatan-kegiatan Non Akademik," *Gemasiswa*, November 2, 1972, pp. 7, 9; Al Amin, "Students' Apathy—Satu Sikap Yang Merugikan," *Gemasiswa*, December 1, 1972, p. 7.

[79] S. Balakrishnan, "Student Government and Welfare," in *Student Problems in Southeast Asian Universities*, ed. Chatar Singh and Tan Beng Cheok (Bangkok: Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, 1969), p. 58.

[80] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 19–24.

[81] Lee Meng Foon, "The University of Malaya Students' Union—An Evolution of Student Leadership" (BEc thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1971), pp. 19–21; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 19–24; interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[82] Fatimah Hamid Don, "Opportunities for Women in Education," paper presented at the conference, "The Role of Women in Higher Education: Implications for Higher Education in Southeast Asia," Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, November 14–15, 1975, pp. 11–13.

[83] Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006. For a spirited denunciation of such participation, see John H. Bunzel, "Some Reflections on Student Participation and Representation," *P.S.* 3,2 (1970), pp. 117–22.

[84] *Malay Mail*, July 5, 1968.

[85] For instance, *Straits Times*, October 30 and 31, 1968, and June 6, 1970.

penned a column on the "problem 'two per cent'" after nearly two dozen students were barred from an exam for having skipped classes.[86] Ungku Aziz was amenable to reform, partly in hopes that, if controlled by student leaders, "the varsity will not be plagued by hooliganism and rowdiness."[87] By the decade's end, students served on several faculties and panels, as well as on the Board of Student Welfare. They won real concessions, from the retraction of a hostel fee increase imposed in 1967 to extension of library hours the following year.[88] A Joint Faculty–Student Committee to increase student representation further was announced in late 1970. And in December 1971, even as the government moved to tighten control, UM professor Ahmad Ibrahim suggested that student representatives could join the University Council as elected representatives of the University Court.[89] (USSU, too, engaged in fierce debates in the late 1960s over how the University of Singapore should be run, laying out demands in a joint UMSU–USSU communiqué in 1972.[90]) Explained the Majid Committee, "They [students] resent the feeling that they are merely units in a vast mass production machine, without any personal influence on many events which affect their lives." Though it endorsed "consultation" and participation in matters of student welfare, the committee drew the line at "radical demands for 'participatory democracy'" on staff and curricular matters.[91] Students pressed for inclusion in student-run initiatives, as well, as when around six hundred from various clubs protested being left out of consultations on an UMSU cultural seminar and carnival in 1973.[92]

In practice, UMSU prevailed in matters of student welfare, controlling the canteen, buses, and more. By 1970, the union's annual income and reserves were each about $200,000, mostly from entrance fees ($10 per student) and yearly subscriptions ($8), to which were added grants from the university and income from investments and rentals.[93] Certain faculties even granted sabbaticals to top union officers, recognizing the significance of their efforts.[94] In the early 1970s, the well-staffed, well-managed UMSU was reputedly "the richest student union in Southeast Asia."[95] Meanwhile, although its responsibility to UMSU remained unclear—at one point, the UMSU council dismissed the editorial board of the paper for questioning union policies, but its authority was hazy—*Mahasiswa Negara* continued as the primary campus news source, sold on campus for a small fee.[96] Even when the price doubled from 10 to 20 cents, students kept buying the paper: all eight thousand

[86] *Sunday Mail*, June 6, 1971; Cheah Boon Kheng, in *Straits Times*, January 13, 1972; also Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 164–65.

[87] Quoted in *Straits Times*, June 26, 1971.

[88] Cheah Boon Kheng, "Reforms at the University," *Sunday Mail*, August 3, 1969.

[89] "Possible for Student to be Member of University Council," *Mahasiswa Negara*, December 3, 1971, p. 8.

[90] Interview with Chandra Muzaffar, February 7, 2006, Petaling Jaya; *Straits Times*, October 13, 1970, May 9, 1972.

[91] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 112.

[92] *New Sunday Times*, August 5, 1973.

[93] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 22.

[94] Cheah Boon Kheng, "Reforms at the University," *Sunday Mail*, August 3, 1969.

[95] Sheryll Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais: The Rebel Returns," *Men's Review*, February 1995, p. 30.

[96] Interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006.

copies of the July 5, 1971, issue sold out, for instance, a feat proudly announced in the following issue. Once the Socialist Club took control in 1972, sales soared higher, making it possible occasionally to publish weekly instead of fortnightly issues.

Reconstituted in Kuala Lumpur in 1968, after a decade of false starts, the Socialist Club (Kelab Sosialis) was UM's first political club. The Board of Student Welfare had rejected the Pantai Forum four years earlier; similar efforts in 1965 (the Progressive Club) and 1966 (Forum Mahasiswa) likewise failed. The Socialist Club had applied to the Registrar of Societies as early as 1960; its establishment was finally approved eight years later. Like its progenitor in Singapore, the club proposed to foster political discussion and activity; study domestic and international social, economic, and political issues; and produce publications. In the early 1970s, for instance, the Socialist Club held weekly forums and discussions on topics ranging from government oppression and capitalist exploitation to mundane developments. Members had access to otherwise proscribed books, and both discussed key works and translated basic Marxist and other texts to distribute among students and workers. The club also produced the biweekly *Berita Sosialis* (Socialist News) for distribution in and around campus. Most members were undergraduates, including clusters of supporters at ITM and USM. Halim Ali served as first president.[97]

Formation of a political club required registration with both the Board of Student Welfare (approval from this board was required for all student organizations) and the Registrar of Societies. The Socialist Club could only conduct activities on campus and accept funds from its members, it could form no political party ties, and only members of the teaching staff, not graduates, could be associate members (graduates were allowed to join other student clubs). The Socialist Club was autonomous of UMSU.[98] Though genuinely noncommunal and concerned with large issues, the club was never very big—it had just around a dozen active members, with their ranks unknown to most students.[99] Still, the club was influential, especially since some leaders were also active in UMSU and other organizations. Notably, former Malay schoolteacher Sanusi Osman, the first Socialist Club research secretary, was also president of the Malay Language Society; another leading member, Hishamuddin Rais, represented his college in the UM Islamic Students' Society.[100] Well-regarded for its "sincere" mien, the club in Malaysia was broader in membership and goals than its perhaps more ideologically rigorous (and fully separate) namesake in Singapore, although the socialist leanings of at least some students in both were quite shallow.[101]

The most important other undergraduate clubs were largely communal, being centered around language or religion. In the former category were the Malay Language Society (PBMUM), the Chinese Language Society (CLS), and the Tamil Language Society (TLS). PBMUM continued to gain importance and vibrancy, rivaling UMSU as an increasingly vocal and active participant in national social and political affairs.[102] In this vein, in 1966 it launched a magazine, *Suara PBMUM*, and a newsletter, *Berita PBMUM*; then another magazine, *exposiswa*, in 1970–71.[103] In contrast, CLS, established in 1962 by mainly Chinese-educated students, kept a low profile.[104] Centered on UM's Department of Indian Studies, the TLS, too, focused mainly on cultural activities, albeit with some attention to social and political problems after 1969. Students established a broader Indian Association in late 1972, then a Joint Action Committee in 1973, pressing the TLS to take action regarding the paltry number of Indians admitted to UM. These demonstrations—the first of their kind—helped convince the government to increase university enrollment slots for Indian students.[105] Most important among the religious clubs were Islamist ones: PMIUM and the national umbrella group, PKPIM.

[97] S. Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity in the University of Malaya" (BEc academic exercise, Universiti Malaya, 1968), pp. 1–4, 10; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 46–47; Junaidi, *Mahasiswa, Politik*, p. 21; interview with Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, December 18, 2003, Kuala Lumpur; and interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

[98] Abdul Majid, *Report*, pp. 12–13.

[99] Andrew Sia, "Still Living on the Edge," *Star*, November 26, 2006.

[100] Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006; and interview with Hishamuddin Rais, March 30, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[101] Interview with Khong Kim Hoong, March 9, 2006; interview with Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, December 18, 2003; interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

Institutional and personal linkages developed across the growing array of universities, with PKPM, the national coalition of student unions, front and center. A tussle for leadership of PKPM, however, proved a harbinger of crisis. ITM pledged support for emergency rule under the National Operations Council after the outbreak of racial tensions in 1969; UMSU urged a return to parliamentary democracy and reunification with Singapore. ITM won.[106] In a more serious falling out two years later, PKPM's UMSU-led leadership, headed by Hishamuddin Rais, fell to a vote of no confidence. Recalling the collapse of the Pan-Malayan Students' Federation back in 1957, UMSU pulled out of PKPM, condemning it as undemocratic, inept, and insufficiently alert to "undesirable activities and trends."[107] PKPM fell into a slump. UKM students took the helm, but were stymied by walkouts and the difficulty of drawing a quorum for meetings.[108]

In the midst of that muddle, some of the same individuals faced a challenge in the UMSU Council. The Socialist Club-dominated leadership was toppled: four executive committee members quit, the council was dissolved, a new council failed a vote of no confidence, then a hotly contested election was declared null and void on account of "irregularities."[109] The experience left the Socialist Club enervated by the end of 1972. The next year, it launched a concerted effort at revitalization. Hishamuddin Rais was elected secretary-general of UMSU, joined by several other Socialist Club members.[110] Their victory was all the more noteworthy since this

[102] Poo Kong Kee, *Tertiary Students and Social Development: An Area for Direct Action—Student Rural Service Activities in Malaysia* (Singapore: Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development, 1976), p. 30.

[103] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 67, 85.

[104] Raghavan, "Political Attitudes of Students," pp. 175–77.

[105] Ibid., pp. 177–79; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 174.

[106] *Sunday Mail*, April 19, 1970.

[107] "Krisis PKPM: PMUM Tidak Patuhi Putusan Majoriti," *Gemasiswa*, October 10, 1972, pp. 7, 13; "UMSU's Relationship with NUMS," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 19, 1972, pp. 4, 13; *Malay Mail*, August 7 and October 30, 1972.

[108] "PKPM Belum Dapat Menyatupadukan Badan-badan Gabungan?" *Gemasiswa*, June 4, 1973, pp. 10, 12.

[109] *Straits Times*, June 11 and 14, 1972; *Malay Mail*, July 12, 1972.

[110] A. Jono, "Dimana Perpaduan Pelajar?," *Gemasiswa*, June 20, 1972, p. 14; interview with Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, December 18, 2003; Hassan Karim, "The Student Movement in Malaysia, 1967–74," in *With the People! The Malaysian Student Movement 1967–74*,

period was not an easy one for the Left. The Tun Razak government announced a ban in November 1973 on the monthly left-wing journal *Truth* after only seven months of publication, declaring it a "danger to public peace and national security."[111] Edited by academics Abdul Rahman Haji Embong of UKM and Sabiha Abdul Samad of ITM, *Truth* was read avidly by leftist students in both Singapore and Malaysia. (Sabiha was then detained under the ISA in January 1975 for her "pro-Communist and anti-National" articles and for using her position at ITM "to propagate and disseminate" propaganda, "[subvert] the loyalty of students for the advancement of communist causes," and more; on the other hand, Rahman Embong deems his subsequent promotion proof of the relative freedom of academe then.[112])

As the Left struggled, UM's other main student faction, centered around PBMUM and PKPIM, thrived. This faction was stridently Malay, in comparison to the Socialist Club and UMSU, which were multiracial and had leaders from across communities. In 1968, charismatic student leader Anwar Ibrahim took charge of both PBMUM and PKPIM. Their shared focus became social problems of the community and their disapproval of official vacillation on questions concerning the use of the Malay language.[113] Anwar also helped to form Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia) after graduating in 1971, offering ex-PKPIM members a nonpartisan way to sustain their political engagement. ABIM expanded rapidly, from 153 founding members to 35,000, across 86 branches, by the end of the decade. Anwar served as secretary-general in 1972, then president from 1974–82.[114] While he recognized that Islam could bolster Malay identity, Anwar aimed to "help circumvent the cul-de-sacs of narrow Malay nationalism."[115] Secularly educated, Anwar still developed a strong religious reputation and legitimacy.[116] At the same time, he promoted a tolerant cosmopolitanism and global perspective among local students. As a student, Anwar traveled widely in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, joined international student and inter-religious dialogues, and helped to bring foreign policy issues such as apartheid and neoimperialism to his classmates' attention.[117] Coincidentally, he was even in Paris

ed. Hassan Karim and Siti Nor Hamid (Petaling Jaya: Institute for Social Analysis [INSAN], 1984), pp. 8–9.

[111] "Fascist Razak in Panic Bans 'Truth'!" *New Malayan Youth* 2,9–11 (September–November 1973): 1–3.

[112] Home Ministry statement, reprinted in Asia Forum on Human Rights, *The State of Human Rights in Malaysia: A Collection of Documents Relating to Political Detainees, Political Banishees, and Their Struggles and Also to the Laws and Procedures* (Hong Kong: AFHR, n.d.), p. 130; interviews with Juliette Chin, December 23, 2006, Herndon, VA; Rahman Embong, March 29, 2006; and Hishamuddin Rais, March 30, 2006.

[113] John Funston, *Political Careers of Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar Ibrahim: Parallel, Intersecting, and Conflicting Lives*, IKMAS Working Papers #15 (Bangi: Institut Kajian Malaysia dan Antarabangsa, 1998), pp. 20–21.

[114] The first president was (briefly) Abdul Wahab bin Abdullah, followed by Razali Nawawi, who had been educated in Egypt and the United Kingdom.

[115] Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *A Question of Class: Capital, the State, and Uneven Development in Malaya* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1988), p. 91.

[116] Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," in *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, ed. Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah (North Sydney: Asian Studies Association of Australia and Allen and Unwin, 1992), p. 85.

[117] Funston, *Political Careers*, p. 21.

for a leadership conference in 1968, at the time of the massive student protests there.[118]

While some PBMUM and PKPIM campaigns were specifically by and for Malays (as when they engaged in issues concerning Islam and Malay language), other key initiatives of the period were collaborative to the core. Among these were pivotal campaigns that either disregarded ethnicity or that united Islamists and leftists through a shared class-based, if Malay-centered, focus. We begin with noncommunal engagement, specifically involvement in electoral politics, which perhaps best illustrates students' legitimacy and space to maneuver at the time. We then turn to the range of class-oriented campaigns that made the period all the more distinctive, and that left arguably the weightier legacy for students and society alike.

STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN FORMAL POLITICS

By the late 1960s, the idea that students must be "the conscience of the *rakyat*" had become something of a mantra.[119] UMSU warned freshmen of the "sin" of ignoring current events,[120] and worked to give them skills and opportunities to engage effectively. Packing the 1968 orientation committee's *Freshmen's Newsletter*, for instance, were articles on students and politics, national unity, and CIA infiltration,[121] alongside abundant photos from demonstrations.[122] Syed Hamid Ali summed up the prevailing ethos: "It is the objective of UMSU to get the students interested in politics. We cannot remain aloof in our ivory towers, satisfied that we will get a good job when we graduate, when everyday events are affecting our lives."[123] Toward that end, in 1967, UMSU launched an annual leadership training program. The program covered issues related to UMSU, local and international student associations, and both university and national politics and policies.[124] Syed Hamid urged, too, open participation in politics and parties.[125]

The 1969 national general election offered students their greatest chance yet to act on such ideas. Initially (with echoes of the proposed Malayan Students' Party of the late 1940s), UMSU president Khong Kim Hoong suggested that UM might field an independent candidate, to make sure students' opinions were heard. Noted one observer, "the University should have no difficulty putting up an individual of sufficient ability to hold his own, if not outpace, the generality of other candidates."[126] Another likewise applauded the proposal, arguing that direct engagement in the elections would help to refute contradictory complaints both of students' indifference toward current affairs and their potential to be "instrumental

[118] Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, April 25, 2006, Washington, DC.

[119] Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, December 5, 2005, Washington, DC.

[120] Lee and Hermani, *Buku Panduan*, pp. 38–41.

[121] Although probably limited at the time, CIA meddling and courting of students was an issue, intensified by Malaysia's significant place in Cold War domino theories. Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

[122] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 11.

[123] "Support for Malay Language Society by Students," *Straits Times*, October 4, 1968.

[124] Lee, "The University of Malaya Students' Union," pp. 25–29.

[125] *Straits Times*, April 4, 1968.

[126] D. P. Vijandran, letter to the editor, *Malay Mail*, October 25, 1968.

to certain political parties."[127] Nothing in the university constitution barred students from standing, but the plan was shelved, both for lack of time and candidates, and to avoid restricting UMSU's efforts to one constituency.[128]

In the midst of planning, however, debates about Student Council politics and allegations that the opposition Parti Rakyat (PRM) had misused UMSU's printing press nearly capsized the Student Council. After angry exchanges at the Speaker's Corner, an anti-socialist group, presumed linked to "off-campus forces," tried to pass a motion of no confidence against the council. Allegations flew—angry students asserted that one side or the other had acted irresponsibly, that PRM supporters had attempted to drag the union into PRM, and that students and plum travel opportunities had been manipulated—but the coup ultimately failed.[129]

With that crisis resolved, following an example set by the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, UMSU launched a Students' Manifesto (*Manifesto Pelajar*) for the general election.[130] Intended to represent the views of students and youths, its premise was that despite attempts to "brainwash" students to "leave delicate political issues to the more experienced," they "can and must take part in politics by campaigning in the National Elections" and "be the leaders of today."[131] The students were carefully nonpartisan, even though their critique of the government's record resonated with the opposition's stance.[132] The manifesto's seven points included calls for personal liberty and release of political detainees; freedoms of expression, assembly, and association; national unity through equitable development; equal and better educational opportunities; student participation in decision-making; and national self-sufficiency in defense.[133]

The students' initiative was tremendously well-received by parties, the press, and the public in 1969. A subsequent government report concurred approvingly with students' "wish to make known their views on important national issues."[134] Yet their volubility took many by surprise, given stereotypes of English-educated students' complacency. Expecting that little would result from such activity, the government offered no obstacle. Starting in Petaling Jaya on April 19 (with an impressed Ungku Aziz in attendance),[135] UMSU launched a series of over a dozen rallies in cites and towns across Malaysia—Penang, Ipoh, Johor Bahru, and more—throughout the long vacation, pressing the public to vote based on issues rather than race. These events started on a relatively small scale, but turnout soon rivaled that of

[127] Rahim Noor, letter to the editor, *Malay Mail*, October 25, 1968.

[128] "Students' Candidate for Polls?," *Sunday Mail*, October 13, 1968; *Straits Times*, October 15, 1968; *Malay Mail*, April 3, 1969; interviews with Khong Kim Hoong, March 9, 2006 and August 23, 2007.

[129] *Malay Mail*, December 11, 12, and 15, 1968; *Straits Times*, December 12, 13, 15, and 16, 1968; interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 80.

[130] "Varsity Students to be Neutral in the Polls," *Malay Mail*, April 11, 1969; interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006; Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," pp. 49–51.

[131] Khong Kim Hoong, "Students and Politics: UMSU's Participation in the 1969 General Elections," *Varsity '69* (1969): 20.

[132] Interview with Khong Kim Hoong, March 9, 2006.

[133] Reprinted in Lee and Hermani, *Buku Panduan*, pp. 56–59.

[134] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 26.

[135] *Straits Times*, April 18, 1969.

Alliance rallies, albeit the crowds attracted by the students were substantially non-Malay. Tens of thousands attended, staying late into the night. The students lacked time to get to all the towns that requested they visit; they regretted especially failing to reach the heavily Malay east coast. UMSU distributed over 100,000 copies of its manifesto (helped by donations tossed into their truck to cover printing costs), its message magnified further by substantial coverage in the media, especially the Chinese press. As the crowds grew, police permits became harder to secure; students had to threaten to rally in the streets in Teluk Anson, for instance, before being allowed to book a field.[136]

The opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan, Malaysian People's Movement Party) openly endorsed the manifesto. Even the incumbent Alliance could "generally support" the students' positions.[137] This concession, concluded *Mahasiswa Negara* editor and *Sunday Mail* columnist Cheah Boon Kheng, "secured for the undergraduate an important right—the right to take part in politics," which UMSU had been demanding for years. He gloats, "It was roses, roses all the way. Not a word was raised against the students—either from the Government or the Opposition parties"; both sides lauded the students' "moderation" and sober approach.[138] In Khong Kim Hoong's words, "We don't claim we have succeeded in changing the people's thinking ... What we do claim is that we have stirred the people's imagination and won their support for our views."[139]

But then came the elections and the eruption of violence on May 13, 1969. That evening, UMSU's executive committee went out for a bite to eat after a meeting. Returning to campus, they encountered a Chinese taxi driver at the gate, crying to be let in. He said people were trying to kill him; the hood of his car was gashed. The students urged the guard to let him stay. Back at Union House, they heard of the unrest on the radio. Freshmen were then making their way to campus for the new term. Students were stranded all over town. The drivers were off for the weekend, so, ignoring the curfew that had just been announced, Syed Hamid set off to rescue the newcomers in the UMSU van, surveying the damage along the way.[140]

The impact on campus was immediate. For one thing, some students' families were directly affected—and the official report situates ITM students among the rioters, although students were not central players.[141] Moreover, the start of lectures (scheduled for May 19) was delayed, and then all activities were scheduled to conform with the curfew—even UM's Convocation Ball had to be canceled. After emergency rule was declared, UMSU called off the political forums it had planned for orientation week to discuss the ISA, socialism, and the recent election. Instead, a National Operations Council representative came to speak on the disturbances.[142] Students still protested, regardless, especially against the Tunku. Ungku Aziz

[136] Interview with Khong Kim Hoong, March 9, 2006, and August 23, 2007; interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 80–82; and Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 4–5.

[137] *Straits Times*, April 12, 1969.

[138] Cheah Boon Kheng, "Right to Take Part in Politics," *Sunday Mail*, May 11, 1969.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

[141] National Operations Council, *The May 13 Tragedy*, pp. 44–57.

[142] *Malay Mail*, May 11, 13, 29, and June 13, 1969.

declined to intercede, declaring "We cannot seal off a generation of students and hope they will be the leaders of tomorrow."[143] Still, he warned new students the following year to "play it cool" and pick their battles wisely.[144]

Although in writing about these events, the Tunku milked Cold War presumptions to pin responsibility on "Communist Chinese youths,"[145] the Alliance's poor showing brought to a head mounting Malay disenchantment with UMNO, centered not least around the still largely non-Malay university.[146] Like so many outside the campus, Malay undergraduates traced their community's poverty and educational underdevelopment to a failure of political leadership—specifically, the Tunku's.[147] The events of May 13 seemed to spur an anti-regime "participation explosion" among students.[148] PBMUM burned the Tunku's book at the Speaker's Corner, as (mostly Malay) students campaigned for his resignation.[149]

When Mahathir was ousted from UMNO for publishing a letter (much discussed on campus) urging the Tunku's resignation, the event proved a catalyst; Malay students, in particular, considered Mahathir more progressive and *maju* (modern) than the Tunku.[150] Anwar Ibrahim was an especial fan who distributed Mahathir's banned *Malay Dilemma* on campus. One chapter, "The Mood of the Malays," was even extracted and reprinted in the 1970 PKPIM souvenir program.[151] The newsletter *Berita PBMUM* published a special issue that July, enumerating the failures of the Tunku. PBMUM argued that the prime minister had conceded too much to the Chinese and done too little to advance the status of Malays and their language, although PBMUM supported the regime overall. The Socialist Club took a more broadly oppositional stance, seeing in the capitalist system "the root cause of poverty" and contesting the Tunku's inadequate political, economic, and social policies.[152] (The Tunku specifically castigated club leader Syed Hamid for aggravating racial tensions on campus, citing the pre-election funeral procession for the Labour Party worker killed by the police, which Syed Hamid had attended as a translator.[153]) The Tunku charged that Mahathir and other "Ultras" (self-identified "intellectuals") were using tertiary students for their dirty work, aiming to destroy the monarchy, install a republic, and form a government without the MCA and MIC. Their recruitment and rallying of students, he averred, mimicked the tactics of communist organizations in Indonesia and Burma—and students are gullible and "ready to be anti-anything," he stated.[154]

[143] "Prof Aziz Upholds Students' Rights to Their Opinions," *Straits Times*, August 16, 1969.

[144] *Straits Times*, May 12, 1970.

[145] Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, *May 13: Before and After* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu Press, 1969), p. 95.

[146] Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*, p. vi.

[147] Mohamad, "Pelajar Melayu," p. 165; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, po. 84–85.

[148] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 84, 100–101.

[149] "Upachara Membakar Buku," *PBMUM 69/70*, p. 21; *Straits Times*, October 3, 1969.

[150] Junaidi, *Mahasiswa, Politik*, p. 19.

[151] Asia Forum on Human Rights, *Human Rights in Malaysia*, p. 102.

[152] Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," p. 5.

[153] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 90–93.

[154] Abdul Rahman, *May 13*, pp. 117–35.

UMSU and PBMUM launched a series of demonstrations, drawing in students as well as lecturers from UM, ITM, and the Muslim colleges. Mahathir met with students on campus, as well. Anwar Ibrahim led over a thousand students in an anti-Tunku protest at UM in July, emergency regulations notwithstanding. The police purportedly had orders to open fire if the students exited the gates. A furious Tunku attributed signs that branded him "imperialist," "feudal," and "unIslamic," displayed outside the UM mosque, to the Communist Party and PRM, fuming, "What I regret is when youths whom we have financed to further their studies are spoilt by irresponsible people."[155]

Matters came to a head in late August. The Home Affairs minister asked vice chancellor Ungku Aziz to stave off an anti-Tunku demonstration during an international conference on Southeast Asian culture scheduled to be held on campus. The vice chancellor asked students to postpone the protest. They refused. As the crowd approached the hall, police deployed tear gas—ten rounds of it—on campus for the first time, until Ungku Aziz intervened. Indignant, he issued a statement proclaiming, "Either I maintain the law as V-C [vice chancellor] or I vacate the seat. I do not want to be V-C without autonomy."[156] The police agreed not to enter the campus again unless foreign agitators were present. Ungku Aziz acknowledged, however, that while university autonomy entailed academic freedom, it did not confer "constitutional status of extralegality," as in a diplomatic compound.[157] As hundreds of Federal Reserve Unit troops milled outside the gates (students ejected the one police van that entered), demonstrations focused on the issues of campus autonomy and freedom of speech continued for several more days.[158]

But the attack on the Tunku remained the real issue. The National Operations Council declared any anti-Tunku activities criminal offenses and made it clear that, with all Malaysia designated as a "security area," the police could enter the campus if they were needed. Four student leaders were detained under the new Emergency (Public Order and Prevention of Crime) Ordinance on August 29, three from PBMUM, plus Syed Hamid Ali. Several hundred students met at the Speaker's Corner the next day, after a tense six-hour emergency meeting of PBMUM and UMSU. At least ten other student groups in Malaysia, Singapore, and the UK lent support. UMSU launched a signature campaign among students and staff and demanded a trial for the student leaders who had been detained. The Socialist Club, too, pressed the government to free their peers, while the Labour Party and Gerakan vouched for Syed Hamid. A six-person delegation from PBMUM, including Dean of Arts Syed Naguib al-Attas, met with Home Minister Tun Dr. Ismail; UMSU sent a delegation headed by acting president Toh Kim Chye. Even Ungku Aziz visited the detained students and called for their release. All were unconditionally released on September 5.[159] Later that month, the Tunku caved in to pressure to resign, ceding

[155] "The Tengku Hits Out at That Mahathir Letter," *Straits Times*, July 21, 1969; *Eastern Sun*, July 18, 1969; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 88–90; Abdul Rahman, *May 13*, pp. 117–35.

[156] Tony Hermon and K. Mohanan, "'Autonomy Isn't Immunity' Warning," *Straits Times*, August 29, 1969.

[157] Ungku Aziz, "What University Autonomy Means," *Straits Times*, August 30, 1969.

[158] "New Protest," *Malay Mail*, August 29, 1969; *Straits Times* and *Malay Mail*, August 30, 1969; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 93–98.

[159] A. Ramalingam, "Four University Student Leaders Detained," *Sunday Times*, August 31, 1969; *Straits Times*, September 3–5, 1969; *Malay Mail*, September 3–4, 1969; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 98–100.

power to Tun Razak. (PBMUM subsequently challenged the size of the Tunku's pension.)[160]

The Tunku's distrust of student activism was not yet widely shared. Still in 1971, the Majid Committee avowed that, "as citizens of the country, the students have a right as individuals to take an interest in all matters concerning the nation, including political questions, and we welcome student interest in politics." Signaling an imminent shift in policy, however, the committee proposed that no student society be allowed to participate in any way in elections off campus.[161] Yet even this limited reaction was clearly post hoc. In 1969, Minister of Education Mohamed Khir Johari found no fault with UMSU's campaign,[162] while UMNO executive secretary Musa Hitam lauded the students' "very important role" in politics and "highly conscious and responsible stand"[163]—a position rather at odds with the UUCA passed two years later.

Meanwhile, students—as well as a number of lecturers[164]—continued to mobilize around such issues as corruption in government.[165] At least one such protest (a bit earlier) was carried out by Malaysian undergraduates still in Singapore, who published a memorandum endorsed by over half their contingent condemning the Malaysian government's squandering of public money for the personal legal fees of ex-Minister of Education Abdul Rahman Talib.[166] Cognate issues resonated across the region. Indonesian students, for instance, demonstrated so avidly against corruption in the early 1970s that a once-sympathetic Suharto turned against them; a December 1971 protest against his wife's pet project, the Taman Mini Indonesia theme park, especially annoyed him. The arrest of four Indonesian students in 1972 quieted protest, but only temporarily.[167] More notorious was the uprising that rocked Thailand in October 1973, as students' calls for a new constitution and release of a dozen detained classmates escalated. A brutal crackdown resulted in scores of deaths, until the king intervened, the prime minister resigned, and the popular rector of Thammasat University stepped in to form a new government. An entrenched military regime thus fell to "crowds of protesting and unarmed students demanding the alleviation of unsatisfactory conditions and a more modern form of government."[168]

Malaysian students were no more inclined to eschew politics. With significant public support, they adopted the slogan, "Students and People Unite" for the next polls in 1974, reviving 1969's manifesto, *sans* road-show. Some participated more directly, too. UMSU president Kamarazaman Yacob campaigned for PRM, for

[160] Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 5–6; Junaidi, *Mahasiswa, Politik*, p. 21; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 129–30.

[161] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 26.

[162] *Straits Times*, April 11, 1969.

[163] "Oppose Resorts to Smear Campaign, Students Told," *Malay Mail*, April 21, 1969.

[164] Mahasiswa Sedar, "Kritik Dedahkan Masaalah Negara," *Gemasiswa*, October 12, 1973, p. 2.

[165] For instance, against Selangor MB Harun Idris: *New Straits Times*, January 31 and February 8, 1974; Josef Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," *Pacific Affairs* 49,2 (1976): 200.

[166] "A Protest by 108 Malaysian Students in Singapore," *Straits Times*, November 26, 1965.

[167] Arief Budiman, "The Student Movement in Indonesia: A Study of the Relationship between Culture and Structure," *Asian Survey* 18,6 (1978): 618.

[168] Frank C. Darling, "Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand," *Pacific Affairs* 47,1 (1974): 14–15.

instance,[169] while UMSU buses transported students to serve as election workers.[170] Particularly at that moment, as the new BN absorbed most competitors, students "filled [a] vacuum that had been created by the withering of the parliamentary opposition."[171] But this election was the last for which undergraduates were to take so open and active a part—even as their less institutional engagement likewise reached its apex.

WITH THE PEOPLE: UNDERGRADUATES AND THE MALAY POOR

> Students of the university in the motherland's city
> rise!
> lift your eyes from the books
> break through the walls
> all are waiting
> inviting you
> to join them in the city streets.[172]

> On the day of judgment, no one is going to ask how many A's you have scored but what you did when the hungry cried for food, when the victimized cried for justice, when the homeless cried for warmth and shelter, when those in pain cried for comfort and relief.[173]

In October 1967, after a lull in UMSU activity, a hundred students petitioned to oust their "unimpressive and aloof" student council leadership, preferring more intellectual, socially concerned leaders who would take a stronger stand on issues like landlessness. The petitioners—labeled in turn "emotional" and "revolutionary"—were outvoted.[174] Soon, though, new leaders were introduced, bringing about a new mood. Lofty appeals to the university's having a distinctive role in a developing society[175] inspired a pivotal round of student engagement on issues of social justice and poverty alleviation. By 1972, UMSU reminded entering students, "we cannot divorce ourselves from our people and because of our education (which is being heavily subsidised by the tax-payers) we are in a better position to serve our country and people."[176] Or, as the Socialist Club's Hassan Karim insisted, "If students want to fight for the rights and objectives of the people, they

[169] *New Straits Times*, August 14, 1974.

[170] *New Straits Times*, September 6, 1974.

[171] Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," p. 10.

[172] Extract from Usman Awang's 1961 poem, "Mahasiswa," in translation on the back cover of Asia Forum on Human Rights, *Human Rights in Malaysia*.

[173] "Bury the University ... If it Remains like This," *Insaf* 1,1 (November/December 1974): 2.

[174] *Straits Times*, October 26, 1967.

[175] A UKM forum on "The Role of the University in National Development," for instance, elaborated upon this theme. See A. Jono, "Bukan Sebagai Kilang Penchetak," *Gemasiswa*, July 19, 1972, p. 3; also Abd. Hamid Ahmad, "Kegiatan Pelajar dan Politik," *Gemasiswa*, October 12, 1973, p. 4.

[176] PMUM Jawatan Kuasa Orientasi, *Buku Panduan PMUM '72* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya Student Union, 1972), p. 32. This statement was reprinted in PMUM Jawatan Kuasa Orientasi, "The Union and You," in *Buku Panduan PMUM '73* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya Student Union, 1973).

must enter into society and not be middlemen or people on the fence." Students' main goal must be to "awaken society—to build a new, just and democratic, society."[177]

A new, bilingual USM student-union journal, launched in 1974, embodied this spirit. Titled *Insaf* (Aware), it sought "to inculcate three basic values among students: Social awareness, responsibility, and a sense of justice." The inaugural editorial announced,

> Social action and social justice is [*sic*] a legitimate and necessary part of education. A student is able to pursue his studies only by virtue of the workers' toil. It is morally right that students do their part by working with them to solve their many problems ... But we will never live up to our name of "youth" and "intellectual" if we fail to question, probe, and act to seek solutions. The university is not the springboard to future occupational stardom; it is a hotbed of learning and student activity.[178]

Articles in *Insaf* castigated students for apathy and bookishness, proclaimed the rightness of even radical student activism, and highlighted issues such as the lack of affordable housing, inequitable development, and the global dimensions of the "progressive people's movement." One essay details a Pergerakan Revolusi Mahasiswa (Students' Revolutionary Movement) that had taken over USM's freshman orientation program that year, promoting a shift from "attitudes moulded hard by rigid social definitions, age-old dogmas, and cultural pressures and parochialism" to "a more responsible and conscious outlook among the newcomers."[179]

Students took their academic stature seriously, though, throughout this turbulent period. A May 1968 *Mahasiswa Negara* editorial, "The Intellectual Awakens," hailed intellectuals' increasing involvement in political life. This sentiment was echoed in a debate five months later, in which undergraduates attacked the university's graduates as "snobs" who know only "how to play golf, sip shandy at the Selangor Club, and drive around in big cars."[180] In the same vein, the organizers of UM's annual[181] Great Economics Debate three years later described the event as

> ... a forum of economic discourse, a responsible exercise of freedom of expression and perhaps, more importantly, we believe, our concrete proof that students in this campus can act with greater responsibility than some of the minor but magnified and unpleasant incidents highlighted by The Press recently.[182]

[177] Hassan A. Karim, "Peranan Pelajar dalam Pembangunan Masyarakat," *Mahasiswa Negara* September 4, 1973, p. 13.

[178] "Socialising the Student," *Insaf* 1,1 (November/December 1974): 1.

[179] "'Revolution' in the Campus," *Insaf* 1,1 (November/December 1974): 3.

[180] Cited in Kee, *Tertiary Students and Social Development*, pp. 29–30.

[181] The event was cancelled in 1969 as a result of National Operations Council restrictions confining discussion to university matters. UMSU declared that this would defeat the purpose of the public debate. *Straits Times*, October 14–15, 1969.

[182] Fong Chek Kwai and Teh Swee Kiat, eds., *Selected Papers Delivered at the Great Economics Debate (8th–12th June, 1971)* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Economics Society, [1971]), p. ii.

University students remained active also on behalf of organized labor. *Mahasiswa Negara* covered labor struggles, and concerned students offered striking workers help, from moral support to editorial assistance.[183] For instance, in 1970, UMSU organized students to protest the dismissal of workers at both Raleigh Cycle and Malaysian Galvanised Iron Pipes. At the latter company, management agreed to meet with five of around forty students who had taken part in the protest; police ordered the rest to disperse, then arrested the UMSU council member who relayed the message by megaphone for directing an unlawful assembly.[184] Singapore, too, saw a brief but significant upsurge in trade union activism among students in the early 1970s (discussed below).

Concomitantly, community-service programs offered an even more substantial outlet for student concern. In late 1968, UMSU and PKPM appealed for students to spend time in rural areas, addressing local problems. The student council president proposed projects that students could take up during the long vacation. PKPM's president went further, recommending that all tertiary students spend a full year serving in remote, underdeveloped (*ulu*) areas to give them "a potentially valuable non-monetary, social awareness, leaving the future elites with a sympathy for the economically backward and oppressed peasant masses."[185]

The outcome of this campaign was UMSU's launch, in 1969, of the Project Perkhidmatan Mahasiswa (Student Pioneer [lit. Service] Corps). Funded and managed by UMSU, the program sent UM students to Malay *kampung* (villages), mostly to teach reading and writing, health maintenance, domestic economics, and modern agriculture. The scheme offered students employment and a small income during the long vacation, as well as exposure to rural residents, a better sense of how they, the students, fit into the wider community, and training in joint problem-solving. At the same time, the program promoted interracial harmony and progressive attitudes, and provided facilities and services.[186]

The next year, PKPM launched the National Student Service Corps.[187] Inspired both by UMSU's initiatives and the US Peace Corps, and open to students from all institutions of higher learning, the program offered an annual, month-long immersion experience for students dispatched to live in disadvantaged *kampung*. Projects ranged from building latrines and filling in pools that harbored malaria, to tutoring children and mobilizing women. Admission was competitive. Seventy students took part in 1970; by 1972, seven hundred applied for two hundred spots. Most participants were from urban backgrounds.[188] As one UKM student explained of these initiatives, "Students no longer confine themselves to their ivory towers, remaining isolated from the less educated and less privileged masses ... We students

[183] Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

[184] "New Styles," *Mahasiswa Negara*, November 1970, p. 16; *Malay Mail*, November 26, 1970; *Straits Times*, May 27, 1971; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 137.

[185] Quoted in Kee, *Tertiary Students and Social Development*, p. 30.

[186] Ibid., pp. 29–30.

[187] *Straits Times*, March 24, 1971.

[188] M. K. Gopikumar, "The National Student Service Corps: Volunteers in the Kampongs," *Synergist* 1,3 (1972); and Kee, *Tertiary Students and Social Development*, pp. 29, 35–41.

know that we must identify with the masses, help solve their problems, and champion their causes."[189] This venture was but one among many.

Malay and Islamic student groups developed similar programs to promote closer ties, specifically between Malay students and their society. These efforts built on prior initiatives: PKPIM had started recruiting students for short-term community development projects around 1960, involving around 1,200 secondary and tertiary students by 1974.[190] PBMUM leader Sanusi Osman kicked off this new phase of engagement in 1967, weathering a no-confidence vote over his political activities to shepherd PBMUM into a more politically active mode.[191] The next year, PBMUM, then led by Anwar, joined the national and campus-level Muslim societies PKPIM and PMIUM, as well as the Peninsular Malays' Student Union (GPMS), in launching the well-received Gerakan Kempen Kesedaran (Awareness Campaign, GKK). Funded mostly by a grant from the Ministry of National and Rural Development, GKK sent students to live and work in rural Malay villages during university vacations. GKK developed a more Islamist focus by 1973, following shifts in PKPIM.[192] By then, GPMS had withdrawn, instead launching its own Pasokan Operasi Pembangunan (Development Operation Corps) in 1972 as successor to classes it had organized since the 1950s. The program focused on state-supported objectives: education, leadership training, and socioeconomic development.[193]

USM's student union developed its own Community Service Movement. The program offered tutoring services, worked with local fishing communities, and conducted local needs assessments. The union also sent batches of students off to rural areas starting in 1973.[194] And UPM's student union, too, provided short-term service-learning opportunities in rural areas. In 1974, UPM became the first Malaysian university to include those programs in its formal curriculum for a Diploma of Agriculture.[195] Government authorities viewed such activities with some distrust, but the organizers cooperated with rural development agencies to mitigate suspicion.

Ultimately more worrying to the state, though, was a wave of protests concerned with rural poverty. Since many students themselves came from poor families, interest in poverty was keen on campus.[196] Pivotal October 1967 protests lambasted

[189] Quoted in Gopikumar, "The National Student Service Corps," pp. 22–23.

[190] Kee, *Tertiary Students and Social Development*, p. 50.

[191] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 63–64; Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," p. 2.

[192] Yahya Othman, "Siswa Turun Kedesa," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 7, 1971, pp. 2, 13; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 56–59, 131–33; Kee, *Tertiary Students and Social Development*, p. 43; Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah among the Students* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1987), pp. 16–17.

[193] Kee, *Tertiary Students and Social Development*, pp. 42–44.

[194] Ibid., pp. 51–52.

[195] Ibid., pp. 52–55; Hamzah Nor, "Bila Mahasiswa Bertani di Labuhan Dagan," *Watan*, December 23, 1977, p. 15.

[196] Issues of rural poverty and landlessness energized Malaysian students abroad in the same period. For instance, in London in 1972, they raised funds and held a two-day exposition on "The Plight of the Landless Peasants in 'Malaysia.'" See *New Malayan Youth* 1,1 (January 1972): 9. Vehement discourse condemned the "foreign monopoly-capitalists and a tiny handful of Malay feudal landlords and non-Malay comprador-capitalists" who exploited the "peasant masses." See "Landlessness—The Spectre that Haunts the 'Malaysian' Government," *New Malayan Youth* 1,3 (March 1972): 3.

the government for attempting to break up a squatter community in Teluk Gong, in Selangor state. Community leader Hamid Tuah had been organizing peasants in the region to convert jungle areas to farmland since the 1950s. Now, he and over five hundred followers had been evicted from their illegal settlement. The government declared a state of emergency, sent in troops, arrested some of the peasants, and destroyed their crops.[197] UMSU and the PBMUM, together with several lecturers and even some university administrators, denounced the crackdown.[198] A multiracial student demonstration at the Speaker's Corner (which Hamid Tuah later visited with his wife and child) progressed to a sit-in outside the Selangor State Secretariat. Arguing that their cause was humanitarian and socioeconomic, not political, the students dispersed only after a warning issued by the riot squad. The police allowed five students, led by UMSU secretary-general Syed Hamid Ali, to meet with the secretariat. They were then promised a meeting with Selangor's Menteri Besar, Harun Idris. It never happened. A group of eighteen lecturers, too, challenged Harun to an open debate.[199] Instead, Harun insinuated that "outside forces" had manipulated both lecturers and students and admonished the latter to spend their time studying.[200] Overall, recalls Syed Hamid, the incident "really gave us a kick start."[201]

Even more momentous was UM students' intervention seven years later on behalf of squatters being evicted from a settlement in Tasek Utara, outside Johor Bahru.[202] In the course of the 1974 electoral campaign, Barisan Nasional leaders had assured the squatters—134 families of poor, predominantly Malay laborers—that their homes would be protected. Once the polls were over, the Land Office sent eviction notices: those homes were slated for demolition to make way for a golf course. Over half the structures in the settlement were razed on September 8, just two weeks after the election. The residents appealed to the government for an alternative site; when that failed, they sent a telegram to UMSU requesting aid. Several UM students left immediately for Johor Bahru, followed shortly by others from both UM and SU. They arrived just in time to protest the arrival of demolition teams, backed by Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) riot police, on September 15. Nine people (including Syed Hamid Ali, by then PRM secretary-general) were arrested.

[197] Koh Swe Yong, *Malaysia: 45 Years under the Internal Security Act*, trans. Agnes Khoo (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2004), p. 130.

[198] Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 2–3; Josef Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics: A Preliminary Comparative Inquiry," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1,1 (1970): 17.

[199] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 60–63.

[200] *Straits Times*, October 14, 1967; *Eastern Sun*, October 20, 1967; Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 12.

[201] Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, p. 60.

[202] On the Tasek Utara protests (including the subsequent fracas on campus), see: Hassan and Siti Nor, eds., *With the People!*, pp. 11–13, 27–44; Kamarazaman, *Bersama Anwar*, pp. 111–18; Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," p. 32; Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," pp. 200–201; Koh, *45 Years*, p. 152; and extensive coverage in the *New Straits Times*, September 22–29, 1974. Also: interview with Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, December 18, 2003; interview with Ibrahim Ali, March 21, 2006; and interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006.

The squatters rebuilt their homes, only to see them dismantled again the next day. About sixty squatter families and supporters then camped outside the Johor State Secretariat Building, picketing for justice and land. The police detained five from the campsite before dawn on September 19, including two student leaders. Around ten more students were briefly detained and officials threatened to withdraw participants' scholarships. Picketing continued three more days, until the FRU surrounded the site and arrested forty-one squatters and seven students. The remainder demonstrated in front of the state courthouse in protest and three more students were detained. All told, seven students (five from UM and two from SU) were among the forty-eight people ultimately charged with occupying state land in Johor; three other students, two from UM and one from UPM, were charged with holding an illegal procession.

Student organizations across Malaysia and Singapore rallied in support, collecting donations and issuing press statements and appeals. On September 18, about seventy students from USSU held a two-hour protest at the Malaysian High Commission in Singapore. Two days later, more than 2,500 Malaysian students, led by UMSU president Kamarazaman Yacob and joined by a number of intellectuals and lecturers, demonstrated at the prime minister's department in Kuala Lumpur. The FRU tear-gassed and dispersed around a thousand protesters who were en route back to the prime minister's office the following day. Prime Minister Tun Razak refused to meet with the crowd. Police sealed off the UM campus, trapping two busloads of ITM students there. Then matters took a bizarre turn.

After an emergency meeting that Saturday, September 21, a Majlis Tertinggi Sementara (Temporary Executive Council), headed by Kamarazaman and supported by almost all UM organizations and other local student unions (except, notably, several Malay groups), took over the university. (Ibrahim Ali and allies took over the ITM campus at the same time, but the occupation of UM was bigger news—reports of this action reached UM students in Johor via television.) Demanding the unconditional release of the five students still held in Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur in connection with the Tasek Utara protests, the Temporary Council secured the main university gate and erected roadblocks. The Council rapidly suspended all classes, took over the vice chancellor's office, and formed committees to handle food, transport, medicine, and security for the campus, as well as communication and publicity.

Meanwhile, a pro-government countermovement formed, the Majlis Tindakan Nasional (Nationalist Action Council), headed by Ahmad Latif and composed of PBMUM, PMIUM, two Malay *silat* (martial arts) groups,[203] and the Science Faculty Malay Study Group. Claiming that the Temporary Council was arming itself in preparation for a long-term occupation, even as they themselves wielded *parang* (machetes) and makeshift weapons, Nationalist Council supporters raided UMSU's Union House, kidnapped and tied up Kamarazaman and other Temporary Council leaders, and demanded the restoration of the campus administration. They hauled

[203] *Silat* groups were (and remain) politically significant although less in the public eye than are groups devoted to Malay language and Islam. *Silat* groups were popular among youth outside the university, as well. The Nasrul Haq *silat* organization, centered around the Minister of Youth, Culture, and Sports, developed rapidly in 1978 into a "powerful cultic following out of all proportion to his ministerial position." Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change," p. 433. See also D. S. Farrer, *Shadows of the Prophet: Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), pp. 8–9.

Kamarazaman to the Dewan Tunku Cancelor (DTC, the Great Hall), where PBMUM president Aziz Shamsudin was waiting. Ungku Aziz arrived, scornfully denounced the Temporary Council as akin to a bunch of bus drivers who think they can fly planes, and threatened stern punishment. To avoid violence, Kamarazaman surrendered power to his rivals that evening, after a mere six hours' occupation of the campus. With support from the vice chancellor, the Nationalist Council imposed a curfew, issued passes to control movement on campus, and, claimed detractors, played up racialism and Islam. Lending grist to allegations that the authorities backed the Nationalist Council, the FRU cracked down anew on the squatters and students in Johor Bahru just nine hours after the Council's victory.[204]

Union House was sealed, various materials were destroyed, and both the Socialist Club and UMSU were suspended within days. The Nationalist Council assumed control, despite a joint statement of condemnation from an array of student groups and public support for UMSU from other universities, students overseas, and the UM Academic Staff Association. Within a week, the Nationalist Council decided it was no longer needed and froze itself. In the meantime, science students had been boycotting lectures for two weeks. Students in law, agriculture, engineering, and dentistry joined in, in support of the suspended UMSU. Announcing (erroneously) the outbreak of violence on campus, Education Minister Mahathir closed UM on September 23, then reversed his decision a few hours later, albeit with further warnings. FRU forces monitored the UM gates and vicinity in case things got ugly.

Critics of UMSU claimed the union was a tool of the opposition DAP and PRM—that its activities at Tasek Utara, however noble they might appear, were in fact "manipulated by a political power." Home Minister Ghazali declared the initial Temporary Council takeover "distinctly a breach of the law" and suggested that PRM was "hoping for the police to use violence on the students so that they could go round the country condemning the police of brutality." (The party denied those charges.)[205] The Singapore government was equally irked with USSU, and the fact that nearly half the union's executive committee members were foreign students left the union especially vulnerable to criticism. The two USSU members detained in Johor and the three who led the protest at the Malaysian High Commission were Malaysians. All five were expelled for meddling in politics. This crackdown coincided with a massive police exercise on campus at SU, amid apocryphal discourse that outside forces—Australian leftists, Malaysian Chinese, the European New Left, communists, Christians—were trying to undermine the nation via its students. New legislation the following December restricted student political clubs to citizens of Singapore.[206]

Back in Kuala Lumpur, students were still embroiled in negotiations to reopen UM's Union House two months later when news came of trouble in Baling, Kedah. Inflation had caused the prices of food and other necessities to soar, even as that of rubber fell. Adding insult to injury, members of parliament had just voted themselves a substantial raise.[207] Most residents of Baling were rubber smallholders. They sought government intervention to raise the price of rubber and reduce those of food and other staples. Over one thousand peasants launched a demonstration on

[204] Hassan and Siti Nor, eds., *With the People!*, p. 39.

[205] "Partai Rakyat Using the Students: Mahathir," *New Straits Times*, September 23, 1974.

[206] Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," pp. 203–6.

[207] S. Husin Ali, *Two Faces: Detention without Trial* (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 1996), p. 2.

November 19, 1974, which escalated dramatically; three days later, more than twelve thousand people from Baling and surrounding areas converged on the town. At their height on December 1, the Baling protests drew thirty thousand participants.[208]

These protests were especially significant because of Baling's location in the Malay "heartland," and the fact that Baling had been the site of the 1955 talks between the Tunku and Malayan Communist Party leader Chin Peng. In addition, the essence of the struggle was frustration with the government's development strategies and the stark inequities they produced. Moreover, the bulk of protesters were Malay and framed their demands in terms of Islamic principles of equality, ethics, and justice. They forged connections with students and lecturers unhappy with the Tun Razak government's political style and the lack of space for free debate and dissent.[209] The government faulted foreign professors, the PRM, and communist subversion for the students' agitation.

A *Mahasiswa Negara* exposé had already reviewed the plight of Baling several years earlier.[210] Now, a Socialist Club delegation traveled there during the school holidays, and sympathetic leaflets and articles condemning imperialist exploitation and rural poverty began to circulate. Students gradually joined protests both at UM and at the *padang* (a ceremonial field situated among the government buildings downtown) in Kuala Lumpur, and many of those who participated were from the rapidly rising ranks of rural students, some of them from Kedah.[211] Indeed, the Baling protests demonstrated both the extent of unity among Malays, who also dominated UMSU at the time (these were largely English-educated arts students),[212] and their engagement with issues beyond those of language and personal piety.

On December 3, two days after the throngs had gathered in Baling, around five thousand students rallied in Kuala Lumpur.[213] They demanded curbs on inflation, an increase in the price of rubber, and the punishment of corrupt government officials. Dispersed by tear gas, the students retreated to Mesjid Negara, the National Mosque. (The *imam* later testified that the students threatened to burn the mosque unless he

[208] Denzil Peiris, "The Emerging Rural Revolution," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 87 (1975): 30; interview with Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, December 18, 2003.

[209] Peiris, "The Emerging Rural Revolution," p. 30.

[210] Michael Tan, "Baling Languishes in Poverty," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 4, 1971, p. 2.

[211] Peiris, "The Emerging Rural Revolution," p. 30. Hamid Tuah's daughter herself later collaborated with fellow activist Hassan Karim to write about the period. See Hassan and Siti Nor, eds., *With the People!* Her sister was the first woman to head USM's student union, in 1969 (Arman Ahmad, "We Went to Jail for Hamid Tuah," *New Straits Times*, November 1, 2009, p. 28).

[212] At the time, Hishamuddin Rais was secretary-general of UMSU, Kamarazaman Yacob was president, Adi Satria was deputy secretary, and Alim Larig was editor of *Mahasiswa Negara*. Interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006; Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," p. 28.

[213] On these protests, see: Kamarazaman, *Bersama Anwar*, pp. 156–61; S. Husin, *Two Faces*, pp. 3–12; Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 14–15; Peiris, "The Emerging Rural Revolution"; Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," pp. 32–33; Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," p. 201; Munro-Kua, *Authoritarian Populism*, pp. 82–83; Makmor Tumin, "Idealisme Gerakan Politik Mahasiswa," *Dewan Masyarakat* 39,10 (2001): 45; Koh, *45 Years*, pp. 153–55; Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 22–23; *New Straits Times*, December 5–6 and 14, 1974; *Sunday Mail*, December 8, 1974. Also: interview with Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, December 18, 2003; and interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006.

agreed that he would not mention the prime minister or the king in his Friday sermons.[214]) The FRU fired tear gas into the mosque and entered, shoes on (contra mosque protocol), in pursuit. Over 1,100 university and college students, predominantly male, were arrested that day. Subsequently, busloads of detainees, including ABIM leader Anwar Ibrahim and ITM's Ibrahim Ali, were quickly "liberated" when students blocked the FRU trucks in traffic and seized the keys. (Anwar was re-arrested when he ventured to bail out other students that night.) Most of the students detained were charged with unlawful assembly; the still pro-government *Straits Times* made a point of publishing all their names. After several postponements, a judge finally discharged the lot after more than a year; those on government scholarships had to forswear further political activities.

Demonstrations continued across campuses, even as the prime minister warned on television against further outbursts. Over a thousand students demonstrated in Penang at the main entrance to USM. Thirty were arrested there, plus one additional student was detained in Singapore. Back in Kuala Lumpur, the FRU closed the road outside UM and UKM and posted armed patrols. Yet after police reportedly injured children in the nearby Kampung Kerinchi squatter settlement while tear-gassing students on December 6, several settlers joined students in a march, smashing traffic lights and barricading the Federal Highway. This time the state made clear that it had had enough.

Later that same night, Syed Husin Ali, secretary of the UM Academic Staff Association, was arrested at his house; he was eventually charged with having "actively, knowingly, and willingly assisted the illegal Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM) by promoting subversive student activities in institutions of higher learning."[215] In 1973, he had won a libel suit against Utusan Melayu Press for similar charges relating to a 1965 lecture. This time, he was detained for nearly six years. Tengku Shamsul, the association's president, was locked up already. But the real crackdown began early the morning of Sunday, December 8, 1974. Police entered the campuses of UM, ITM, UKM, and USM, as well as SU and Nantah in Singapore. Called Operasi Mayang (translated loosely as Operation Nip-It-in-the-Bud), the sweep detained at least two dozen lecturers and students under the ISA. Among those arrested were top leaders of all the student unions, as well as of the UM Socialist Club, UM and USM's Chinese Language Societies (CLS), and national union PKPM. (One detainee, an American law lecturer, was deported.) Sporadic arrests of recent graduates, particularly from the CLS, continued until as late as 1979.

Home Minister Ghazali Shafie explained on television a few nights later that the students had been practicing with weapons to oppose the government. He presented as "evidence" toy guns used as props in a CLS drama. Expressing regret, he justified the intrusion as an action intended to "flush out once and for all the bad elements in the universities so that others can carry on with their studies."[216] Some detainees were discharged quickly or swore off activism to gain early release. Others were remanded to Kamunting detention center, and were soon joined by additional Malaysian graduates and students from the UK, New Zealand, and Singapore. Clustered together, the men at least were able to form a rather vibrant community, and several (including both Anwar and Kamarazaman) enrolled in graduate-degree

[214] *New Straits Times*, March 18, 1975.

[215] S. Husin, *Two Faces*, pp. 66–71, 160–62.

[216] Quoted in Munro-Kua, *Authoritarian Populism*, p. 82.

programs from prison.[217] Several key students, though, evaded arrest, disguising themselves and hiding out in "safe houses" to evade detection. Most famous among these was Hishamuddin Rais,[218] who made plans to flee to Thailand along with classmates Kamarazaman Yacob, Abu Zer Ali, and Yunus Ali. Only Hishamuddin went through with the plan, beginning a twenty-year, thirty-country exile abroad. (Abu Zer also escaped, but by joining the MCP.) Hishamuddin returned to Malaysia in 1994 with the help of Kamarazaman and Anwar, who were by then prominent UMNO politicians.[219]

Demonstrations continued despite the crackdown. For instance, mere days after the sweep, over a thousand students attended a "solidarity rally" at the Speaker's Corner, then marched around campus; the police prevented them from leaving the UM grounds.[220] The various staff associations issued a joint proposal to restore normalcy, which called on the government to release unconditionally all detained students and staff, remove police from the campuses, let university councils and senates exercise their usual functions, and recognize that "citizens have a right to disagree and dissent."[221] A new NGO, Aliran Kesedaran Negara (Aliran, National Consciousness Movement), headed by lecturer Chandra Muzaffar, posted bail for detained USM students and offered them legal assistance.[222] Lectures were temporarily suspended, and while exams were postponed, regardless, UM students voted overwhelmingly to boycott them. The government and administration pressed the students to return to classes and work with them to solve issues, for instance through a new Students' Consultative Board.[223]

A sensationalist December 1974 Home Affairs Ministry white paper, entitled *Communist Party of Malaya Activities with the University of Malaya Chinese Language Society*,[224] reprinted in the mainstream newspapers, blamed communists for the protests, claiming that communists had infiltrated the CLS and, through it, UMSU. (The CLS at the time had around seven hundred members, about one hundred of them active.[225]) Anwar and other Malays were branded "pro-pro-communist"; CLS detainees were tagged more simply as "pro-communist."[226] Split by factional contests in 1970 and 1974, the MCP *was* focusing then on united-front tactics, including appeals to Malays (known to be sympathetic to Thai Muslims who cooperated intermittently with MCP insurgents along the border). The MCP front Partai Persaudaraan Islam (Islamic Fraternal Party, Paperi), founded in 1965, drew new support in the early 1970s.[227] However, the students involved with the December 1974 protests seem not to have been involved with these developments in the MCP. Indeed (although hardly conclusive evidence), an assertive *Mahasiswa Negara* cover story three years earlier had firmly averred students' anticommunism and staunch support for the government, at least in this one respect.[228]

The government offered as proof for its claims documents the police seized from a house occupied by eight CLS members, as well as the themes and discourse of club publications. The Home Affairs Ministry cited, too, implausibly frank documents allegedly recovered from dead communist terrorists to prove links among the CLS, other Chinese organizations, and the MCP.[229] According to the authors of the white paper, the CLS was using "culture as a platform for preaching so-called 'class struggle' in order to secure the overthrow of the existing social order."[230] The CLS was a "spearhead" in the party's propaganda initiative, with cultural and literary activities "calculated to portray the Government as oppressors and exploiters of the people."[231] The alleged activities of the Chinese Language Society ranged from the sale of subtly subversive Chinese New Year cards to the gala Spring Thunder Grand Amalgamated Cultural Performances, planned for May 1974. The white paper claimed that the term "spring" had been used by the MCP as code for "communism" since 1946—and even instrumental music could be "prejudicial to security."[232] Denied necessary permits for the latter event at the last minute, the CLS condemned the government's "paranoid" and inappropriate suppression of progressive cultural activities.[233]

It was "close individual contact" that let the CLS and Socialist Club push UMSU "in a direction suited to their subversive purpose," the report insisted. In the case of Tasek Utara, the CLS used UMSU "as a cat's-paw" in order to "incite student unrest," while pro-MCP CLS members "remained discreetly in the background." This faction instigated the demonstrations over Baling, too, according to the white paper—for instance, by issuing "pamphlets claiming that villagers in the Baling area were dying of starvation, which was, of course, patently untrue."[234] The report concluded, obviously suggesting larger implications:

[217] S. Husin, *Two Faces*, pp. 50–63; Kamarazaman, *Bersama Anwar*, pp. 144–51; Koh, *45 Years*, pp. 153–54; Munro-Kua, *Authoritarian Populism*, pp. 83–84.

[218] An unfortunate economics undergraduate from Johor with the same name was mistakenly arrested in his stead. See Sheryll Stothard, "The Further Adventures of Hishamuddin Rais," *Men's Review*, March 1995, p. 71.

[219] For the dramatic full story, see Kamarazaman, *Bersama Anwar*, pp. 59–74, 162–66; Stothard, "Further Adventures," pp. 71–79; Andrew Sia, "Still Living on the Edge," *Star*, November 26, 2006.

[220] *New Straits Times*, December 11, 1974.

[221] *New Straits Times*, December 13, 1974.

[222] One of those students, Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, went on to become vice chancellor of USM (interview with Chandra Muzaffar, February 7, 2006).

[223] *New Straits Times*, December 14 and 21, 1974; Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," p. 27; and Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," p. 16.

[224] Government of Malaysia, *Communist Party of Malaya Activities within the University of Malaya Chinese Language Society* (Kuala Lumpur: Kementerian Hal Ehwal Dalam Negeri, 1974).

[225] Interview with Koh Swe Yong, March 29, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

[226] For specific charges and rebuttals, see Asia Forum on Human Rights, *Human Rights in Malaysia*; or Munro-Kua, *Authoritarian Populism*, pp. 82–83. Also: interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006; interview with Hishamuddin Rais, March 30, 2006; and interview with Anwar Ibrahim, April 25, 2006.

[227] Justus M. van der Kroef, "Patterns of Political Opposition in Southeast Asia," *Pacific Affairs* 51,4 (1978–79): 633–36.

[228] "Mahasiswa Boleh Tentang Komunis," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 18, 1971, pp. 1, 20.

[229] *New Sunday Times*, December 15, 1974; Government of Malaysia, *Communist Party of Malaya Activities*, pp. 6–10, 14–18.

[230] Government of Malaysia, *Communist Party of Malaya Activities*, p. v.

[231] Ibid., pp. 2–6.

[232] Ibid., pp. 6, 10–14, 18–20.

[233] Asia Forum on Human Rights, *Human Rights in Malaysia*, pp. 145–47.

[234] Government of Malaysia, *Communist Party of Malaya Activities*, pp. 21–23.

> The threat posed to national security by the CPM elements in this country through language bodies in institutions of higher learning, and in particular through the UMCLS, must be exposed so that the people will be fully made aware of similar approaches used to advance the cause of the CPM in this country under the guise of advancing the "healthy growth" of literature and culture.[235]

The Malaysian government was clearly invested in affirming that Malay students could not have spearheaded these anti-government, left-leaning, and class-aligned activities, no matter how demeaning it might be to label those students as mere puppets of Chinese ringleaders. The paradox that these alleged Chinese subversives were said to be working diligently on behalf of a *Malay* underclass was ignored. The report, too, entirely neglected to deal with the protests at UKM, where most students were Malays of peasant background. According to one analysis, the student protesters at UKM were primarily motivated by frustration with endemic corruption (this period was peppered with corruption scandals), "young Turks" in government (especially Mahathir and Musa Hitam), and officials' paternalism. In short, these protests were "not an intellectual exercise," but "a gut reaction from students' own experience of rural misery."[236] And while Malay scholarship students would be less able to express idealism after they graduated to become government servants, for now, they were "among the most articulate about rural problems, the plight of the peasantry, and reforms."[237]

Either the PRM, as a party that united left-leaning Chinese and Malays, or ABIM is more likely than is the MCP to have played a significant role in these protests.[238] PBMUM's Sanusi Osman and UMSU's Syed Hamid Ali and Rustam Sani (all also Socialist Club members), among others, were simultaneously engaged with PRM; the party's newsletter was readily available on campus; and lecturer Syed Husin Ali was a party leader.[239] Yet even if it had been the most active party on campus in the late 1960s, PRM's appeal remained limited: while student leaders of the day were generally anti-establishment, most identified more with issues than with parties, and Islamist or Malay-centric students, in particular, tended toward the nonpartisan, but PAS-inclined, ABIM.[240]

Regardless, the charges against the detainees were elaborate, colorful, and crass. Anwar, for instance, was detained on grounds that he had been active with various organizations since March 1969, and, according to the Home Affairs Ministry, he had become

> ... the main agitator of several undesirable activities, acts of lawlessness and illegal demonstrations amongst students of the University of Malaya and other institutes of higher learning agitating against the Government policies, on various issues in the country, with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the legally constituted Government of Malaysia by unconstitutional and revolutionary means.

[235] Ibid., p. 24.

[236] Peiris, "The Emerging Rural Revolution," p. 31.

[237] Cheah Boon Kheng, "Understanding the Students," *Sunday Mail*, March 22, 1970.

[238] Peiris, "The Emerging Rural Revolution," pp. 30–31; and Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," pp 201–2.

[239] Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

[240] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 54.

The last straw was his "being one of those known to have been engaged in manipulating from behind the scenes the altruistic motives of many students who thought they were championing the cause of the poor peasants in Baling" in December 1974.[241] Adi Satria and Hamzah Mohd. Kassim, too, were alleged to have supported a "militant pro-Communist faction within the UMSU which advocated militant forms of mass agitation against the Government," and were accused as well of such trespasses as rallying support in Penang and seeking to "embarrass the Government" in Australia and New Zealand.[242]

This assiduous scapegoating of key student activists escalated an enduring trend, with roots in the colonial era. Rather than address the source and nature of grievances, the government could at one stroke discredit protestors as communist-inspired, pin everything on Chinese provocateurs rather than Malay "heartlanders" (ever more important in the NEP era), and insist that the students had just been led astray—confirming the assumption that gullible, vulnerable students must be kept on a tighter leash. That strategy resonated in part due to the international climate: the intensification of the Cold War in Southeast Asia sharpened the fangs of the communist bogey. Moreover, this interpretation of national politics resonated deeply among Malaysian students, so that its severity, intolerance of the left, and racial slant left an enduring impression. Operasi Mayang marked a definitive turning point in the campus environment, crystallized in the newly hardened UUCA: the clearest policy manifestation of intellectual containment.

International Dimensions: The Vietnam War and More

All this while, Malaysian students broadly were keenly conscious of and inspired by their position in a global student surge; this international dimension reinforced a sense of collective identity. They kept up with their peers overseas through study tours, regional student union ties, and the international student news page in *Mahasiswa Negara*.[243] These connections were tangible: for instance, four student leaders, sponsored by PKPM and the host countries, took an extended tour through Asia, Africa, and Europe in 1969 to link up with other student groups.[244] Closer to home, a group of SU architecture students raised funds to travel through Malaysia and Thailand in 1970–71, helping with flood relief, surveying squatter architecture, and meeting with their counterparts along the way.[245] In the same vein, Ungku Aziz proposed the establishment of a University of Southeast Asia to encourage "scholarship and regionalism rather than parochialism." He

[241] Asia Forum on Human Rights, *Human Rights in Malaysia*, pp. 99–100.

[242] Ministry of Home Affairs statement, in Ibid., pp. 132–35.

[243] See, for instance, "Demonstrasi Pelajar2 Malaysia Ditertawakan," *Gemasiswa*, June 20, 1972, p. 4 (on a Jaycees-sponsored tour for UKM students that took them to meet with fellow activists in Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore); and *Malay Mail*, March 13, 1969 (on an exchange between UMSU and the University of the Philippines' student union).

[244] "Students Going Abroad to Study Unrest," *Straits Times*, February 11, 1969; and interview with Khong Kim Hoong, August 23, 2007.

[245] Interview with Juliette Chin, December 23, 2006.

recommended that this university be sited on an island donated by a country in the region and designated as international territory. Each country would contribute at least one faculty member, along with staff, students, and a share of administration.[246]

Malaysian students took the lead in several regional initiatives, such as the inaugural ASEAN Youth Consultative Conference, held in Kuala Lumpur in November 1970. Acting Minister of Youth and Sports Dato Hamzah bin Abu Samah was so inspired that during this event he announced the Malaysian government's intention to establish a new National Youth Consultative Council.[247] More enduring was the Asian Students Association (ASA), launched in Kuala Lumpur in April 1969 to bolster cooperation and mutual understanding among students across the region, advance a shared Asian identity, promote human rights and academic freedom, and support member organizations.[248] The ASA built upon former initiatives, such as the Asian Student Conference (an offshoot of the International Student Conference) and a more recently established Association of Southeast Asian University Students. Launched in 1968 with Khong Kim Hoong as pro-tem chair, and extending to ITM and the polytechnics, the latter association held a preliminary meeting at Kuala Lumpur, then an initial conference in Manila, before UMSU withdrew from the organization in January 1970 to avoid duplication of efforts.[249] In 1971, though, the ASA—comprising student federations from across the region, representing over 1.5 million students—was denied registration under Malaysia's Societies Act and obliged to close its local office (though it persisted as an organization).[250] PKPM withdrew the next year, after the National Union of Israeli Students gained admission.[251]

Many Malaysians studying abroad were active, too. London remained the hub for expatriate activists. The London-based Malaysian and Singaporean Student (MASS) Forum[252] became radicalized after a change of leadership in October 1967. Taking over Malaysia Hall as a base, the small, multiracial group worked to revivify and unite the local Malaysian student community. MASS Forum maintained close links with UMSU (though less so with USSU) and hosted visitors, including Syed Hamid, Khong, and Anwar. A United Malaysian and Singapore Student Action Front formed shortly thereafter, chaired by MASS Forum president Rahman Embong and collaborating with the umbrella London Union of Malaysian Students. It focused on promoting a noncommunal orientation. The group drifted leftward, restyling itself as MASS Movement in 1972. Not least through its earnest, incendiary journal, *New Malayan Youth*, MASS Movement urged students to "integrate with the workers

[246] Ungku Abdul Aziz, "University of Southeast Asia," *Suara Universiti* 1,1 (1970): 10–11.

[247] "ASEAN Youth Conference: Building Our Own Future," *Mahasiswa Negara*, January 18, 1971, p. 2; and Kamaluddin Mohd Zin, "Sekarang belia boleh bersuara lebih lantang," *Mingguan Malaysia*, May 23, 1971.

[248] Keshav Raj Pandey, "Looking Back: The Seed of ASA," *ASA News*, April 2000, pp. 14, 16.

[249] "All the Facts on the Move for an Asian Student Conference," *Mahasiswa Negara*, September 1961, p. 4; *Malay Mail*, January 14, 1970; and interview with Khong Kim Hoong, March 9, 2006.

[250] "ASA Office to Close," *Mahasiswa Negara*, August 23, 1971, pp. 1, 20.

[251] "Surat Terbuka kepada PKPM, *Gemasiswa*, December 31, 1972, p. 15.

[252] The Malayan Forum came to be known as the Malaysian and Singaporean Student Forum after 1965, despite a request from the Malaysian Students' Department to exclude Singapore since the group received Malaysian government funds.

and peasants and struggle to defeat our common enemies: US-led British imperialism, landlordism, and comprador–bureaucrat capitalism!"[253]

Meanwhile, back in Malaysia, many students embraced a globalized student identity as a frame for collective action. Burgeoning student radicalism overseas served as both scapegoat and metric for trends back home. Reinforcing that positioning, the DAP's Lim Kit Siang invoked "student power" in Indonesia, South Korea, the United States, and elsewhere to encourage Malaysian students to be politically engaged.[254] Increasingly, international campaigns united students, often without perturbing the state.[255]

Such campaigns peaked as antiwar protests escalated. As of 1967, well over two-thirds of students in Malaysia backed American actions in Vietnam.[256] By 1973, opinion seemed to have shifted.[257] But Vietnam was not the only international issue confronting students. Earlier, in 1968, UMSU declined to protest the visit of the shah and queen of Iran to Malaysia, for fear that such an action might have racial or religious overtones.[258] But students were provoked into action by the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia later that same year. Echoing protests that were taking place internationally, UM students demonstrated peacefully outside the Soviet Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. The police responded harshly, deploying tear gas. Around a thousand students flocked to the Speaker's Corner. From there, they marched to the *padang* downtown, then to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Deputy Prime Minister Tun Razak addressed the crowd and met with a delegation, pledging an investigation into the police's methods, sympathetic consideration of future applications for permits, and the return of a confiscated megaphone. In exchange, the delegation promised to return to UM. It denied that the demonstrators had been manipulated by provocateurs, however ideological their anti-Soviet slogans. Indeed, part of the impetus for this demonstration was simply to prove that the Socialist Club was not pro-Soviet, as the pro-US Literary and Dramatic Society had recently charged.[259] Malaysian students also protested Britain's suppression of Anguillan people's rights in early 1969[260] and arms sales to South Africa the following year: organized by UMSU, several hundred UM students trampled and burned first the British flag, then an effigy of Prime Minister Edward Heath, sending the ashes, with a note, to the British High Commission.[261] A few years later, UMSU joined the

[253] Punctuation in original. "Hail the Four Years of Valiant Struggle of the Malayan and Singaporean Student Movement," *New Malayan Youth* 1,1 (January 1972): 7–13, 36; and interview with Rahman Embong, March 29, 2006.

[254] "Should Students Take Part in Party Politics?" *The Rocket* 3,4 (April/May 1968): 3–4; also *Straits Times*, April 4, 1968.

[255] *Straits Times*, July 25, 1970; Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," p. 31.

[256] "Report on the Findings of the Opinion Poll 1967," *Prima* 1,3 (1967–68): 12.

[257] *Malay Mail*, February 15, 1973.

[258] Panchacharam, "Student Political Activity," p. 50.

[259] *Straits Times*, August 26 and 28, 1968; Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 4, 7–8; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 71–72; and interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

[260] "Students Attack British Action in Anguilla," *Sunday Times*, March 23, 1969.

[261] Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," p. 46; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 126–27; and *Straits Times*, July 25, 1970.

Malaysian Youth Council, MTUC, and DAP Youth in issuing statements against French nuclear tests in the Pacific.[262]

Some protests focused on injustices nearer to home, as with 1968 demonstrations against the Philippines, which was asserting territorial claims to Sabah, in East Malaysia. Around five hundred students left the Speaker's Corner for the Philippines Embassy, then proceeded to the Tunku's home to ask his support. The prime minister initially lauded their spirit, but muted his praise on learning that they had broken through the embassy gate and torn down the Philippines flag. Angry Filipino students responded by demonstrating at the Malaysian Embassy in Manila.[263] PMIUM later spearheaded another protest against the Philippines, over Marcos's treatment of Muslims.[264] Visiting dignitaries also posed easy targets for demonstrators. In 1974, for instance, Hishamuddin Rais led a demonstration at the airport against arriving Japanese prime minister Tanaka and his country's militarism. Those who supported Japanese factories and Japanese investment in Malaysia subsequently held a counterdemonstration, and noted the irony of their opponents' reliance on Japanese-made motorcycles.[265] Not all causes took off, however. Hishamuddin's calls to free the Straits of Melaka from imperialist dominance, for instance, drew little interest, and when a group of students spoke of problems in Albania, few in the audience knew where it was.[266]

Part of what distinguished Malaysian students generally during this period was the breadth of their exposure to diverse groups of peers and a wide range of scholarship and activism. UMSU and the Socialist Club included both Muslims and non-Muslims; members of Muslim organizations read broadly, including works by Japanese and Jewish scholars, among others; and local students followed international Islamist movements and secular student uprisings alike.[267] Even so, Islam offered a particularly sturdy axis for solidarity, especially among Malay students. PKPIM and ABIM had ties regionally with Indonesia's Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI, Muslim Students' Association) and sent members for trainings in Jakarta and Bandung. HMI helped PKPIM both intellectually and organizationally. Imaduddin Abdul Rahman, an engineering lecturer from Bandung who taught in Malaysia in the early 1970s, was especially influential, offering talks on Islamic praxis and the Qur'an.[268]

[262] *Malay Mail*, June 23, 1973.

[263] Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics," p. 3; and Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 72–74.

[264] Hishamuddin, "14 Jun Berulang Lagi?" *Mahasiswa Negara*, December 13, 1971, p. 9.

[265] Kamarazaman, *Bersama Anwar*, pp. 39–43. A visit by Tanaka sparked a pivotal student protest in Indonesia at around the same time. Students declared corrupt Indonesian officials to be tools of Japanese businessmen, and students joined crowds of the urban poor in attacking Japanese cars and shopping centers in Jakarta in 1974. The Indonesian military's response was harsher than Malaysia's: several people were killed in the clash, and almost fifty student leaders were arrested. See Budiman, "The Student Movement in Indonesia," p. 618. During this same period, Thai student activism gained momentum, too, from a November 1972 boycott of Japanese goods. Darling, "Student Protest and Political Change in Thailand," pp. 11–12. The coincidence of these protests against the Japanese reflected regional unease with Japanese economic dominance.

[266] Interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006.

[267] Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, April 25, 2006.

[268] Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 18–21.

In June 1971, the reported government abuse of Muslims in Pattani (in southern Thailand) sparked a massive demonstration among Malaysian—especially Malay—students. (Critics accused the Thai government both of violently suppressing local nationalist agitation and of allegedly exploiting natural resources and suppressing civil liberties in the largely Malay–Muslim southern provinces.) Coverage of the case in PKPIM's *Suara Siswa* the previous December had already prompted the Malaysian government to halt publication of that newsletter. A visit by Thai prime minister Thanom Kittikachorn in June offered a chance to protest both his government's alleged ill-treatment of Pattani Muslims and reputed cooperation between Thai and Malaysian forces along the border. The demonstration, organized by the Muslim Student Society (PMI), was the first off-campus protest to be organized since passage of the new Universities and University Colleges Act. On June 14, as many as two thousand students walked out of lectures and assembled on the road outside campus shortly before Thanom's party was due to pass. The FRU confronted the students, issued several warnings, then chased them away, lobbing tear gas even into the UM mosque. Over a dozen students were wounded, several severely—the first such casualties involving Malaysian student demonstrators. Eighteen students plus Anwar, by then a graduate, were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly. The crowd dispersed only after Ungku Aziz promised to organize a meeting with the prime minister. The latter refused to meet. Several thousand students, Malay and non-Malay, continued to protest and boycott lectures the following day and, subsequently, refocused on police brutality and their detained classmates. FRU troops waited outside the gates with trained police dogs. Busloads of supporters came to see the arrested students; the students were then charged and released on bail on June 17, on their vice chancellors' recognizance. *Mahasiswa Negara* sustained the drama with a blank, black-bordered textbox in lieu of an editorial while charges remained pending. Tried two months later, the students were convicted of illegal assembly.[269] Meanwhile, in an action that recalled the response of offended Filipino students in 1968, the destruction and trampling of their flag goaded Thai students, especially at Chulalongkorn University, into a counterprotest at the Malaysian Embassy in Bangkok.[270]

The Palestinian cause proved similarly galvanizing, and not just among Muslim students. In October 1973, shortly after the start of the Yom Kippur War, Malaysian students from across the religious spectrum, joined by members of the public, staged a huge, two-hour protest outside the United States Embassy in Kuala Lumpur—the first of several such protests to take place over the years. Speakers denounced Zionism and imperialism, including the provision of US arms supplies to Israel and the latter's aggression in the Middle East, and burned effigies of US President Richard Nixon and Israeli defense minister, Moshe Dayan. Police broke things up with tear gas, causing several student injuries. Three days later, over four thousand

[269] "In Commemoration of the June 14 Student Struggle against Fascism in Malaya," *New Malayan Youth* 1,6 (June 1972): 3–4; and, in that same issue, "Youth, Students, and Women in Struggle," pp. 32–33; "19 Detained, 12 Injured," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 21, 1971, pp. 1, 24; "The June 14 Incident in Perspective," *Mahasiswa Negara*, September 6, 1971, p. 17; and "Jangan Mengabaikan Hakikat," *Mahasiswa Negara*, September 20, 1971, p. 2; *Straits Times*, June 15, 17, 19 and August 17, 1971; Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 7–8; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 145–52; and Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change," p. 410.

[270] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 152–53.

students returned, this time stressing the humanitarian dimensions of the cause. A group of students pulled the US flag down from its mast; it was shredded, burned, and replaced by a singlet. The PLO representative in Malaysia, Abu Yaacob (a frequent speaker at both UM and USM; Malaysian students maintained open links with the Al-Fatah arm of the PLO), addressed the crowd, and writer Usman Awang read poems on the suffering of Palestinians. The students then marched to the embassy's Lincoln Center, the US Information Service's library, which they declared a CIA front and threatened to burn. By this time, the crowd was getting restless; stones were thrown, glass was broken, and the FRU was gearing up. Just then Home Affairs minister Ghazali Shafie arrived. He assured the crowd of his support and pressed them to adjourn for prayers. Waves of students duly marched to the National Mosque, leaving behind a frustrated core of protestors. Later, Prime Minister Tun Razak explained Malaysia's position on the United States–Israel issue to a group of student leaders over tea; another delegation met with US Embassy staff.[271] Meanwhile in Penang, around four hundred attended a USM forum on the issue, where UKM's Rahman Embong exhorted them to understand the Palestinian and Malayan people's struggles as part of a shared campaign for Third World liberation.[272]

Malaysian students pursued less weighty matters, as well. In December 1967, for instance, over five hundred students demonstrated against UM's extravagant feting of visitors from an American "floating university," which took place right after the university had proposed a controversial increase in hostel fees, an unwelcome proposal that a thousand-student, UMSU-organized sit-in convinced the University Council to defer.[273] And in August 1970, UMSU and PBMUM joined forces (with support from PRM) to protest the sixteen-hour detention and forced shearing of three long-locked Malaysian students who had been detained upon entering Singapore. They demonstrated at the airport when Lee Kuan Yew arrived in Malaysia later that month, then at the Singapore High Commission, and, finally, at parliament two days later, seeking a review of Malaysia's treaties with Singapore. Tun Razak promised the crowd that he would study their memo.[274] (The issue resurfaced a year later, when Malaysia's Public Services Commission banned male undergraduates from sporting hair longer than their shirt collar, ears, or eyebrows.[275]) By 1970, however, UMSU president Zainal Abidin bin Mohd Yusuf complained, "Our energies should be directed towards the politics of our own country instead of making a lot of noise about the problems of other countries which

[271] Anti-Imperialist Student, "Massive Anti-Zionist, Anti-Imperialist Demonstration in Kuala Lumpur in Support of the Just and Valiant Struggle of the Arab and Palestinian People!" *Truth* 1,7 (October 1973): 4, 7; Mohd. Idris Jusi, "Siswa Tunjuk Perasaan," *Gemasiswa*, October 24, 1973:1, 12; "Demo Anti Imperialis Amerika," *Mahasiswa Negara* October 24, 1973, pp. 1, 12; *New Straits Times*, October 14 and 17, 1973; Kamarazaman, *Bersama Anwar*, pp. 93–105; Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," p. 31; Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 9–10.

[272] Commentator, "The Palestinian and Malayan People's Struggles Support Each Other," *Truth* 1,7 (October 1973): 3, 9; Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," p. 30.

[273] *Straits Times*, December 15, 16, 18, 1967; and Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," p. 44.

[274] Adding insult to injury, the Singapore police charged each student $1 for the haircut. *Straits Times*, August 20–21, 1970; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 127–29.

[275] *Mahasiswa Negara*, November 22, 1971, p. 1.

is no concern to us at all."[276] The Student Council duly resolved thenceforth to focus on national, not international, affairs.[277]

The Awakening Specter of Communalism on Campus

Though many students focused on global issues, as described above, the primary identity for many, starting especially in the late 1960s and continuing thereafter, was ever more narrowly communal. The sparse enrollment of Malays in tertiary institutions in the past had helped to preclude or cloak communal affiliations and animosities. Now, changing campus demographics heightened ethnic tensions. Already in 1967, just over half the students in one survey reported a tendency to "move freely" among races, although nearly all intermingled to some extent.[278] The following year, *Mahasiswa Negara* noted with regret the prevalence of ethnic voting on campus. By the early 1970s, only UMSU and the Socialist Club could claim to be truly multiracial.[279] The implications for the nation of increasing racial polarization on campus, emblemized in the growing rift between UMSU and PBMUM, started to worry students and officials alike.[280]

Nearly all the early leaders of PBMUM were from Malay Studies, the department out of which the club emerged. Its orientation shifted, though, with changes in leadership. Sanusi Osman (president in 1967–68) was concerned with rural issues and building a dynamic national profile; Anwar (1969–70), with anti-Tunku and national education issues; Nordin Razak (1970–71), with Malay language and society on and off campus; and Mahathir Mohd Khir (1971–72), with less radical long-term strategies to advance Malays' educational, economic, and political position.[281] By 1971, PBMUM had achieved its main goals for Malay language and development policies, but the path had been rocky.

Malaysia's 1957 constitution made Malay the national language, but allowed English to be used for official purposes for ten more years. Revisiting the policy in February 1967, the Tunku tabled a National Language Bill, declaring Malay to be the sole official language of peninsular Malaysia from September 1967 on, and of Sabah and Sarawak after 1973. Ridden with loopholes, the Language Act was ambiguous in its terminology and commitments, and it did little to alter language-use patterns.[282] Response in the Malay press ranged from anger to uncertainty. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP, or PAS after 1971) blasted the proposals for favoring English at the expense of the Malay masses. A new National Language Action Front (NLAF), comprising Malay teachers' associations, the National Writers' Association (Persatuan Penulis Nasional, PENA), PBMUM, and students at the Muslim College, dismissed the bill's promises as mere posturing.[283] By then, the Malay secondary

[276] Quoted in *Malay Mail*, September 2, 1970.

[277] *Malay Mail*, September 30, 1970.

[278] "Report on the Findings of the Opinion Poll 1967," *Prima* 1,3 (1967–68): 10.

[279] Raghavan, "Political Attitudes of Students," pp. 166–67.

[280] "A Shade of Difference," *Mahasiswa Negara*, July 24, 1968; "Racialism in the University," *The Rocket* 3,8 (August/September 1968): 1.

[281] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 153–61.

[282] Cynthia H. Enloe, "Issues and Integration in Malaysia," *Pacific Affairs* 41,3 (1968): 376; Margaret Roff, "The Politics of Language in Malaya," *Asian Survey* 7,5 (1967): 323–24.

[283] Roff, "The Politics of Language," pp. 325–28.

school system had expanded significantly. Graduates had been assured that at least some Malay-medium courses would be available for them at UM. But use of English had hardly abated, given its socioeconomic utility, and it had become clear by late 1966 that the government was reluctant to intervene. Education Minister Mohd Khir Johari highlighted the unifying powers of English schools in the past, while government statements touted the importance of English for economic development.[284] Frustrated, PBMUM called for Khir's removal. When an MCA division then questioned whether the politicking PBMUM should be allowed to continue as an academic society, other student groups, including the Socialist Club, came to PBMUM's defense.[285]

The Chinese community—for example, the MCA, Chinese guilds, and Chinese educational organizations—protested the Language Act, too, especially after the Ministry of Education announced that students who had not passed the government's exams would no longer be allowed to further their education overseas. Despite some mitigation, for instance, regarding translation of official documents, community leaders were not mollified, and they trained their sights on the establishment of a local university for graduates of independent Chinese schools,[286] even as public Chinese secondary schools converted that year to trilingual "national-type" schools.

Not surprisingly, the issue of education, including higher education, featured in the 1969 electoral platforms of most opposition parties and provided the subtext behind discussions on economic development and equity.[287] Malay scholars had complained of the neglect of Malay studies and language in higher education since the 1930s. Malay-educated students tended to lack fluency, cultural pride, and self-confidence for literary expression; those in the English stream lost competency in Malay. Nationalist writer and linguist Za'ba made this point trenchantly, for example, yet conceded (perhaps indicating the very lack of confidence he decries),

> ... it will ultimately be necessary to have a properly trained man from Europe who is expert in philological studies and in linguistic research on scientific lines [to teach Malay Studies]. But to begin with, so long as the studies are confined to Malay language and literature, [and] Malay customs and history ... the post may be occupied by a Malay fit for the work.[288]

Three education policy issues now came to the fore: widely disappointing results in 1967's lower school certificate exams (LCE), part of the gauntlet of qualifying exams inherited from the British that determined a student's advancement through public secondary and tertiary education;[289] the use of quotas for Malays in university

[284] Ibid., pp. 322–24.

[285] "Call for Probe into Varsity's Malay Language Society," *Straits Times*, October 23, 1968; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 76–77.

[286] Kua Kia Soong, *A Protean Saga: The Chinese Schools of Malaysia*, 3rd ed. (Kajang: Dong Jiao Zong Higher Learning Centre, 1999), pp. 90–92.

[287] Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*, pp. iv, 43; Kua, *Protean Saga*, pp. 91–93.

[288] Zainal Abidin b. Ahmad, "The Necessity for Higher Malay Studies in the Malay Schools, the English Schools, and at Raffles College," Arkib Negara Malaysia, SP18/6C/36 [1938], pp. 1, 3.

[289] Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*, p. 65.

admissions (discussion through the late 1960s focused more on opening English-medium education and careers to Malays than on changing the medium of instruction); and creation of a new Chinese university. All three had to do less with preserving "cultural distinctiveness" than with economic competitiveness and modernization.[290]

The proposal to found a Chinese university—to be called Merdeka University, connoting the freedom of both nation and institution[291]—was an especially contentious issue.[292] Since Nanyang University was no longer a feasible alternative for Chinese-language students, given Singapore's separation from Malaysia and PAP crackdowns, Chinese educators first proposed the founding of a multiracial, multilingual university in late 1967. Members of the public donated generously and promptly, and most opposition parties with Chinese support endorsed the effort. Deeming the proposal impractical and unwise, however, the MCA first tried to divert attention from the initiative by proposing to expand UM's Chinese department and establishing Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman (KTAR). Yet the university remained an election issue. MCA minister Tan Siew Sin had scoffed in mid-April 1969, "It would be easier for hell to freeze over than for Merdeka University to be established under the prevailing circumstances in Malaysia." By the end of that month, needing to defuse the issue, he and his party had agreed to pursue it.[293] UM's CLS also advocated for the university—while PBMUM advocated for a Malay counterpart. The Alliance faced potent pressure from the Malay community, and within a matter of weeks it caved in on the issue and announced the establishment of the Malay-medium National University (UKM). Initially, some in government—including the Tunku and Minister of Education Mohd Khir Johari—had opposed this proposal, but their recent $10 million allocation for KTAR had too deeply incensed PBMUM and other Malay organizations, and they needed to make amends.[294] By the time of the election, the Merdeka University issue had merged with broader ones of multilingualism and non-Malay rights, especially in the DAP's campaign. The issue came to naught in 1969, but was revived later (see chapter 5), especially as university admissions grew tighter for non-Malays after 1971. Throughout, though, this phase of the Chinese education movement was distinctive: while in the 1950s, activists sought space within the national education system, now they looked outside it.[295]

The debacle of the 1969 elections, when the incumbent Alliance won less than half the popular vote, convinced the government to do more to shore up Malay support. A mere two months later, it announced that as per the 1956 Razak Report, it was converting all English-medium schools to "national schools," with a common curriculum and examinations. The changeover would be phased in one year at a

[290] Enloe, "Issues and Integration," pp. 373–84.

[291] Tham, "Malaysian Education," p. 349.

[292] On Merdeka University, see: Kua, *Protean Saga*, pp. 94, 109–10; Wong Jee Yai, "Gerakan Universiti Merdeka Dan Implikasinya Dalam Politik Malaysia 1967–1982" (MA thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1996), pp. 207–10, 220–22; Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 18; Nancy L. Snider, "Race, Leitmotiv of the Malayan Election Drama," *Asian Survey* 10,12 (1970): 1074–78; Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*, p. vii; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 78–79.

[293] Snider, "Race, Leitmotiv," pp. 1077–78.

[294] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 78–79.

[295] Tan Liok Ee, *The Politics of Chinese Education in Malaya 1945–1961* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 288–91.

time, from the primary level to university, from 1970 until 1983. Malay would be the medium of instruction and English would be a compulsory second language. Non-Malays could study their mother tongue, as well.[296] In 1971, the government introduced new quotas for university admissions, with selection biased according to racial percentage rather than just academic merit. The tide had already begun to turn with the 1965–66 session, when students from Malay-medium schools were admitted to the arts faculty for the first time. The percentage of Malays jumped after 1966 by 10 percent in four years, reached a bare majority by 1971, then kept rising.[297] The proportion of Malay undergraduates soon outstripped this ethnic group's share of the nation's population. The Universities and University Colleges Act, which mandated that any university or college must be approved by the king and parliament, was passed the same year, stalling the Merdeka University movement.[298] Between these measures and the other pro-Malay provisions of 1971's New Economic Policy, ethnic consciousness escalated as government policies rendered racial lines increasingly sharp.[299]

Encouraged, but not satisfied, by such moves, in 1970, PBMUM made *Bahasa, Bangsa dan Negara* (Language, Nation, and Country) its official motto and Malay-language predominance its official goal. At the time, UM had no declared policy on Malay-language instruction, although some faculties had introduced such courses. Only in the 1970–71 academic year did an official Preliminary Policy Statement propose that Malay become the chief medium of academic communication after six years' staggered implementation. Both PBMUM and UMSU largely supported the plan, although PBMUM wanted immediate provisions to help Malay-stream students, and UMSU was concerned about language training facilities for matriculating non-Malays.[300]

Matters soon heated up. New Education Minister Abdul Rahman Yakub was lauded as the "savior" of the National Education Policy and credited with launching UKM. He promised, too, to establish Islamic and agricultural universities.[301] Yet he resigned in 1970, after just a few months in office, to become chief minister of Sarawak. PBMUM and PMIUM leaders cried foul. On July 9, PBMUM led two thousand UM and UKM students to protest the minister's resignation, which they presumed had been forced. Abdul Rahman himself visited both campuses the next day to explain that he was merely extending the struggle. To wild applause, he added that education policy would be destroyed only over his and Tun Razak's dead bodies (*mayat*).[302]

Three months later, members of PBMUM—by then 2,500 strong, representing one-third of the student body—launched *Operasi Ganyang* (Destruction). They burned English-medium posters at the Speaker's Corner, then roamed the campus, splashing paint over English signs and notices (even on the UMSU bus) and causing ancillary damage along the way. Reproving these "acts of destruction and

[296] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 100, Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality and Higher Education*, pp. 13–14.

[297] Raghavan, "Political Attitudes of Students," p. 145.

[298] Kua, *Protean Saga*, p. 110.

[299] Tham, "Malaysian Education," pp. 345–46.

[300] Abdul Majid, *Report*, pp. 98–100.

[301] *Straits Times*, July 10, 1970.

[302] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 105–8.

vandalism," UMSU invited the PBMUM executive committee to negotiate. (USSU, too, telegrammed its disapproval, an act that PBMUM considered an intrusion into UM's internal affairs.) PBMUM first brushed off UMSU's request, then called for an immediate, public meeting. UMSU declined. PBMUM members marched to UMSU's offices and "persuaded" union leaders to join them—and over a thousand students—at the DTC (the Great Hall). There, with Sanusi Osman (then a tutor in Malay Studies) as chair, ex-PBMUM president Anwar Ibrahim argued that the term "vandalism" was offensive. PBMUM's actions, he offered, were fully justified and in accordance with the wishes of Tun Razak's regime (the prime minister's department quickly dissociated itself from this proposed alliance). PBMUM issued UMSU an ultimatum: withdraw those words, "acts of destruction and vandalism," within twenty-four hours "or else they would be shown what vandalism actually meant."[303] UMSU recanted only the term "vandalism"; PBMUM demanded more. The two camps met at the DTC again the next day, with lecturer Khoo Kay Kim as mediator and a capacity crowd of over 2,500. UMSU leaders Zainal Abidin Yusuf and Jai Mohan ultimately decided to withdraw UMSU's full statement, "for the sake of student unity and peace." PBMUM was ecstatic. Some UMSU members felt its leaders had let them down; others thought that they had acted responsibly. The clash triggered a vote of confidence in the UMSU Council at a meeting attended by an estimated five thousand students. (*Mahasiswa Negara* mused optimistically that perhaps students had "finally shaken off their apathy.") The sitting council easily prevailed.[304]

The clash was the biggest to date between student organizations. Its impact was deep and wide. Most importantly, in dialogues with PBMUM, the vice chancellor pledged to use Malay for all communications and administrative purposes at UM, to replace English-language signs, and to study ways to bring the teaching staff up to scratch in using Malay.[305] The next month, he announced a new language policy. UM's council and senate agreed both to hold their own meetings in Malay and to prioritize facility in the Malay language among academic staff. In November 1971, within six months of the launch of Malay-medium UKM, Malay became the sole official language of UM, as well. PBMUM was pleased; other students were less so. And non-Malay lecturers in particular worried both about the quality of instruction, given so speedy a conversion, and about how easily the university had yielded to students' pressure tactics.[306]

Within a year, the transition to using the Malay language in student affairs, at least, was proceeding apace. UMSU announced a new policy of promoting Malay, and *Mahasiswa Negara* even published a handy glossary of *Istilah PMUM* (UMSU vocabulary) to help.[307] (By then, the Malay name "Universiti Malaya" had come more frequently to supplant the English "University of Malaya," including on the masthead of *Mahasiswa Negara*.) By the next year, Malay students had convinced the

[303] "UMSU and PBMUM Clash," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 1970, p. 8.

[304] Ibid., pp. 1, 8; "The Future of 13th Council," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 1970, p. 3; "13th Council Gets New Mandate," *Mahasiswa Negara*, November 1970, pp. 8–9; *Straits Times*, October 6–9, 1970; interview with Khoo Kay Kim, March 17, 2006; Mohamad, "Pelajar Melayu," pp. 168–69; Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 108–10, pp. 117–22.

[305] Mohamad, "Pelajar Melayu," pp. 167–68.

[306] Muhammad, *Mahasiswa Menggugat*, pp. 110–12; and Tham, "Malaysian Education," p. 334.

[307] Salleh Hj. Yusof, "'Situasi baru telah bermula,'" *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 18, 1971, p. 15.

UM administration to require science students (who were mostly Chinese) to pass a Malay-language examination not simply before graduation, but in their first year of study.[308] Already, all students now had to pass the same Malay-language exam to proceed to the upper secondary level. In 1972 alone, over fourteen thousand candidates (overwhelmingly non-Malay) failed.[309] Bitter at these sudden changes, science students boycotted classes, to no avail. In fact, the science faculty was among the last to comply fully with the language policy, but it did so mainly by helping *bumiputera* advance, as by offering remedial "zero year" courses or allowing students who failed a science class to substitute a language exam.[310] Regardless, PBMUM and PMIUM continued for some time to complain of UMSU's and the administration's inadequate embrace of the Malay language.[311]

The shift in language was significant not only in defusing the criticisms of a newly restive mass in the short term, but in restructuring race and class over the long term. Education policies up until then had fostered both cultural differentiation via vernacular education streams and status differentiation, with English-language education for elites and Malay for the masses, even as access to English-medium education, and the instrumental benefits it conferred, progressively widened.[312] The use of English had been sustained not to create a distinctive national identity (indeed, it clouded Malays' attempts to do that), but because it promised to help fulfill modernizing objectives. Moreover, Malaysia's hurried and politically fraught shift from English to Malay in higher education was hardly unusual. Surveying the region of Southeast Asia, Thomas Silcock suggests, "Nowhere was a consistent language policy worked out in advance and then implemented stage by stage. Nor could this be expected ... Political demands conflict with long-run educational needs; solutions are reached by compromise among conflicting pressures, not worked out with long-range planning."[313] The change in Malaysia signaled a shift in priorities, from shallow integration to assimilation under a specifically Malay norm.

That goal proved elusive, especially on campus. Most indicative of the extent of cleavage was the students' *de facto* bifurcation into two unions. Even more than before, Malay students shunned the noncommunal UMSU for PBMUM as "a Malay society representing Malay interests which it regards as national interests." In representing "what it calls the goals and hopes of the Malay masses," PBMUM did "not regard itself as racialist but as the guardian of truly national aspirations."[314] Other campus societies picked sides. In June 1973, for instance, members of the Non-Hostelites Organisation, the largely non-Malay Engineering Society, and the Chinese and Tamil language societies marched on campus to protest Malay domination of an UMSU-organized seminar on national culture. A PBMUM counter-rally two days later, followed by continuing threats and tirades, condemned non-Malays as "traitors" and "anti-national elements" who should be killed or shipped "back to China and India."[315]

Other events fed the tension. Some were petty: PBMUM forced UMSU to remove Chinese characters from Welfare Week sales coupons, for instance. Others were more serious, as when Ungku Aziz ignored cross-racial student support for the sitting master of the Fifth College in the early 1970s and decided to appoint a Malay. The man he chose, Raja Mokhtaruddin, considered a "Muslim and Malay fanatic," had been arrested during the May 1969 riots for trying to instigate violence on campus. Among his first acts as master were the banning of bare legs above the knee for women, the banning of movies with a sexual bent, of alcoholic drinks, couples' courting, and visits by women or men to each other's sections. When a group of students complained to the vice chancellor of racial tensions in the college, PBMUM and PMIUM staged a demonstration to support Raja Mokhtaruddin. Addressing the crowd himself, clad in black and brandishing a sword, Raja Mokhtaruddin admonished non-Malays never to disrespect Muslim tradition and denounced the Malays in the Socialist Club as atheists and traitors to their race. The episode helped to solidify the rift between PBMUM and UMSU, even though half UMSU's leaders were Malay.[316]

Underlying this tension were fundamental differences in PBMUM and UMSU's constituencies, histories, primary objectives, and ideologies; these came to the fore when PBMUM shifted toward engagement in national politics in the late 1960s, formerly UMSU's exclusive sphere. The confrontation began with the *Oh! Awangku Sayang* case in 1965, when PBMUM claimed to speak for all students in requesting the government to withdraw the drama (see chapter 3). PBMUM's increasing cachet and reputation[317] exacerbated matters, especially when PBMUM retracted support from UMSU's 1966 Autonomy Day and rejected UMSU's incrementalism on language policy. The 1969 elections, Abdul Rahman Yacub's resignation the next year, and even the predominantly Malay June 1971 protests against the Thai government stoked the ire. By 1973, though, as new leaders in both organizations converged toward the PBMUM's goals, mutual accommodation became more possible.[318]

Behind this organizational split were a deeply pervasive racial consciousness and political alienation that had developed since 1969. A 1972–73 survey of student attitudes at UM found Malay students in particular to be strongly communal. Non-Malay students were more keen to integrate or assimilate to safeguard their rights and opportunities, but felt excluded from the Malay-dominated regime. Indeed, what marked Malay students was the relative insignificance of all variables *except* race in shaping their political, social, and economic attitudes, including a "definite lack of tolerance for the non-Malays and their welfare" and a lack of interest in compromise. Malay students were politically optimistic, non-Malays pessimistic, but

[308] Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," pp. 199–200; and Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," p. 3.

[309] Raghavan, "Political Attitudes of Students," pp. 154–55.

[310] Interview with Koh Swe Yong, March 29, 2006; ibid., pp. 155–57.

[311] "PBMUM dan PMIUM Adakan Demonstrasi," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 26, 1973, p. 1; Abdul Jalil Ishak, "Students Demonstrate before V.C." *Mahasiswa Negara*, September 6, 1971, p. 1.

[312] Tham, "Malaysian Education," pp. 323–24.

[313] T. H. Silcock, *Southeast Asian University: A Comparative Account of Some Development Problems* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1964), pp. 24–25. For instance, Burma similarly switched abruptly from English to Burmese in the 1960s, not least to suppress student protest. However well justified this initiative might have been in nationalist terms, the standard of education there declined precipitously.

[314] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 50.

[315] Raghavan, "Political Attitudes of Students," pp. 179–81.

[316] Ibid., pp. 181–83, 436.

[317] For instance, Nawi Jusoh, "PBMUM Hari Ini," *Mahasiswa Negara*, October 18, 1971, pp. 2, 18.

[318] Mohammed Abu Bakar, "A Case of Conflicting Idealisms?," *Varsiti '73* (1973; UMSU's annual student magazine): 47–51.

both felt democracy had declined after 1969.[319] Yet university students remained the primary candidates to fill positions as the nation's future leaders, leaving the prospect of Malaysian racial unity ever more dubious.[320]

DAKWAH

As the struggle over language wound down, communalism on campus took a new form. The early 1970s saw the start of a sustained upsurge in *dakwah* activism among students (discussed in more detail in the next chapter). Derived from an Arabic term meaning to call or invite, and referring initially to efforts to propagate Islam, *dakwah* in Malaysia evolved by the 1970s into "a catchword, a term for categorizing and stereotyping aspects of behaviour, new dress conventions and a range of organizational activities" associated with Islam.[321]

By the end of the 1970s, *dakwah* had transformed the campuses, spurred by factors ranging from PAS's joining the government in 1973 (leaving a void to be filled by anti-establishment groups), to the decimation of the student Left, to underlying class contradictions and racialism.[322] The movement's first stirrings in the late 1960s, however, emerged from efforts to reconcile the struggle for socioeconomic justice with Islamic ideals and to meld Malay nationalist and Islamist paradigms. Anwar Ibrahim, in particular, recommended that Malay students focus less on the hereafter and suggested ways to reconcile worldly needs, modernity, and Islam,[323] and the sympathetic dean of the arts faculty, Syed Naguib al-Attas, helped further the students' understanding of Islam as a way of life.[324] The increasing number of Malays studying overseas contributed, too: based usually in Britain, Australia, and North America, they were exposed both to Western lifestyles and to fellow students from other Muslim countries.[325]

The ranks and achievements of *dakwah* activists swelled rapidly. At UM, starting with issues of morality, they secured bans on ragging,[326] balls, and Halloween parties

[319] Raghavan, "Political Attitudes of Students," pp. 400–409.

[320] Ibid., pp. 410–11; also Tajuddin Abdul Rahman, "Kommunalisma Dalam Politik Pelajar (Satu Kajian Di-Universiti Malaya)" (BEc honors thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1971).

[321] M. L. Lyon, "The Dakwah Movement in Malaysia," *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 13,2 (1979): 35–37. Interestingly, at much the same time, waves of Malay schoolchildren—the girls inspired by mythic heroine Zahura, a "young peasant girl who took up arms to fight for the cause of the Malayan proletariat"—were purportedly going "on strike against the narrow religious education to which they are fascistically being subjected" (in the perhaps overwrought language of MASS Movement). "Militant Action by Malay School Girls Catches the Reactionaries Gasping!" *New Malayan Youth* 1,7 (July 1972): 37–38.

[322] Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," p. 85; Clive S. Kessler, "Malaysia: Islamic Revivalism and Political Disaffection in a Divided Society," *Southeast Asia Chronicle* 75 (1980): 3; Lyon, "The Dakwah Movement in Malaysia," pp. 40–42.

[323] Interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006.

[324] Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 11–13.

[325] Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change," p. 411. For instance, by 1971, London had a Malaysian Islamic Study Group, affiliated with the Arab and South Asian-dominated Federation of Students of Islamic Societies (FOSIS). See Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 26–28.

[326] Ragging, it seemed, would not die—although it adopted such novel forms as a mandatory freshman anti-UUCA Solidarity March in the hot sun ("Does UMSU Rag Too?" *Mahasiswa Negara*, May 29, 1972, p. 1). When three raggers were suspended from their residential college in 1973, not only did five hundred residents demonstrate outside the vice chancellor's office in

by 1972, then reshaped the orientation week, for instance, by mandating Malay students' attendance at dawn prayers and proper attire.[327] Meanwhile, the head of UKM's student union, Abd. Halim Arshat, proclaimed in 1973 that the union "accepts Islam as the basis and objective of its struggle," and as the only way to protect society.[328] Similarly, challenging ITM's reputation as socially oriented and morally lax, its student union started in the early 1970s to promote Islamic values and engagement. President Ibrahim Ali claims he even carried out room checks, disciplining "any student involved in practising Western culture or sinful behaviour."[329] Such policing of Malay students' behavior only accented the ethnic divide.

University administrators sought to stem the rising communal tide. UM's Ungku Aziz announced in 1971 that all meals in the residential colleges would thenceforth be "neutral" (pork-free), to allow Muslims and non-Muslims to dine together. Chinese students complained of this infringement on their culinary rights (especially since pork dishes had been among the better offerings), and even supporters acknowledged that merely establishing a common cuisine would not mandate close interaction. At the same time, the vice chancellor also announced that all students should be able to understand the *Rukunegara* (Malaysia's new national ideology, promulgated in 1970 to enhance national unity); sing the national anthem; and perform one local dance. To safeguard local culture, he cautioned, too, that university authorities would take strong action against "extreme hippieism" like pot smoking—part of a broader strategy to prevent countercultural infiltration.[330] (The Immigration Department, for example, issued a directive on how to spot hippies, following a Home Ministry ban on their entry as of September 1972. Officials were to look out for people with long, dirty, unkempt hair and beards, shabby dress, and an "awful body odour." The Malaysian Youth Council and UMSU welcomed the measures.[331]) Far more pervasive and enduring than the vice chancellor's new rules, however, were the UUCA mandates passed by parliament that same year, and a host of auxiliary enactments.

MEANWHILE, IN SINGAPORE ...

The crackdown in 1974—and the upsurge to which it responded—extended to Singapore. The University of Singapore had changed significantly by then. Setting a new tone was the PAP's Toh Chin Chye, vice chancellor from 1968 to 1975. A micromanaging party loyalist, Toh restructured SU to create a more efficient, effective bureaucratic apparatus, oriented toward facilitating Singapore's economic

protest, but two of the perpetrators were still elected college officers, forming an unusual council "in exile." See "Ragging Kotor: 3 'Sick' Disingkir," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 26, 1973, p. 1; "Suspended Student Elected College President," *Mahasiswa Negara*, July 16, 1973, p. 17; "Students at the University of Malaya Wage Resolute Anti-Fascist Struggle!," *New Malayan Youth* 2, 7–8 (July–August 1973): 12; and *Malay Mail*, June 16, 21, and 23, 1973.

[327] Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 14–15.

[328] "Islam: Dasar dan Matlamat Perjuangan," *Gemasiswa*, October 12, 1973, p. 1.

[329] Zainal Epi, *Ibrahim Ali: Crossing the Waves* (Johor Bahru: Trade and Industry Media, 2000), pp. 55–56.

[330] "Neutral Meals," *Mahasiswa Negara*, June 7, 1971, p. 8; *Straits Times*, May 25, 1971.

[331] *Straits Times*, August 26, 1972.

progress.[332] Students and staff alike worried that the autocratic Toh would "depoliticise not only the university but also Singapore." They protested such changes as the vice chancellor's appointment of deans (previously elected by the academic staff), which changed the direction of accountability.[333] From the start of his term, Toh worked with Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, a master of intimidation, to prevent staff and students, particularly in the social sciences, from fomenting trouble of the kind that was happening overseas. For instance, the SU Staff Union, launched in 1971 on the advice of the National Trade Unions Council to replace existing local and expatriate staff associations and to boost the union members' negotiating power and unity, was "a nuisance to the University administration," according to Toh. The union's president and some members were then Malaysian; Toh denied their right to dictate to the Singapore government—signaling that Malaysian students and staff would no longer be treated equally at SU. (Partly as a result of these changes, Malaysian enrollments dwindled.) The union ultimately opted to dissolve when Lee announced SU and Nantah's merger in NUS under the vice chancellorship of likeminded Tony Tan, who similarly brooked no trouble from staff.[334] Toh "tamed the student unions," too,[335] according to one scholar, even as concerned students continued to press for academic autonomy.

SU then included a mix of English- and Chinese-educated students, as well as both local and expatriate students and staff. Cross-group mixing helped to feed Singapore's last serious outburst of student protest in 1974. At the time, USSU had been quarrelling over petty matters—enough so that the mudslinging was getting picked up by the press. After trying to raise more significant issues at an USSU general meeting, and after a vote of no confidence in the sitting council, final year architecture student Juliette Chin was nominated to head an interim council.[336] Working together with a classmate, she became the first woman to lead the union. The socially engaged interim council was popular with students, less so with the administration (which, for instance, refused to collect students' union subscription fees).[337]

Chin and Tan Wah Piow then came together to run for and lead the new council in 1974, as secretary-general and president, respectively. Tan "was committed to transform the sterile, apathetic, and ivory-tower conception of University life into something dynamic and socially relevant"—to ensure USSU matured into an "effective democratic forum."[338] Some campaigns focused on the campus; students mobilized against a 20 percent rise in tuition in June, for instance. Others focused on society at large, organizing such events as an Anti-Repression Week and forum on political detention, following the incarceration without trial of thirty-five Singaporeans, also in June. Still other campaigns had an international focus: students studied Japanese regional economic initiatives ahead of Tanaka's visit in January and requested a meeting with him, for example, while the next month a group of students called for dialogue with Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. The latter half of 1974 saw extensive activism, too, at Nantah as well as Singapore Polytechnic and Ngee Ann Technical College (as Ngee Ann College was renamed in 1968). Much of this activity was energized by Tan and Chin. USSU collaborated with the other student unions, for example, in a signature campaign against a bus-fare hike in February, and the union advocated for flood relief for Bangladesh that August. Then Chin joined UM students at Tasek Utara in September, having been "drawn into the thick of it" while home in Johor for a visit.[339] Moreover, USSU pressed students to "go into life" during their vacations, to "[pretend] not to be university students and work in the factories," and then to write about the workers' plight.[340]

It was USSU's engagement with labor that may have sealed its fate. Amidst an international financial downturn, over 14,000 Singapore workers were laid off between February and October 1974. The USSU Council established a Retrenchment Research Centre (RRC) in October, chaired by Tan, to monitor events and provide material assistance. The RRC got off to a strong start, helped by some student leaders' ties with industrial workers. (Certain student activists of the period still went on to trade-union work, such as late 1960s graduate Chandra Muzaffar, who became an advisor to several unions in Penang in the early 1970s.[341]) USSU made its conference facilities available for meetings, allowing workers from different factories to meet (and to be legitimated by student-union sponsorship). The RRC came to pose a strategic, if indirect, challenge to the National Trade Unions Congress. When Tan was eventually arrested in late 1974, he blamed mainstream union leaders, alleging a "frame-up."[342] SU's Socialist Club, too, believed that Tan's arrest was aimed specifically at sabotaging worker–student unity.[343]

Leading to the point of Tan's arrest, Foreign Minister Rajaratnam accused student leaders of being in the service of the KGB or CIA; he made these accusations as Singapore's own Special Branch grew increasingly overt, and the press increasingly chary. Raids by narcotics squads, threats of withdrawn scholarships, and bribes tempting students to work as government agents signaled a looming showdown. It began with Tan, who was charged on November 1 with participating in a riot two days earlier at the Pioneer Industries Employees' Union—charges he denied. USSU campaigned intensely, leafleting locally and appealing abroad, and the four Singapore student unions issued a joint statement calling for the release of Tan and two factory workers arrested with him. Sympathy demonstrations were held in Kuala Lumpur, London, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand. Neither Toh Chin

332 Lam Peng Er, "The Organisational Utility Men: Toh Chin Chye and Lim Kim San," in *Lee's Lieutenants: Singapore's Old Guard*, ed. Lam Peng Er and Kevin Y. L. Tan (St. Leonard's, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p. 10.

333 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

334 Teng Siao See, "The World of the English-Educated in the 1960s and 1970s: An Interview with Koh Tai Ann," *Tangent* 6 (2003): 278–79, 288.

335 Lam, "The Organisational Utility Men," p. 11.

336 In 1971, their professors failed most of the Chinese-educated students in SU's small, close-knit new architecture program. Nearly all the class joined a semester-long academic boycott in their classmates' defense, backing off only after they were threatened by Vice Chancellor Toh. A high proportion became active in USSU. Interview with Juliette Chin, December 23, 2006.

337 Ibid.

338 Tan Wah Piow, *Let the People Judge: Confessions of the Most Wanted Person in Singapore* (Petaling Jaya: INSAN, 1987), pp. 86–89.

339 Interview with Juliette Chin, December 23, 2006; Huang Jianli, "Positioning the Student Political Activism of Singapore: Articulation, Contestation and Omission," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7,3 (2006): 408.

340 Teng, "The World of the English-Educated," p. 276; Tan, *Let the People Judge*, pp. 80, 86–89.

341 Interview with Chandra Muzaffar, February 7, 2006.

342 Tan, *Let the People Judge*, pp. 83–85.

343 *Sunday Times*, November 10, 1974.

Chye nor any other government leader would intervene, however, and local media avoided covering the protests. Still, the pressure, plus Tan's threat of a hunger strike, were enough to get the three released on bail. Hundreds of students and workers welcomed them upon release.[344] Conscripted immediately into the army and worried for his safety, Tan Wah Piow fled, seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom.[345]

On the same December morning as Tan's trial, December 11, 1974, authorities arrested and deported Juliette Chin and four other key student leaders (all Malaysian). Handed over to authorities in Johor Bahru, Chin was detained without trial for one year in Malaysia. At SU, at least two thousand students, undeterred, staged a rally in support of their detained peers, and 60 percent of the student body joined a class boycott.[346] The council that took over supported both the detained students and continued social engagement, albeit with a less confrontational line.[347] Ironically, among PAP stalwarts today are several who claim to have been stirred initially by their activism alongside or in support of Tan Wah Piow, either in Singapore (this was true of Balaji Sadasivan, for instance) or the United Kingdom (Tharman Shanmugaratnam was also inspired by Tan).[348] Yet such engagement was not to be repeated. Like Malaysia, Singapore pressed through restrictive legislation in the mid-1970s and restructured the university and its campus. After sustained, but ineffective, pressure from the minister of education for greater collaboration between Nantah and SU, the former was dissolved in 1980 and merged with SU in the National University of Singapore (NUS). The new NUS campus at Kent Ridge, inaugurated in the 1980s, had no central meeting place and dispersed faculties and residence halls—a design calculated to maintain the peace.

Advent of a New Order

> One cannot put into a pot a litre of social justice, a chunk of intellectual freedom, a dash of appreciation of technical efficiency, a sprinkling of ethnic norms of conduct in public and private affairs, and heat the pot with the excitement of discovery—and not expect the whole thing to seethe and boil over.[349]

By 1970, 60 percent of Malaysia's population was under age twenty-one, with undergraduates the "most articulate" segment.[350] Students took advantage of the chance, less available to other youths, to scrutinize society and their own place in it. Not only were they part of a discernible "academic community," but they shared a "common identity of students as a social group which transcends national boundaries."[351] National leaders, too, defined students explicitly as a special class—one meriting scrutiny and constraints as the consolidating state grew less patient with their feedback. Although students themselves sustained the moralistic arguments offered since the nationalist period, they found sparse reinforcement in the suddenly chilly political climate post-1969. And after 1974, not only were undergraduates seldom invoked as future political leaders with opinions worth hearing, but they were more often dismissed as a suspect category, politically immature and out to cause trouble.

Even at its apex, student activism in Malaysia had serious weaknesses. Most significant among these—both specific to Malaysia and endemic to student organizations internationally—were ethnic tensions and monoracial orientations, limited close or sustained contact with the masses, a lack of continuity or ideological coherence in organizations and leadership, a reactive issue-orientation and short-term perspective, and relatively meager support from academics and other intellectuals who could have provided analytical depth.[352] What distinguished students from other citizens through at least the early 1970s also kept them apart: the English language, plus the sense of superiority and Western ways of thinking that English-medium education encouraged, alienated students from the communities they were preparing to serve.[353] Indeed, despite the aspiration of so many students to interact "with the people," the students' rhetoric tended toward snobbery, stressing that, as privileged future elites, they should get to know the masses and their problems, then apply their special insight to help make things right. The cover cartoon of the inaugural (and, it seems, only) issue of the USM student union's *Insaf* illustrates this tension. Captioned "Academic Factory," the image shows the entry to a university. Students punch in at the gate, then churn through, amid bookworms, crumbling facilities, and groveling "freshies." Sporting mortarboards and clutching diplomas, they are carted off on a conveyor belt after convocation, wind-up keys in their backs. Students might empathize with workers, in other words, but still felt their own experience should be rather different.

At the same time, student activism was more coherent and idealistic at this point, the late 1960s and early 1970s, than at any time since—and those involved arguably really did not understand or anticipate the extent to which their input was no longer welcomed until too late. Assuming they could expect the same sort of irked but basically respectful response as they had received in the recent past, critical students were greatly surprised when the government and university administrations began to crack down. In time, they saw their callous treatment to be a harbinger of a new, more irritable regime, mandating that students take a new approach in years to come.

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[344] Tan, *Let the People Judge*, pp. 79–81.

[345] His name was invoked again in 1987 as the proposed culprit behind a "Marxist conspiracy." Tan denied having swayed or manipulated the sixteen later detainees, even if he interacted with them in the United Kingdom. Ibid., pp. 7–8, 10–11; Huang, "Positioning Student Political Activism," p. 409.

[346] Tan, *Let the People Judge*, pp. 86–89; Lam, "The Organisational Utility Men," pp. 11–12.

[347] Interview with Juliette Chin, December 23, 2006.

[348] Huang, "Positioning Student Political Activism," p. 410.

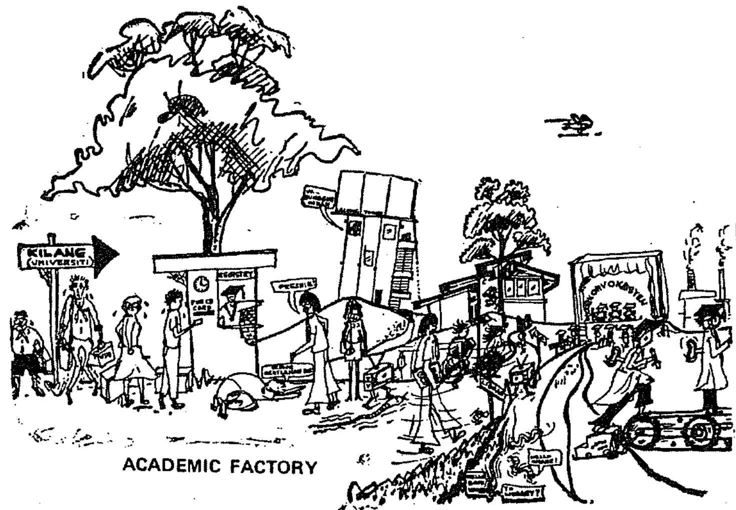
[349] Dalupan, "Students and Politics," p. 133.

[350] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 117.

[351] Ibid., p. 118.

[352] Jomo K. S., Hassan Abdul Karim, and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, "Malaysia," in *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*, ed. Philip G. Altbach (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1989), p. 155; Hassan, "The Student Movement in Malaysia," pp. 16–17.

[353] "Graduates Must Serve Their Own Community," *Malay Mail*, October 23, 1968.



Front cover of the first issue of *Insaf*, November–December 1974

As a Filipino contemporary described, traditionally, "When the dissenters are students," officials "are apt to respond with mere annoyance, in the smug belief that the young express nothing more than disrespect for authority and age." By the late 1960s, he argued, attitudes were changing: authorities were "learning to view student activism as occurring within a larger—and truly legitimate—context."[354] This perspective offers leverage when we seek to understand events of the early 1970s: Malaysian students were finally accepted as truly akin to other protesters. Inasmuch as the issues with which they were engaging were hardly confined to students, but calculated to appeal to, stir up, and dangerously empower non-student masses, students could no longer claim or enjoy sacrosanct space or privileges to protest. Indeed, Malaysian student activists themselves asserted by the late 1960s that a student "enjoys the same rights and restrictions as any other member of the public and his behaviour should never be based on the belief that he is entitled by his status to any additional license."[355] Even so, for perhaps the last time, what the students did made front-page news, and undergraduates still enjoyed the authority of being better-educated than many national leaders.[356]

In this period, Malay undergraduates especially came into their own, not as an aloof elite, but as part and parcel of the Malay masses whose struggles they espoused. Most importantly, Malay students claimed the campus as important territory in the battle to redefine the nation as *Malay*. The Majid commission described the university as:

[354] Dalupan, "Students and Politics," p. 131.

[355] "The Rights and Responsibility of Students," *Varsity '69*: 10.

[356] Interview with Mohamad Abu Bakar, November 30, 2004.

> a microcosm of the society as a whole ... The campus reflects the conditions outside, indeed in a more acute form by virtue of the fact that undergraduates tend to be idealistic, impetuous, more aware and more insistent ... [T]he solution to the problem of race relations in the campus is to be found in the solution of the problem of race relations in the society as a whole, towards which objective the University itself has of course an important role to play.[357]

The "mutual indifference" and incomprehension of so many students fostered hostile polarization among students, belying apparent cordiality and "encouragingly non-racial" discourse.[358] That duality only intensified over time, percolating through society as on campus.

Yet what was significant to this new Malay upsurge was not just race, but class. On the one hand, the poor and working class students who began flocking to campus in the late 1960s could claim real affinity with the masses they championed, and had a personal stake in righting perceived injustices. On the other hand, these students were newly vulnerable. Social and economic pressures took on new weight, debilitating mobilization. By 1972, graduate unemployment was already making the news, as at least four hundred members of the previous UM cohort continued to search for jobs.[359] One of that year's graduates explained, "The competition for jobs is so great today that students cannot afford to slacken in their academic work or get a slur on their name by being associated with 'anti-establishment' activities."[360] At least some students did pay a price for their activism. For instance, Syed Hamid Ali's record not only kept him from securing a Japanese government scholarship to study in Tokyo (this being the time of the Zengakuren), but the Ministry of Education declined the services he was obliged to offer in exchange for his teaching bursary. Unemployed, he raised havoc, writing articles, distributing fliers, and serving as executive secretary to a union and as leader of PRM. When the government seized his passport as he was about to depart for Australia to study in 1975, he fled to the jungle.[361] Few students were willing to pay such a price.

Changes in campus ecology to some extent reflected this shifting class composition, with further implications for mobilization. The majority of students by the late 1960s lived off-campus, whether for lack of space in hostels or to cut expenses; the lack of decent, affordable housing off campus "reached unmanageable proportions," although UMSU did what it could to help.[362] The Majid Committee confirmed previous findings: that hostel residents were "in a better position than non-hostelites to take part in the activities of societies." A greater proportion of Malays than non-Malays lived off-campus, leaving the former "somewhat handicapped in vying for leadership" of student societies. (It should be noted that relatively few Malay students participated even in the Non-Hostelites Organisation, suggesting that the PBMUM discouraged Malay students from channeling their

[357] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 29.

[358] Ibid., pp. 29–31.

[359] *Straits Times*, May 30, 1972.

[360] Velayudhan, "The Universities and University Colleges Act," p. 66.

[361] Interview with Syed Hamid Ali, July 26, 2006.

[362] Balakrishnan, "Student Government and Welfare," p. 61.

energies and grievances through UMSU-affiliated organizations.[363]) Still, it was easier for hostelites to attend meetings of student societies, and both friendships and ideological commitments thrived in hostel rooms. Student leaders Hishamuddin Rais, Adi Satria, and Khoo Soo Wan, for instance, met as freshmen in the Fifth College,[364] helped shepherd UMSU through its most flamboyant period, then remained lifelong friends. Still, the structure of the campus through the early 1970s offered opportunities even for those who lived elsewhere. The Speaker's Corner, Union House, and DTC were readily available—and the new universities that had sprung up nearby were especial boons. While still preeminent, UM was no longer isolated, and could readily join forces with students at Malay-dominated ITM and UKM (campuses soon banished to the suburbs, preventing further such intermingling), as well as liaising actively and regularly with counterparts in Penang and Singapore.

The long-term legacy of this generation of students left post-1974 generations conflicted: "On one hand, in awe of them, on the other, resentful that their exuberance had effectively clipped *our* wings, *our* voices."[365] At the same time, the crackdown, and the state's firm recourse to a strategy of intellectual containment, brought as much innovation as obedience. Most obviously, Islamist activism came to fill the void, offering a "safe avenue through which students could air their grievances, channel their energies, fulfill a need to serve society and find relief from the pressures of university life and urban living."[366] What manifested as racialized struggles over language and class through the early 1970s transformed into debates concerning the symbols and praxis of religious observance by the end of the decade.

Ironically, their experience as student activists primed many of the leading dissidents of the time for politics, and they participated, more often than not, on the side of the very government they had opposed. Anwar Ibrahim's rise within UMNO (discussed further in chapter 5) is best-known, but Kamarazaman Yacob, Ibrahim Ali, and others also found successful careers in UMNO once the sting of detention had subsided and after some shifting from party to party. Indeed, some students' racialized posturing in PBMUM might have helped them attract government jobs after graduation.[367] Overseas Malaysian student associations offered similar opportunities; this was true, for example, of the Malaysian student networks of the United Kingdom, which remained an important conduit into positions in UMNO. Members of the Socialist Club tended toward PRM, not least since some had already been involved in the PRM as undergraduates.[368] Such direct links, the student organizations themselves, and mere open political discourse all dwindled or disappeared after 1974, as intellectual containment—a systematic program of delegitimation and suppression—took hold, with potentially dire consequences for the caliber and training of political leaders to come. We turn next to this new phase,

[363] Abdul Majid, *Report*, p. 17.

[364] Stothard, "Hishamuddin Rais," p. 30.

[365] Ibid., p. 29.

[366] Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, p. 23.

[367] Interview with Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, December 8, 2003; interview with Ibrahim Ali, March 21, 2006; and interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006.

[368] Interview with Hishamuddin Rais, March 30, 2006.

characterized by a more subdued campus, marked by new channels and alignments, against a far more bridled and less responsive sociopolitical order.

CHAPTER FIVE

CURBING POLITICS AND INTELLECTUALS: 1975–1998

> Our temples were erected yesterday,
> And renovated this morning. We see no
> Virtue in decay. Our schools face the old
> Problem: children. Our scent is chiefly
> Petrol. Our shops sell what we need.[1]

The 1980s and 1990s saw a tumultuous mix of economic growth, social dislocation, and increasingly authoritarian governance across Malaysia. Post-1969 legislation quelled most protest against the BN (Barisan Nasional, National Front), which was more inclusive, but also more dominant, than the Alliance it replaced. Intellectual containment was part of that program, as the regime sought to insulate itself from disruptive critiques. Mahathir Mohamad's accession to the premiership in 1981 ratcheted up the pace of change as he pushed the executive to the forefront and pressed a far-reaching developmentalist agenda. Structurally, the programs of Malaysia's New Economic Policy, launched under Tun Razak's leadership, continued through successor initiatives, with marginal changes. Mahathir's "Vision 2020" plan, introduced in 1991, aimed to bring Malaysia to fully developed status in thirty years, an effort requiring not just consistently strong growth, but also social cohesion, political stability, and national pride—all in Malaysia's "own mould."[2] The state continued programmatically to pursue targets for poverty reduction, industrialization, and wealth redistribution, with ancillary goals geared toward improving education, housing, basic infrastructure, and other aspects of human development. Malaysia rapidly became a more urban, middle-class society than it had been, but one in which, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the fortunes of that new middle class—especially of its *bumiputera* members—were tethered closely to the state's activities. Also, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, civil society gained vibrancy as economic growth surged and the middle class swelled, but civil society remained circumscribed by the strength of the state. The combination of a powerful and proactive state, rapid economic growth, and burgeoning civil society formed the backdrop for a new, substantially redirected, and politically subdued phase of student activism.

Throughout Malaysia, tertiary education continued to swell. Local university enrollment more than quadrupled by 1985 to nearly 38,000 from around 8,500

[1] Extract from "Come to Sunny S[ingapore]," in D. J. Enright, *Unlawful Assembly* (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 20.

[2] Mahathir Mohamad, *Vision 2020* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Strategic and International Studies for Malaysian Business Council, [1991]), p. 2.

students in 1970, with over 17,000 more (mostly *bumiputera*) studying overseas with government support.[3] State-funded scholarships, grants, and subsidized loans increased apace. And even apart from still-salient ethnic divisions, universities grew less homogeneous: entering students differed increasingly in their family background, training, motivation, and capabilities. In a 1977 survey, the majority of undergraduates reported being from working-class backgrounds, and nearly a third were the children of farmers, fishermen, and unskilled laborers. Only 7 percent of their fathers were university-educated; nearly half their mothers had no formal education at all.[4] Yet the democratization of higher education exacerbated and complicated class and ethnic cleavages. Many students from Anglophone or urban backgrounds, in particular, regardless of ethnicity, found on campus their worst experience yet of racial polarization. By the early 1980s, some students at UKM denied having had a single friend from another community in four years there.[5]

Meanwhile, protest tapered off. The years 1975 and 1976 saw a few demonstrations, mostly over students' rights and the newly reinforced UUCA (Universities and University Colleges Act). Students pelted FRU guards in March 1975, for example, with bottles, stones, and ball bearings at ongoing trials of dozens of students, most acquitted, over the Baling protests of the previous year.[6] And pressure from UM's new Students' Representative Council (SRC) helped secure some concessions, including Anwar Ibrahim's being allowed back on campus.[7] Students took SRC elections more seriously after that,[8] but protested even less, and then largely on campus-specific issues.[9] Issues flared up periodically, but infrequently and with limited scope.

The UUCA helped press this trend of passivity and inaction, but it was not completely to blame: intellectual containment extended beyond the law. New public discourse that conceptualized students as inherently gullible sapped students' motivation. Grim warnings cautioned against manipulation: "The enemies of the country will always look for opportunities to weaken us and the student community will always be their main target," ranted Information Minister Mohamed Rahmat, for instance, pinning the demonstrations of the early 1970s on "foreign elements."[10] Officials still reassured students that they could safely critique policies, but only in ways both constructive and independently conceived.[11] Soul-searching continued among students and within the larger society on the role of universities and the place

[3] Viswanathan Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality, and Higher Education in Peninsular Malaysia: The Sociological Implications*, Working Paper 78 (Singapore: Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 1987), pp. 18, 21.

[4] T. Marimuthu, "Students' Evaluation of Their University Experience," *RIHED News* 4,2 (May–August, 1977): 4–5.

[5] Sulochini Nair, "Disturbing Trend," *New Sunday Times*, August 5, 1984.

[6] *New Straits Times*, March 20, April 15, and May 23 and 25, 1975.

[7] *New Straits Times*, October 16, 1976; *Malay Mail*, January 20, 1977.

[8] *New Straits Times*, July 23, 1977, and July 25, 1978.

[9] For a stark accounting, see Junaidi Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa, Politik, Dan Undang-Undang* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993), pp. 113–17.

[10] "Beware the Enemies, Students Told," *New Straits Times*, June 19, 1987.

[11] For instance, *New Straits Times*, May 1, 1984.

of undergraduates.[12] But the combination of legal strictures and intellectual containment, which delegitimated and deprecated student activism, thwarted students' confidence and deterred them from mobilizing for collective action.

To understand the framework in which students now found themselves, let us look at the rapidly transforming ecology of higher education as a whole. Students did still mobilize in this period, but less often *as* students or with a sense that students merited special attention. Rather, student activists became more like any other type of activist in political and civil society, marked by partisanship, but also ready to explore new ways of making their mark. And students did still leave a mark, most clearly as the vanguard of an activist strand of religious revival.

Institutional Developments

The position of universities themselves, not just the students within, shifted as the BN solidified its developmentalist and redistributive regime. By the mid-1970s, Malaysian universities had clear, if elusive, official goals, as pressed by government planners. Most important were to further national unity, promote research and develop a skilled workforce, and help redress imbalances across racial, income, and regional groups. Those ends could be contradictory, given the uneasy blend of political and educational considerations, but the balance tipped decisively from nation-building to more practical, instrumental ends by the 1980s.[13]

The Higher Education Planning Committee of 1962–67 (succeeded by a more narrowly bounded Higher Education Advisory Council in 1972), Malaysia's first serious attempt at long-range planning for higher education, had already promoted a rapid increase in the number of universities and a focus on scientific and technical fields (see chapter 4). A 1984 strategic plan continued in this bent, prioritizing practical (*gunaan*) over pure or academic (*tulen*) sciences and arts fields. Such a slant, argued UKM lecturer Rustam Sani, rendered university education "'slave' to the prevailing needs and demands of industry and business," neglecting such core capacities as critical, creative thinking and effective communication.[14] Yet this focus on "practical" courses remained. The Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–95) urged universities to align their activities with research and manpower needs for industrialization. To churn out graduates faster, the government recommended, too, reducing the undergraduate course from four years to three and aspired (unsuccessfully) to reverse the 60:40 ratio of arts to science students. The subsequent Seventh Malaysia Plan gave still greater emphasis to research in the sciences and technology.[15] By the late 1990s, the head of the UKM staff association, Wan Mokhtar Yusoff, estimated that 70 percent of the university's offerings were "utilitarian"—

[12] For example, Md. Ibrahim, "Mampukah Mahasiswa Kini Menjadi Agen Perubahan Masyarakat," *Aspirasi* (PMUKM) 9 (1984–85): 110–13; and, in that same issue, Kamsani b. Mahful, "Mahasiswa dalam Melihat Masalah Masyarakat dan Penyelesaiannya," pp. 120–22.

[13] Sharom Ahmat, "Nation Building and the University in Developing Countries: The Case of Malaysia," *Higher Education* 9,6 (November 1980): 724–25, 736.

[14] Rustam A. Sani, "Bagaimana Seharusnya Pendidikan Universiti," *Dewan Masyarakat* 27,11 (November 1989): 17.

[15] Sharom, "Nation Building and the University," p. 727; Thong Lay Kim, "Malaysian Universities at Crossroads? A Case-Study of Malaysian Academics' Perceptions," in *Educational Challenges in Malaysia: Advances and Prospects*, ed. Zaniah Marshallsay (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 1997), pp. 154–55.

more attuned to producing "factory workers" than "philosophers and thinkers." Even UM deputy vice chancellor Osman Bakar agreed, urging universities to think beyond education's short-term commercial value.[16]

In the meantime, higher education itself gained dramatic new commercial potential. In 1995, 11 percent of secondary-school graduates pursued higher education, about half in public universities, 35 percent in local private colleges (joined by 40,000 foreign students), and 15 percent overseas.[17] Five bills enacted in 1996 focused on meeting human resource needs for development while reducing the government's financial burden, stemming foreign exchange outflows, boosting science and technology, and reaching a target of enrolling 40 percent of secondary-school graduates in higher education by 2020.[18] The bills included the Private Higher Education Institutions Act, National Council on Higher Education Act, National Accreditation Board Act, National Higher Education Fund Board Act, and a new Education Act, accompanied by amendments to the UUCA.

The Private Higher Education Institutions Act, which blended state control and a neoliberal market model, was most immediately transformative. The law empowered the private sector to establish degree-granting universities (beyond existing non-degree colleges), subject to a degree of ministerial oversight. Separate acts established a new National Council on Higher Education to coordinate higher education policies and a National Accreditation Board to ensure maintenance of adequate standards in coursework, academic staff, and facilities in these new facilities. The revised Education Act reaffirmed the role of the national language, requiring study in Malay and a common curriculum across public and private institutions. Finally, the related amendments to the UUCA (discussed further below) allowed public institutions of higher learning to be corporatized, which would transfer decision-making authority from the university council to a board of directors and grant additional administrative and financial autonomy from the state, for instance, to pursue commercial applications for research and in matters of staff recruitment and compensation.[19] The government aimed to reduce its contribution to public university budgets from 90 percent to 70 percent.[20] While many university staff were optimistic about the possibility of reclaiming university autonomy or at least securing a more efficient bureaucracy and competitive compensation, others feared that profit-seeking would displace the spirit of collegiality and truth-seeking inquiry. In fact, full corporatization never really took off, although public universities all sought new sources of funding.[21] Taken together, these policies sped the commodification of university education through the 1990s—a phenomenon common especially to developing countries in need of skilled workers. In such

[16] Bakhari Ariff, "Mengikis Sikap Jumud Masyarakat Universiti," *Berita Harian*, May 24, 1998.

[17] Tan Ai Mei, *Malaysian Private Higher Education: Globalisation, Privatisation, Transformation and Marketplaces* (London: ASEAN Academic Press, 2002), p. 5; Francis Loh, "Crisis in Malaysia's Public Universities?," *Aliran Monthly* 25,10 (2005): 2–10.

[18] Tan, *Malaysian Private Higher Education*, p. 1, Haji Azmi bin Zakaria, "Educational Development and Reformation in the Malaysian Education System: Challenges in the New Millennium," *Journal of Southeast Asian Education* 1,1 (2000): 127.

[19] Azmi, "Educational Development and Reformation," p. 123.

[20] Tan, *Malaysian Private Higher Education*, p. 95.

[21] Wan Manan Wan Muda, personal communication (via email), October 9, 2007; Thong, "Malaysian Universities at Crossroads," pp. 165–66.

contexts, higher education tends to be considered the price paid to secure a decent job rather than merely the means to pursue humanistic aims.[22]

Meanwhile, the discouragement of critical thinking and dissent, deteriorating standards of English, increasing frequency of "diploma disease" (the compulsion to acquire a degree for no better reason than to have a degree), and the ramping up of race-based criteria for both matriculation and staff promotion (discussed below) progressively lowered the intellectual quality and experience of students in local universities. Universities adopted stopgap measures, such as transitional or "matriculation science" programs to help ill-prepared students,[23] yet, overall, students' performance was below standard relative to the past. This decline in academic standards was exacerbated by the flight of many of the brightest students to private or overseas institutions, particularly given the full Malay-language orientation of local public universities and limited opportunities for non-*bumiputera* applicants. Top academics, too, absconded to the private sector (whether to other higher-education opportunities or corporate positions), further sapping the intellectual environment in public universities.[24]

The public sector grew, regardless. By 1999, the ranks of public universities included the five established before 1974—UM, USM, UKM, UPM (renamed Universiti Putra Malaysia in 1997), and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM, as the former Technical College was renamed in 1975)—as well as six new ones: International Islamic University (IIU, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa, 1983),[25] Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM, University of North Malaysia, 1984), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS, 1992), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS, 1994), Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI, formerly Sultan Idris Training College, 1997), and, the largest, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM, formerly Institut Teknologi MARA [Majlis Amanah Rakyat, or Council of Trust for the People], 1999). Six vocationally oriented university colleges were established outside the major cities from the mid-1990s on, as well, together with ten new polytechnics, with plans for more.

Beyond the public institutions, fifteen private universities had been established by 2002, by corporations (Telekom's Multimedia University, oil company Petronas's Universiti Teknologi, electric utility Tenaga's Universiti Tenaga Nasional) and BN parties (Gerakan's Wawasan Open University College; the Malaysian Indian Congress's Asian Institute of Science, Technology and Medicine; and the Malaysian Chinese Association's Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, previously KTAR), or as "branch campuses" of overseas universities (Monash, Curtin, Swineburne, and Nottingham), as well as three medical schools (International Medical University, Penang Medical College, Malacca-Manipal Medical College). Joining these were several degree-granting private university colleges (i.e., specialized rather than comprehensive tertiary institutions) and nearly seven hundred private colleges—up

[22] Ibid., pp. 156–58.

[23] Sharom, "Nation Building and the University," pp. 727–29, 737.

[24] Interview with E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003, Kuala Lumpur; Thong, "Malaysian Universities at Crossroads," pp. 160–61.

[25] Unlike other Malaysian universities, IIU was established with sponsorship (and representation on its board of governors) from eight governments and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It was the world's first English-medium Islamic university, with instruction also in Arabic.

from about two hundred in the early 1990s. Around six hundred other colleges offered either "matriculation courses" to prepare students for university or diploma courses in such fields as English, information technology, and business. More than fifteen hundred institutions were established in 1997 alone, most of them for-profit, from small-scale computer and language centers to flexible "twinning" programs with universities overseas. With those changes in place, university enrollment doubled, from 58,286 in 1990 to 116,376 in 1997.[26] That expansion had an almost immediate impact of curbing currency outflows from students who would otherwise study overseas and on the supply of semi-professional workers,[27] but also on graduates' unemployment, which increased steadily.

The Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996–2000) boosted allocations to fund yet further expansion, still targeting scientific, technical, and business-related fields. Public funds for overseas study were redirected primarily to the postgraduate level, largely in "practical" fields. To compensate, the education ministry approved "3+0" programs, through which undergraduates earned foreign degrees by studying entirely at local colleges.[28] As during the recession of the 1980s (coincident with the UK and Australia's imposition of full fees for overseas students), the currency crisis of the late 1990s led the government to press for additional places in existing twinning programs and for new private universities, both to absorb around two thousand students recalled from overseas and to make room for paying foreign students. Between 1997 and 1999, however, public universities bore the brunt of the effort, boosting their enrollments from 45,000 to 84,000.[29]

Such rapid growth made student housing a serious problem. In 1986, for instance, UM's eight residential colleges could accommodate only 40 percent of their students. Despite the administration's decision to purchase additional housing, as many as a thousand UM students who failed to secure university lodging demonstrated that year at off-campus residence halls, then another six hundred from UM's Akademi Islam picketed and threatened to march. Deputy Vice Chancellor Mohd. Yunus Mohd. Noor defused the situation via closed-door discussions with the students, promising to redress the "appalling" state of student accommodations. Nevertheless, over a thousand students remained in "squalid squatter huts" a year later, while the same number bunked in with friends and relatives.[30] Four UM student leaders were fined over the 1986 housing protests; two others were convicted in similar protests at UTM two weeks later. These episodes foreshadowed housing shortages yet to come as enrollments surged a decade on.[31]

[26] Azmi, "Educational Development and Reformation," pp. 123–25; Loh, "Crisis," pp. 4–5.

[27] Tan, *Malaysian Private Higher Education*, p. 3.

[28] Azmi, "Educational Development and Reformation," pp. 123–24, 128.

[29] Tan, *Malaysian Private Higher Education*, pp. 8–9, 12–13.

[30] *Malay Mail*, July 15, 1987. As late as 1992, students were still complaining to the university administration about overcrowding and the poor quality of food on campus. The latter complaint was not new, either: in 1981, students boycotted the UM canteen for nearly a month over "substandard" food and high prices. See: "A Storm Brewing over Campus Fare," *Malay Mail*, November 26, 1992; *New Straits Times*, November 11, 1981; and *Malay Mail*, November 12 and December 10, 1981.

[31] The UM case offered evidence, too, of how attitudes toward students were changing. Reporting the presence of a PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia) flag at the demonstration (which PAS denied having planted), an UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) Youth official insisted on students' immaturity, averring that students "are supposed to be studying and not promoting political causes. They would fail the high hopes of their parents if they deviate from this course. They should study first and only then indulge in political ideologies." See "Students Stage Demo," *New Straits Times*, July 7, 1986; and these additional 1986 issues of *New Straits Times:* July 11, 12, 14, and 17, September 5, and December 31; and *Star*, January 27, 1987.

Tightening Control

In line with such sentiments, the state kept the burgeoning masses of students firmly in line, with a comprehensive framework of intellectual containment. Campus environments changed dramatically after 1974: security gates were put up or reinforced, and UM's Speakers' Corner was razed. The names of UMSU's leaders from 1972 to 1975 were removed from displays in the union building to speed students' forgetting about those individuals.[32] Discipline tightened on everything from April Fools pranks to dozing off in the library.[33] The term of study likewise changed. First, a semester system replaced trimesters at all institutions, concluding with UM in 1986–87.[34] Then, many degree programs were abbreviated from four years to three as of 1996.[35] While designed to move students more quickly into the job market, the shift carried implications for activism by leaving students less time to acclimate, then engage.

Campus publications, too, were curbed; all required official clearance after 1974. The tame *Budiman* replaced *Mahasiswa Negara*. Underground publication became a significant channel for awareness-raising and dissidence. In the early 1980s, for instance, students produced a self-funded, independent newspaper, only informing the (furious) vice chancellor of its existence post hoc. UM authorities eventually permitted the new paper to continue publication, but the students involved soon caved in and allowed university authorities' oversight of the paper's content.[36] Other publications were more targeted. For example, in 1996, former student detainee Chong Ton Sin helped organize around twenty undergraduates to produce a Chinese-language magazine covering campus activities and culture, international student movements, national politics, and more. It folded for lack of funds after three years.[37]

Perhaps the most stark indicator of how much the national political environment had changed since the 1970s was the list of former student activists now entrenched in the ruling coalition. By the mid-1980s, Shahril Samad, Aziz Shamsudin, Sanusi Junid, and others were in politics, perhaps perversely confirming the value of their engagement as students.[38] Most notable was Anwar Ibrahim, who resigned his post

[32] Interview with Adi Satria, Bhaskaran S., and Khoo Soo Wan, March 25, 2006.

[33] Interview with Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004, Kota Samarahan.

[34] *Star*, June 21, 1986.

[35] Machi Sato, "Education, Ethnicity, and Economics: Higher Education Reforms in Malaysia 1957–2003," *NUCB Journal of Language, Culture, and Communication* 7,1 (May 2005): 82.

[36] Interview with Charles Hector, December 11, 2003, Petaling Jaya.

[37] Interviews with Chong Ton Sin, March 11, 2006, Petaling Jaya; and Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[38] Md. Ibrahim, "Mampukah Mahasiswa Kini Menjadi Agen Perubahan Masyarakat," *Aspirasi* (PMUKM) 9 (1984–85): 112. Hussain offers a long list of youth leaders UMNO has coopted; see Hussain Mohamed, "Gerakan Belia, Umno Dan Kepimpinan Politik Di Malaysia," *Manusia & Masyarakat* 4,4 (1983): 73–76. Nor was this strategy unique to Malaysia. Upon assuming the

in ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia)—through which he had retained substantial influence among students—to join the government just before the 1982 elections. Both Anwar and ABIM subsequently lost clout on campus. However respected he might be as an Islamist leader, Anwar was secularly educated and from a strong UMNO family—his father was a member of parliament and his mother, he claimed in 1982, had been paying his UMNO dues for years. Ironically, he had earlier decried fellow ABIM member Sanusi Junid's 1974 move to UMNO as opportunistic, denying the party could be cleansed from within.[39] Given his background and humanistic leanings, Anwar's speedy elevation to minister of education seemed to many a boon for higher education—but in the face of graduates' unemployment, even Anwar focused on education that was "relevant" and "useful"[40] rather than education for the sake of knowledge. Still, Anwar insists that he welcomed input from student leaders, even when they mocked and heckled him. (During one mid-1980s visit to UM, for instance, he could only quiet a booing crowd by reciting the Qur'an.[41]) He also approved vice chancellor Syed Hussein Alatas's reopening the Speaker's Corner in March 1989, albeit barring discussion of race or religion from that platform. Students largely failed to take advantage, though, of this chance to "play an active role in discussing issues."[42]

UUCA and Related Rules

> The gravity of the challenge to our liberties posed by this Bill cannot be overstated. In exchange for the opportunity for higher education, our youth are required to give up their fundamental rights as citizens ... A country that adopts such a law cannot even pretend to be a democracy any more. At one shot it destroys all pretences to autonomy of our universities, deprives the youths of their freedom and reduces university teachers to the status of hacks in the service of the Government in power ... We are now to have higher education in a concentration camp atmosphere to produce submissive, unquestioning, unthinking graduates fit to be employees, not citizens ... This is a war on intellectuals and on youth, and the youth have time on their side.[43]

Indonesian presidency, for instance, Soeharto appointed leaders from student federation KAMI (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia, Indonesian Students' Action Front) as MPs in appreciation for their support. His government remained friendly toward students until protests resumed in 1970 (Arief Budiman, "The Student Movement in Indonesia: A Study of the Relationship between Culture and Structure," *Asian Survey* 18,6 (June 1978): 617–18.

[39] Interview with Shabery Cheek, March 22, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," in *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia*, ed. Joel S. Kahn and Francis Loh Kok Wah (North Sydney: Asian Studies Association of Australia and Allen and Unwin, 1992), pp. 90–93.

[40] Rustam, "Pendidikan Universiti."

[41] Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, April 25, 2006.

[42] *New Straits Times*, October 20, 1988; *Star*, March 1, 1989.

[43] Abdullah Ahmad, "Student Unrest and Campus Politics," Tan Chee Khoon, remarks in parliament during debate on 1975 amendments to UUCA, in his *Without Fear or Favour*, ed. Raj Vasil (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1984), pp. 334–35.

Levels of university autonomy and academic freedom plummeted after 1975. Speaking at UM soon after the December 1974 arrests, deputy minister Abdullah Ahmad expounded, "The young are prone to be swept emotionally by issues larger than themselves, embracing slogans which help to lift them from the drabness of their lives." The government had "shown a high degree of indulgence to student opinion however extreme or ridiculous," but "self-righteous" students and polarized student organizations had gone too far with Baling. "In a situation where there is every possibility of manipulation by student activists who reject multi-racial solutions to the economic problems of the ethnic groups in the country," he explained, "the Government's duty is clear." The "prattle of academic freedom" would pose no barrier.[44]

In 1975, parliament speedily passed a set of harsh amendments to the UUCA.[45] Section 15 now prohibited any student (not just student associations) from "anything which may be construed as expressing support, sympathy, or opposition" toward any party, union, society, or other body except with permission of the vice chancellor. Students and their organizations were banned from appealing for money or other donations, either on campus or off; the officers of student organizations were made criminally liable for any missteps of their groups; and any student charged with a criminal offense was to be immediately suspended, then expelled and denied any opportunity to matriculate elsewhere if found guilty or held under preventive detention. The law was unclear as to whether the provision also applied extra-territorially or, for Muslims, to violations of syariah law.[46] Section 16 gave the vice chancellor new powers, too: he or she could suspend or dissolve any student organization deemed to be acting in a manner prejudicial to the university, its students or staff, or public safety and order; and all university staff were subject to a disciplinary committee comprising the vice chancellor and two members of the University Council. A designated deputy vice chancellor would be the disciplinary authority for all students, with appeal possible only to the minister. All student societies were dissolved, starting with those at UM in September 1975. Only if they conformed to the amended UUCA could organizations appeal for reinstatement.[47] While a new UM Students' Representative Council supplanted UMSU as of 1975, students continued to speak of "UMSU," both to invoke past glory and because an SRC seemed "more a council than a union."[48]

The UUCA established a framework; each university then developed specific (but similar) rules within it. For instance, UM enacted the University of Malaya (Discipline of Students) Rules and the University of Malaya (Discipline of Staff) Rules. The rules for students established a Student Affairs Department (Hal Ehwal

[44] *New Sunday Times*, January 5, 1975.

[45] Laws of Malaysia, Act 30: April 30, 1971—Universities and University Colleges Act, 1971, incorporating amendments made by Act A80 (1971), P.U. (A)386 (1971), P.U.(A)100 (1972), and A295 (1975); Arkib Negara Malaysia, sections 15–16, pp. 5–11; DEMA (Gerakan Demokratik Belia Dan Pelajar Malaysia, Malaysian Youth and Student Democratic Movement), "Students Involvement in Promoting Democracy," in *Values of Democracy and Youth*, ed. Nurul Mu'az Omar (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Kajian Dasar, 2003), pp. 7–8, 12–13; and Junaidi, *Mahasiswa, Politik*.

[46] Gan Ching Chuan, "The Universities (Discipline of Students) Rules: An Administrative Law Perspective," *Journal of Malaysian and Comparative Law* 20,1&2 (June and December 1993): 93.

[47] *New Straits Times*, September 27, 1975; *New Sunday Times*, October 5, 1975.

[48] Interview with Shabery Cheek, March 28, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

Pelajar, HEP), headed by a deputy vice chancellor, with disciplinary guidelines "somewhat lacking in procedural fairness."[49] (Note the use of *pelajar*, "student," instead of the loftier *mahasiswa*, "undergraduate.") Additionally, starting in May 1975, UM students had to accept a new code of conduct upon matriculation, the *Ikrar UM* (UM Pledge). The pledge declared that they had joined the university of their own free will and understood they could be expelled for violating the university's rules.[50] Ungku Aziz cautioned the next year's cohort to abide by the UM Pledge or "return home and find some other career," to remain serious in their studies, and not to be swayed or confused by former students' propaganda.[51] The new laws were promptly enforced: two students were expelled from UM within a matter of months, one upon conviction for a criminal offense and the other for cheating on an exam.[52]

At least through the early 1980s, students continued to organize forums, invite opposition politicians to speak, and develop intercampus resolutions with neither permission nor sanction.[53] But the 1975 amendments lent the UUCA far greater punch than before, particularly given the broader political context. Most notably, the student Left was decimated. The Socialist Club was banned and its leaders arrested or forced to flee abroad, leaving pro-government "Malay nationalists" and more antiestablishment Islamic activists, both focused largely on campus-level issues, sparring for dominance.[54] Student societies were required to submit a yearly plan of activities to the HEP for approval. Getting permission or funds to add activities could be daunting. Even committed student activists assumed a lower, less radical profile.[55]

Talk of amending the UUCA surfaced periodically. For instance, after dialogues with educators, teachers' unions, and students, Anwar drafted a new education bill in 1986 that would eliminate the UUCA and leave disciplinary matters entirely to universities. Nothing came of the bill, though, once Anwar left the education ministry for finance—and it may have stalled in the cabinet, regardless.[56] Opposition parties, too, called repeatedly for the UUCA's revision or repeal, explicitly challenging the rules that reinforced intellectual containment. Tan Chee Khoon, one of few opposition members of parliament in 1975, fretted from the outset, "These repressive measures, far from curbing students' political activities, will harden their attitude, and if they cannot conduct their activities openly they will just go underground."[57] Again in 1991, Gerakan Youth's Chang Ko Youn argued, "The more we control them [students], limit their movement and restrict them, the more they

[49] Gan, "Discipline of Students," pp. 101–3.

[50] *New Straits Times*, May 28, 1975.

[51] *New Straits Times*, May 31, 1977.

[52] *Malay Mail*, February 26, 1976.

[53] Interviews with Khalid Jaafar, December 6, 2005, Falls Church, VA, and Charles Hector, December 11, 2003.

[54] Jomo K. S., Hassan Abdul Karim, and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, "Malaysia," in *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*, ed. Philip G. Altbach (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1989), p. 154.

[55] Interview with Yap Swee Seng, March 6, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

[56] Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, April 25, 2006.

[57] Quoted in Josef Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," *Pacific Affairs* 49,2 (Summer 1976): 202.

will strive to be rebellious and become defiant of authority."[58] Students weighed in on proposed amendments, too. Quipped UMSU head Shabery Cheek in 1981, "Although we weren't asked for our views, we are nevertheless sending them in"; Vice Chancellor Ungku Aziz offered to forward Shabery and his peers' memo to the minister himself.[59] By then, UKM vice chancellor Datuk Awang Had Salleh likewise supported refinement of the UUCA, given changing circumstances: students had gained "a broader perspective" and grown "more mature."[60] Still, the only adjustments made were to shift power from the ministry to the vice chancellor, not to boost the freedom of staff or students.[61]

In any event, most students seemed to lose interest in amending the UUCA, especially as memories of their activist legacy faded. (I'll discuss that dynamic later.) More than fifteen years after UUCA's debut, Junaidi Abu Bakar surveyed UKM students' views on the reinforced rules. He found the UUCA's provisions so normalized that students and staff took them for granted; few considered challenging the law. By the early 1990s, fewer than half the students had ever attended a political seminar or student association meeting. Around 59 percent of all students voiced approval of the UUCA (the percentage was slightly higher among just Malays), citing the peaceful, harmonious environment it fostered and the HEP's services.[62] The UUCA—and the level of control it entailed—had become part of the institutional fabric.

Regulation of Academic Staff

The government's crackdown extended also to lecturers. Although rarely invoked, the rules were intrusive; university academic staff retained far less freedom than before. While previously they could, for example, support opposition-party initiatives and engage in electoral campaigns, now they could neither hold office in nor endorse any political party. Furthermore, UM's Discipline of Staff Rules mandated that faculty members observe a university code of conduct at all times, including while on leave. For example, they could not use their position for private interest, bring discredit to the institution, or be insubordinate. Moreover, academic staff could not contribute to publications of a political nature, engage in outside employment or even seminars and other activities without the vice chancellor's permission, accept most gifts, be seriously indebted, or offer public critiques of university policies. Punishments ranged from warnings to fines and forfeiture of salary, and procedural guidelines leaned toward a predetermination of guilt.[63]

[58] Quoted in Claudia Theophilus, "Relax Varsity Act: Gerakan Youth," *Sun*, July 24, 1991.

[59] *New Straits Times*, November 18, 1981; *Malay Mail*, November 27 and December 12, 1981, and February 18, 1982; *Star*, December 7, 1981.

[60] *Malay Mail*, December 3, 1981.

[61] Sanusi Osman, "Mengapa Akta Universiti Dan Kolej Universiti Ditenang," paper presented at the seminar Akta Universiti dan Kolej Universiti, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, February 27–March 1, 1987, p. 4.

[62] Junaidi, *Mahasiswa, Politik*, pp. 108–11.

[63] C. C. Gan, "The Universities (Discipline of Staff) Rules: An Administrative Law Perspective," *Journal of Malaysian and Comparative Law* 21,1&2 (June and December 1994): 7–12; and, in that same issue of *Journal of Malayan and Comparative Law*, Abdul Majid, "Discipline of Staff in the University of Malaya: The *Nemo Judex* Rule and the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971," pp. 45–62.

The new rules were enforced initially in just two universities, then were to be rolled out for all. UM teaching staff declared an industrial action against the Discipline of Staff Rules almost immediately, backed by all five universities' academic staff associations, but such protests secured only minor amendments to the rules.[64]

What made these rules especially oppressive was the suffocating influence of the Ministry of Education and the Public Services Department (PSD) over university affairs, including on matters usually the purview of academics. Prior to the 1970s, salaries, terms, and conditions of service were determined through collective bargaining between the University Council and in-house trade unions such as UM's Academic Staff Association (PKAUM, Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik UM). New guidelines in 1970 (see chapter 4) imposed generalized schemes of service, instead, even though university personnel were not government servants, but employed by the University Council. Now UM's council (and soon those of the other universities) became "virtually a Government agency under the Minister of Education" and almost 90 percent of its members were government representatives, since the government financed over 90 percent of the annual budget.[65] Moreover, only the staff associations at UM, UTM, and UiTM had been allowed to register as trade unions, with powers of collective bargaining[66]—part of a crackdown on organized labor imposed broadly in a period of frenetic neoliberal development. Despite pervasive uncertainty and plunging morale, PKAUM still proposed a collective agreement in 1975, inviting the administration at least to resolve anomalies and ambiguities in the comprehensive service scheme presented earlier that year, which covered everything from promotions to research and travel support, study and sabbatical leave, medical care, and disciplinary matters.[67] The union asserted that certain provisions of the Public Offices (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations of 1969, now to be extended to academic staff, were inappropriate to the traditions and needs of higher education, contravening "the very spirit of academic life" and wrongly discouraging academics' participation in public affairs.[68]

Staff resignations mounted at UM as conditions deteriorated. From 1975 to 1980, twenty lecturers in economics, twenty-two in arts, and even more in engineering and medicine resigned. Their reasons included downgraded salaries, sparse facilities, and the slow pace of promotions, but also the "stifling" atmosphere, "mechanical" teaching requirements, tedious permissions procedures for matters like attending conferences, and failure of the "civil service boys" on the University Council to protect academic freedom.[69] In 1983–84 alone, more than forty medical and engineering lecturers resigned.[70] Whatever the government's intent, "the feeling among most of the staff is that the University of Malaya is sinking into mediocrity, which is harmful to its academic standard."[71] When the popular president of USM's Academic and Administrative Staff Association complained to the press in 1985 about the declining quality of university education—its undemocratic decision-making, erosion of professionalism, unfair promotions, and the like—he became a cause célèbre among students and academic staff, both locally and abroad. Convicted by a disciplinary committee, he was dismissed and his vice president was demoted. Education Minister Abdullah Badawi declined to intervene, but, remarkably, the Penang High Court granted his reinstatement on appeal.[72]

Mounting restrictions propelled academic staff to campaign for university autonomy. Central to the initiative was the pithy University Charter, initially proposed by USM's Chandra Muzaffar at the first all-university staff congress in 1974 and promulgated in January 1978. The University Charter was both to enumerate academic rights and responsibilities and to forge a unified Tenaga Akademik (Academic Force), although the latter initiative lagged.[73] The document framed the university as "essentially an institution of learning, a community of students and scholars ... bound by standards of integrity in scholarship," but also as part of the wider community. According to the charter, the university trains citizens to think in a disciplined way, informs public policy decisions, offers consultancy and extension services, and raises the public's consciousness and intellectual horizons—all of which both advance "economic, social, political and cultural development" and foster a more united, progressive, and aware society. However, even state-funded universities must remain independent, autonomous, and beholden to the community at large rather than to political or economic patrons, insists the charter. The document offers an academic code of ethics, germane to both research and teaching, and lays claim in turn not only to generic civil liberties, but also to academic freedom, access to information, and evaluation "only on the basis of professional standards of teaching and research." The charter's supporters recommended that parliament form a University Commission to adjudicate alleged violations and implement the charter's code of ethics, with jurisdiction over all university staff.[74] The government ignored the proposal.

Protests by academic staff continued. In 1984, for instance, the five academic staff associations issued another joint statement urging democratization of decision-making and administration, better channels for communication, and abrogation of

[64] Teng Cheng Siong, "The Loss of Autonomy in Malaysian Universities and Its Consequences and Impact on Administration, Personnel, and Students: The Case of the University of Malaya" (MEc thesis, Universiti Malaya, 1985), pp. 93–94; Asia Forum on Human Rights, *The State of Human Rights in Malaysia: A Collection of Documents Relating to Political Detainees, Political Banishees and Their Struggles and also to the Laws and Procedures* (Hong Kong: AFHR, n.d.), p. 188.

[65] Teng, "Loss of Autonomy," pp. 74–76, 83–84, 94–96; Viswanathan Selvaratnam, "Change Amidst Continuity: University Development in Malaysia," in *From Dependence to Autonomy*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Viswanathan Selvaratnam (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 200.

[66] Interview with Rosli Omar, March 24, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

[67] Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik Universiti Malaya, "Proposal for a Collective Agreement with The University of Malaya," September 1975, in Universiti Malaya—Mesyuarat Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik Universiti Malaya: Proposal for a Collective Agreement with the Universiti of Malaya, Arkib Negara Malaysia, No. SPR 1986/00068.

[68] Appendix A, "Comments on Essential (General Orders) Regulations 1969, Chapter D," September 1975, pp. 37–39, in Universiti Malaya—Mesyuarat Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik Universiti Malaya: Proposal for a Collective Agreement with the Universiti of Malaya, Arkib Negara Malaysia, No. SPR 1986/00068.

[69] "Dons Fed Up with Conditions at MU," *Star*, October 2, 1981.

[70] "42 Pensyarah UM Berhenti Sejak 1983," *Berita Harian*, December 11, 1984.

[71] "Dons Fed Up with Conditions at MU," *Star*, October 2, 1981.

[72] Wan Manan Wan Muda, personal communication (email), October 9, 2007.

[73] Chandra Muzaffar, *Freedom in Fetters: An Analysis of the State of Democracy in Malaysia* (Penang: Aliran Kesedaran Negara, 1986), pp. 137, 156n2.

[74] Academic Staff, "University Charter," *Ilmu Masyarakat* 2 (April–June 1983): 90–96; Chandra, *Freedom in Fetters*, pp. 138–43.

overbearing controls, lest "despair and despondency" among "thinking persons" set in irrevocably.[75] Again the following year, the Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia (Malaysian Social Science Association, PSSM) convened a workshop of around two hundred academics in Kuala Lumpur to discuss mounting government interference in university affairs.[76] (It was reprised four years later in Penang, as an even larger First National Academic Congress.[77]) PSSM's co-presidents warned of the imminent collapse of the Malaysian university and called for immediate restoration of the university autonomy needed for independent, apolitical intellectual pursuits. Their statement identified four obstructions to university autonomy: the UUCA, restrictive and inefficient administrative structures, the launch of new universities more for political than academic considerations, and weaknesses in the university community itself, particularly in the teaching staff. The university "had deteriorated as if to become a 'factory' for turning out graduates and blindly fulfilling political pressures and objectives."[78] Endemic "brain drain" and the diminished caliber and dedication of graduates were only to be expected. PSSM reiterated the call for a University Commission,[79] again without effect.

Frustrated, a group of academics launched the Malaysian Academic Movement (MOVE, known in Malay as Pergerakan Tenaga Akademik Malaysia, GERAK), first proposed at 1989's Academic Congress as a long-term strategy. It was registered in 1993, with Wan Manan Wan Muda as chair.[80] The group noted increasing violations of academic freedom since 1979, from lecturers being detained under the ISA (Internal Security Act) for involvement with the Islamist group Darul Arqam in the early 1990s to penalties for discussing a new viral strain that beset Malaysia in 1998, as well as self-censorship whetted by fear of surveillance and punishment.[81] And at least some of those involved with the University Charter kept trying: Chandra Muzaffar, for instance, urged again in the mid-1980s that academic staff associations endorse the document and press for its implementation.[82] In some ways, then, the liberalization of higher education in 1996 represented a remarkable step for ceding a degree of government control; conversely, the legacy of twenty years' suppression and continuing curbs on civil liberties remained daunting.

NEP and University Admissions

Accompanying these regulatory changes were substantial adjustments to university admissions beginning in the early 1970s. Malay and non-Malay applicants

[75] "Varsities' Academic Staff Call for Action," *New Straits Times*, October 12, 1984.

[76] Loh, "Crisis."

[77] Wan Manan Wan Muda, personal communication, October 9, 2007. Papers from the congress, among the most trenchant evaluations of academia in Malaysia, are included in Wan Manan Wan Muda and Haris Md. Jadi, eds., *Akademia Menjelang Tahun 2000* (Penang: Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik dan Pentadbiran Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1991).

[78] S. Husin Ali and Hussain Mohamed, "Pernyataan Dan Resolusi Diterima Oleh Bengkel Universiti, Para Akademik Dan Masyarakat," *Ilmu Masyarakat* 10 (1985–86): 90–91.

[79] Ibid., pp. 91–92.

[80] Wan Manan Wan Muda, personal communication, October 9, 2007.

[81] Anil Netto, "Academics Speak out at Their Own Risk," *Asia Times Online*, June 16, 1999, at www.atimes.com/se-asia/AF16Ae01.html, last accessed January 15, 2011.

[82] Chandra, *Freedom in Fetters*, pp. 153–55.

faced countervailing trends. With applications soaring, overall acceptance rates declined, hitting a low of 22 percent in 1984 (compared with 62 percent in 1968–69), even as the total number of available places doubled from 1976 to 1989.[83] Non-Malays found themselves increasingly squeezed out of public higher education: from the late 1960s on, enrollment rates surged for Malays and plummeted for non-Malays. By the early 1980s, over 85 percent of students at UKM, UPM, and UTM were Malay, although non-Malays still accounted for around half the student body at UM and USM. As a side effect, students increasingly clustered along regional or class lines at the virtually monoethnic UKM, but on racial lines at UM and USM.[84]

Nonetheless, progress toward accomplishing the redistributive goals of the NEP (New Economic Policy; see chapter 4) lagged; the policies tended to maintain upper-class advantages rather than boost social mobility. Nearly two-thirds of students at the MARA Junior Science Colleges as of the mid-1980s, for instance, were from urban middle- or upper-class backgrounds, although the schools were intended to meet the needs of the rural poor. Moreover, well-connected, rich *bumiputera* were over twenty times more likely to be awarded scholarships than were their poorer rivals; wealthy Chinese and Indians enjoyed similar, although less stark, advantages.[85] At the same time, students educated in Malaysia rather than abroad, especially non-Malays, found few job prospects upon graduation. The public sector gave hiring preference to Malays; the private sector preferred English-educated overseas graduates. These trends only exacerbated disparities in occupational chances and incomes, especially as economic growth rates dipped in the mid-1980s.[86]

That demographic shift compounded aggressive moves toward Malayization and Islamization on campus. In 1987, for instance, all female students at UTM were required to wear headscarves for convocation, and UKM's Chinese lion dance performance was cancelled. Chinese associations protested both rulings. More provocative still was the UM senate's mid-year decision that elective subjects in the Chinese-, Tamil-, and English-language departments be taught in Malay.[87] Non-majors could no longer study any of the three languages. Critics blasted the requirements as unreasonable on academic and cultural-equity grounds. The heads of the three departments resigned in protest. The government lambasted subsequent demonstrations in mid-August—ending in a shouting match over the UM gates—as "exploiting sensitive issues," particularly given raucous DAP (Democratic Action Party) involvement. In turn, around three hundred Malay students led an UMSU demonstration against "outside interference." The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) also opposed the ruling, obliging

[83] Junaidi, *Mahasiswa, Politik*, p. 2; Thagavelu Marimuthu, *Student Development in Malaysian Universities*, RIHED Occasional Paper 19 (Singapore: Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development, 1984), pp. 17, 29–31.

[84] Marimuthu, *Student Development*, pp. 18, 49–50.

[85] Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality, and Higher Education*, pp. 26–28.

[86] Ibid., pp. 28–29.

[87] A cognate issue had arisen before. In May 1972, the dean of the arts faculty required all Malay-stream students to take both "Special English" and an additional subject in English. PBMUM and UMSU denounced the directive as a violation of university language policy and demanded the dean's resignation; he complied after the acting vice chancellor took the students' side. Muhammad Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa Menggugat: Suatu Analisa Dan Peninjauan Dari Dalam Terhadap Kegiatan Mahasiswa-Mahasiswa Negeri Ini* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1973), pp. 171–73.

Education Minister Anwar to review it. He declared his hands tied, insisting such issues should be left to academicians—a perhaps ironic affirmation of university autonomy—but labeled the UMSU protest an "unhealthy trend," citing "racial undertones." Indeed, a Chinese UM student lodged a complaint with the police against an UMSU leader's racial provocation. To the consternation of UMSU leaders—who saw themselves as defending a decision of the senate—Ungku Aziz threatened action under the UUCA, and nine individuals received summonses; eight were convicted. The next month, the DAP launched a hunger strike over this and other education-related issues, until halted by an ISA crackdown.[88]

By the late 1980s, adamantly pro-Malay government policies left Chinese students even more pressed to assert their linguistic and cultural rights. For instance, USM authorities announced a policy requiring that all books and other materials be in Malay—even the Chinese Language Society (CLS) had to use Malay in its own publicity.[89] The CLS remained among the most active societies on campus and was at least loosely aligned with the BN's MCA and Gerakan (until it later drifted toward the opposition),[90] although officially recognized after 1975 only at UM and USM. Even where it existed only "underground" or informally, the CLS held cultural and other programs, under various guises. Facing perceived injustice, these groups increasingly framed their appeals as less communal (ethnic) than about student and human rights generally—a strategic shift informed by Chinese educationists and other activists that was designed to broaden support for the cause. Much CLS activity was social, from dancing and singing to Mandarin lessons, all of which fostered a sense of kinship. Social events were complemented by field trips, workshops, and discussion groups, as well as community service camps and even semester-long courses on social issues, political development, and leadership. The CLS borrowed not just from recent experience locally, but from China's May Fourth Movement (see chapter 2)—especially core values of "democracy" and "scientific thinking" introduced by senior member Thock Kiah Wah in the mid-1980s.[91] Yet the CLS could do little to stem the demographic and cultural tide of Malayization.

NEP targets affected not just student admissions, but hiring of academic staff as well. The diminution in university autonomy Malaysia experienced was in some ways a generic artifact of postcolonial modernization and development,[92] but not

[88] For details about these events, see: Chinese Associations, "Who Are the Real Culprits: The Chinese Associations Reply to the White Paper," in *The White Paper on the October Affair and the Why? Papers*, ed. K. Das and SUARAM (Suara Rakyat Malaysia, Voice of the Malaysian People) (Kelana Jaya, Selangor: Suaram Komunikasi, 1989), pp. 82–83; Government of Malaysia, "Towards Preserving National Security," in *The White Paper on the October Affair*, ed. K. Das and SUARAM, p. 131; Raymond Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia," *Asian Survey* 28,4 (April 1988): 416–17; several articles in the *Star*, August 21, 22, and 30, 1987; "MP among 11 Hunger Strikers Arrested," *Star*, October 10, 1987; "DAP Calls Off Hunger Strike at Universiti Malaya," *Malay Mail*, September 11, 1987; and these 1987 articles from the *New Straits Times*: "Faculty's Options Scheme Criticised," July 6; "Dons Resign in Protest," July 7; "MCA to Raise MU Ruling in Cabinet," July 8; "Purely Academic," July 12; "Demonstrators Nearly Clash, August 18); and coverage of hearings, September 10–11, 1987.

[89] Interviews with Teresa Kok, March 20, 2006, Kuala Lumpur, and Yap Swee Seng, March 6, 2006.

[90] Interview with Teresa Kok, March 20, 2006.

[91] Interviews with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; Lee Khai Loon, February 7, 2006, Petaling Jaya; Teresa Kok, March 20, 2006; and Yap Swee Seng, March 6, 2006.

[92] Chandra, *Freedom in Fetters*, pp. 144–49.

entirely so. Most obviously, the NEP mandated disproportionate recruitment and promotion of *bumiputera* in the professions, including higher education, resulting in their nearly monopolizing university administrative positions. In at least some cases, "academic credentials have been forfeited for ethnic considerations," while *bumiputera* students and staff have felt pressed to identify more with a protective government than with the broader academic community.[93] The imperative of gratitude thus compounds the effect of laws in discouraging dissent, although these laws themselves have not gone unchallenged.

Merdeka University

Among the clearest manifestations of tension over preferential education policies was the revival of the Merdeka University issue. A mere four years after the NEP's launch, the imbalance in the universities had been reversed in favor of Malays, tipping beyond the proportional enrollments the Majid commission had proposed. Moreover, the universities could accommodate fewer than one-tenth of the students who were in pre-university classes. Non-Malays in particular competed intensely for those limited university places.[94] Moreover, *bumiputera* claimed over 80 percent of federal and state government scholarships as of the early 1980s. Given the scarce slots in local institutions, by the middle of the decade, about as many Malaysian tertiary students were enrolled overseas as locally. And given the distribution of available slots and scholarships, the majority of Malaysians studying overseas were self-funded non-Malays.[95]

It was against this backdrop that the Merdeka University issue resurfaced before the 1978 elections. A memorandum to the king signed by six government and opposition political parties (including the MCA, Gerakan, and DAP) and over four thousand Chinese guilds and associations kicked off the campaign for a new school. The memorandum asked for royal assent to establish a primarily Chinese-medium Merdeka University, with admission based solely on academic qualifications, but organized otherwise in accordance with the UUCA. Groups ranging from UMNO Youth to the UKM student union[96] came out immediately against the proposal. However, the government waited until after the elections to deny the request on grounds of the proposed institution's private sponsorship, medium of instruction, and preference for Chinese-educated students—although the Merdeka University Council contested the latter two claims (and the last could also apply to the fully legal KTAR). The government instead promised to expand existing universities and increase the proportion of non-*bumiputera* students. The council moved toward legal action, while the DAP proposed parliament amend the UUCA to allow the establishment of private universities, and the MCA and Gerakan withdrew their endorsement of the memorandum.[97]

[93] Ibid., pp. 151–53.

[94] Tham Seong Chee, "Issues in Malaysian Education: Past, Present, and Future," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10,2 (September 1979): 349; Kua Kia Soong, *A Protean Saga: The Chinese Schools of Malaysia*, 3rd ed. (Kajang: Dong Jiao Zong Higher Learning Centre, 1999), pp. 110–11.

[95] Selvaratnam, *Ethnicity, Inequality, and Higher Education*, pp. 21–25.

[96] "U. Merdeka," *Suaritasiswa* 22 (February 27, 1978), p. 1 (a UKM student union newspaper).

[97] Kua, *Protean Saga*, pp. 110–13; Tham, "Malaysian Education," p. 349.

The Merdeka University case was heard in September 1981. The council reiterated the institution's inclusiveness, and asserted that the National Education Policy's insistence on only one language of instruction violated minorities' constitutional rights. Moreover, argued counsel, the institution would alleviate dissatisfaction among non-Malays, and it enjoyed enormous public support (at least among the Chinese, representing 40 percent of the population), could reasonably expect to be financially viable, and would train qualified persons to serve the nation, at no expense to the state. The high court dismissed the suit in November, asserting that, regardless of the need for more places, any university established under the UUCA is a public authority and, thus, in the national interest, must use the Malay language. Moreover, if discrimination were involved, it was against a corporate body rather than individual citizens, and thus the rights claimed by the council were not protected. Upon appeal, the court again invoked the imperative of fostering national unity through schools and universities, with passing negative reference to Singapore's experience with Nantah and to promoting universities to curry favor with voters.[98]

Passage of the Private Higher Education Act fifteen years later, in 1996, not only helped meet state educational goals, but, in sanctioning private institutions, also removed the major hurdle facing advocates of Chinese-medium higher education. United under Dong Jiao Zong (the United School Committees Association), Chinese educationists launched New Era College, intended as the apex of the Chinese independent school system, with much the same sort of buzz and fundraising as for Nantah and Merdeka University. The government granted a license for New Era College in 1997; classes began the next year. Aiming to develop a culture of critical, nonpartisan social engagement, New Era mimics the UM of old, with a Speaker's Corner, students' union, and student representatives on the college's governing council.[99] Academic staff, too, are urged to serve as "public intellectuals."[100] Not coincidentally, once Dong Jiao Zong took steps to expand New Era and develop it into a full-fledged university in 2001, the MCA announced KTAR's upgrading to Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman[101]—even though, ironically, students there had recently rallied against a statement by the chair of the KTAR board in which he described the institution as one intended for training technicians, not engineers, which had dashed its chances for university status.[102] Clearly, political jockeying around universities still thrived, whatever the status or stature of their students!

Repositioning Students in Society

Indeed, New Era College is an anomaly: contemporary Malaysian students are rarely encouraged to be so involved, although many retain a sense of having some special purpose as students. For some time after the December 1974 arrests, the continuing crackdown and key leaders' prolonged detention kept many students politically aware. As late as August 1975, forty-five UKM students were summoned

[98] Kua, *Protean Saga*, pp. 113–28.

[99] Kua Kia Soong, *New Era Education* (Kajang, Selangor: New Era College & SIRD, 2005), pp. 3–14, 64–65, 81.

[100] Ibid., pp. 108–9.

[101] Ibid., pp. 12–13.

[102] Interview with Chai Chee Fatt and Lee Yenting, March 5, 2006.

before the Public Service Commission in connection with the past December's demonstrations and made to sign a pledge to behave or lose their scholarships.[103] Several months later, the UKM student union (which still identified as such) commemorated the first anniversary of the protests with a special edition of newsletter *Suaritasiswa*.[104] Some students still simply disregarded the UUCA—for instance, by leaving their student cards at home to conceal their status, or organizing high-profile events without asking permission.[105] And new campaigns sustained past models. When ITM (Institut Teknologi MARA) expelled several dozen students in 1976, for instance, the youth wings of parties UMNO and PAS joined forces with Muslim groups ABIM, PKPIM (Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia, National Association of Muslim Students of Malaysia), and PMIUM (Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam Universiti Malaya, UM Muslim Students' Society); the Malaysian Youth Council; and the student unions of UKM and UPM in a Joint Action Committee. The committee resurrected the strident language of the past—condemning "fascist" controls, accepting sacrifices in the name of resisting the UUCA, and invoking a communal frame of "MALAY SPIRIT AND NATIONALISM"[106]—but with a broader institutional front.

Students' social service activism continued as well, with even Prime Minister Mahathir's blessing. UKM, for instance, sustained its annual rural immersion trips, with similar goals as previously.[107] ITM offered the same sort of program, and found subtle cooperation with the authorities eased their access to the masses.[108] To the annoyance of some students, campus authorities and the MCA "hijacked" KTAR's community-service program, as it offered the party a bridge into rural areas.[109] KTAR was not the only place political parties intruded, however.

UUCA notwithstanding, by the 1980s and 1990s, student politics had become deeply partisan, as each camp sought its champions, although the contemporaneous rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also offered new potential models for collective action and allies. Allowing partisanship to develop on campus is consistent with a government strategy of containment, which typically seeks to keep engagement within "appropriate" channels, while insisting that students are unsuited for political involvement off campus. It is more students' outside than their internal involvement that authorities fear might galvanize and unite students. Such divisions did, in fact, develop on campus, with the rise of an increasingly more visible, vocal, and critically engaged Islamist, and to a lesser extent, Catholic, orientation, inflecting activities from campus elections to community service. Much of this activism was clearly framed in terms of social justice, thus moving participants' thinking toward a reformist sociopolitical perspective.[110] Even more

[103] "Aku Janji," *Suaritasiswa* 5 (July 29, 1975), p. 1.

[104] *Suaritasiswa* 15, special edition (December 3, 1975).

[105] Interviews with Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004.

[106] "Anak Melayu ITM Disingkir!!" *Suaritsiswa* 20 (February 13, 1976), pp. 1–2 (emphasis in original).

[107] "OPKIM 3," *Suaritasiswa* 25 (March 14, 1978), p. 1.

[108] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003, Kuala Lumpur.

[109] Interview with Chai Chee Fatt and Lee Yenting, March 5, 2006.

[110] Interviews with Anna Har, December 20, 2003, Petaling Jaya; Charles Hector, December 11, 2003; and E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003.

than partisan ties, it was this specifically religious timbre that most clearly characterized the campus from the mid-1970s on and marked the limits of state control, and that carried the broadest implications for the nation as a whole. We consider these dimensions in turn—the place of parties, new models of engagement, and especially the rise of *dakwah* and other religious mobilization—to understand the evolution of students' identity and activism and of intellectual containment.

Partisanship on Campus

> Politics is open to all, but don't play politics in universities.[111]

The UUCA effectively quashed the possibility of aboveground student involvement in parties and elections. Some students still engaged in politics, but covertly. For instance, several Muslim students, mostly Kelantanese, entered a *kampung* in 1981 to campaign for PAS under the guise of peddling cloth and Qur'anic verses. They faced arrest.[112] Five years later, over fifty students received "show cause" letters (notices of violations) for having campaigned for "certain political parties" in the recent elections.[113] (Chinese students still campaigned for the MCA in a subsequent by-election, though, on behalf of a lecturer who resigned from UKM to contest.[114]) That year, too, a group of USM students (in league with a lecturer) put up posters urging workers not to vote BN.[115]

More substantial and sustained than these interventions, though, was an increasingly partisan slant to campus elections—not via the sort of student parties mooted since the 1940s, but through the stealthy intrusion of national ones. Particularly, as the UUCA curbed independent, active student organizations, control of the union, however diminished, became the only way for students to wield real influence with the administration and with official publications.[116] Still, SRC elections were initially quiet affairs. Sapped by the recent crackdown, UM's first SRC elections in 1975, for instance, drew only 27 candidates for 24 positions, and voter turnout was under 20 percent.[117] Interest soon perked up, but with marked racial dynamics. Indeed, Indian students at UKM opted to boycott campus elections in 1987, complaining that as a minority, they could not win any seats.[118]

Across campuses, students tended toward either pro-government or more anti-establishment, Islamist factions after 1975. At UM, for example, students had largely split by the late 1970s into a Malay-and-Islamist camp, and a multiracial, pro-government one (although its actual ties with the BN grew more concrete only after Anwar joined the regime). In 1979, the ABIM-influenced "radicals" of the Barisan Mahasiswa (Students' Front) ran on a platform of mostly national issues and "awakening" students, defeating the more moderate, BN-like Gabungan Mahasiswa

[111] Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahman, quoted in "Beware the Enemies, Students Told," *New Straits Times*, June 19, 1987.

[112] "Mahasiswa Islam Masuk Kampung Kempen PAS," *Utusan Malaysia*, September 21, 1981.

[113] *Star*, September 5, 1986.

[114] Interview with Teresa Kok, March 20, 2006.

[115] Interview with Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004.

[116] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003.

[117] *New Straits Times*, June 27 and July 2, 1975.

[118] Interview with S. Arutchelvan, February 21, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

(Students' Coalition) and its student welfare platform.[119] The next year, though, the latter coalition enjoyed a landslide, in part due to a trend against "overzealous" Islamist groups on almost all campuses, and in part to government sponsorship of non-Muslim challengers.[120] The ricochet continued in 1981, when in an environment of mounting communalism, the tide started to turn anew. At that point, parties were banned to reduce tensions, yet loose clusters still formed; the clampdown simply caused confusion.

That year, a multiracial team headed by Shabery Cheek[121] (later an UMNO cabinet minister) contested on issues of student welfare and awareness. Inspired both by supportive NGOs cropping up off campus and by the implosion of the Islamist bloc when it took too hard-line an approach, Shabery and fellow Islamist students (for instance, Husam Musa, today a leading member of PAS) worked to find "common values" and objectives with which to build rapport with non-Muslims. Some of the more progressive non-Muslim students from the previous council soon joined them in a "Dynamic Group," forging a direct—and successful—challenge to the incumbent pro-government coalition.[122] The still-popular team chose not to run the following year, lacking both time and patience, but the multiracial team that stood instead—including Ismail Sabri Yaakob and Charles Hector (both later members of parliament, from the BN and DAP, respectively)—won unopposed. Meanwhile, Shabery went on to become president of PKPIM that year, in an upset win against a more conservative candidate from UM's Akademi Islam. (While the latter institute was an early part of Mahathir's Islamization program, its students, ironically, leaned toward PAS.)[123]

Competition for control of the student unions heated up further through the decade. At UKM, for instance, one coalition allied with UMNO (Tindakan Siswa Bersatu), one with PAS (Islam Pengalamat Ummah), and a third specifically with Anwar (Angkatan Tindakan Mahasiswa) in the mid-1980s.[124] PAS-linked Islamist activists were generally ascendant, but shared power with non-Malays at least at UM and USM.[125] Yet within a few years, "liberal, multi-racial, nationalist" groups started to defeat Islamist groups at UKM and USM (and less so at UM).[126] This apparent new spirit of moderation was not entirely organic. Campus authorities had implemented changes—from new nomination procedures to minimum grade-point averages required to contest—in an effort to curb the influence of the more extremist groups. In an ironic reversal, the UM administration relaxed rules on campaigning and

[119] *Star*, July 21, 24, and 28, and August 1, 1979; interviews with Shabery Cheek, March 28, 2006, and Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006.

[120] *Malay Mail*, July 18, 1980.

[121] Shabery had taught in ABIM's Yayasan Anda—known for nurturing activism. His hostel-level election as a freshman prompted an immediate ban on first-year students' eligibility for elected office. Interview with Shabery Cheek, March 28, 2006.

[122] Interviews with Shabery Cheek, March 22 and 28, 2006; and Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006. See also *Malay Mail*, July 25, 1981; *Star*, July 3, 1981; and "Pilihanraya UM Berbau Perkauman?" *Watan*, July 7, 1981.

[123] *Star*, July 16, 1982; interviews with Shabery Cheek, March 22, 2006; and Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006.

[124] Interview with S. Arutchelvan, February 21, 2006.

[125] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003.

[126] Zainah Anwar, "Pray Less, Play More," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 147,4 (January 25, 1990): 32–33; also *New Straits Times*, December 15, 1989.

introduced a party system in 1988 to lend "an atmosphere of genuine politics to the elections" and to encourage voting based on leadership qualities rather than (racialized) group affiliations. Candidates were allowed to hold rallies and hang banners and posters with their party's symbol. All but two of twenty-seven candidates for the nine seats that year aligned with one of four parties, although the two frontrunners were the Islamic Students Party, Nadi (rooted in the Muslim Students' Society [PMI, or Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam], and modeled on PAS), and the multiracial Students United Front, BMB (Barisan Mahasiswa Bersatu, modeled on the BN). Oddly, nineteen candidates withdrew at the last minute; the remaining eight were returned unopposed.[127] The next year, with record high turnout, the BMB, led by a former PMI activist, Shamsuddin Moner, defeated Nadi to win the elections. Even the multiracial BMB premised its struggle on Islam, however, and PMI retained "formidable control."[128] The next year, the BMB's Chinese partner withdrew, forming a party modeled on the Chinese-majority DAP (Angkatan Mahasiswa Adil, AMA). The AMA outperformed the BMB that year, yet the Islamist Nadi won the elections (supposedly after a secret pact with the AMA).[129] Power then passed back and forth, the losers not always graceful. In 1991, for example, sulky PMI members made excuses not to attend meetings, denying the necessary quorum to form the SRC; a president was not elected until over a month after the polls.[130] The university's party system came to an abrupt halt in 1992: to further unity and deter communal voting, candidates could no longer mention an affiliation, nor were those details included on the ballot—although results were generally reported in terms of the same parties as before.[131]

Parties and other organizations on campus were not completely divorced from their national-level counterparts. While national parties now rarely considered students an important constituency, these parties still wanted a measure of control.[132] For instance, when MIC head Samy Vellu urged that the UUCA be enforced more strictly to prevent opposition parties from influencing students, Gerakan supported relaxing the act, instead, to allow students to voice their opinions lawfully, but also urged its BN partners to make more of an effort to follow the opposition's lead.[133] By the 1990s, some parties had developed bureaus specifically for outreach among students, UUCA notwithstanding.[134] Even the few national student coalitions tended to be partisan. The Islamist-tinged Barisan Bertindak Mahasiswa Negara (BBMN, National Undergraduates' Action Front), for instance, formed in the mid-1980s to rally student unions around rising graduate unemployment and other issues, was

[127] *New Straits Times*, December 19 and 20, 1989; *Malay Mail*, December 15, 21, and 27, 1988; January 23, 1989; December 15, 1990.

[128] Zainah, "Pray Less, Play More," p. 34.

[129] *Malay Mail*, December 15, 1990; *New Straits Times*, December 19 and 21, 1990; *Star*, December 18, 1991.

[130] *Star*, December 18 and 21, 1991; *Star*, January 22, 1992; *Star*, February 12, 1992.

[131] *Malay Mail*, December 17 and 18, 1992.

[132] Interview with Charles Hector, December 11, 2003.

[133] Claudia Theophilus, "Relax Varsity Act: Gerakan Youth," *Sun*, July 24, 1991.

[134] Interview with PKPIM leaders Azuan Effendy Zaira and Muhammad Hisyamudin Baharudin, December 19, 2003, Kuala Lumpur.

ideologically inclined toward PAS, although institutionally independent.[135] Other student organizations, too, had party ties. For example, USM's CLS maintained informal ties with the DAP, MCA, and Gerakan in the late 1980s.[136] And the MCA purportedly funded the Chinese-based Intervarsity Council (IVC).[137] Especially given this framework—and as is apparent from how many student leaders of the time progressed to public office later—student activism remained a training ground for political involvement and cooptation, even as students found decreasing outlets and encouragement to act in line with a distinct "student" identity.

New Progressive Alternatives: NGOs and Social Justice

Electoral politics was only part of the story. Expressing critical perspectives remained risky. For instance, though socialism had declined as a force in Malaysia both on and off campus, the communist menace was front-page news in UKM's (student-run) student union newsletter in late 1976, seemingly just to keep students on their toes and discourage activism against the state.[138] Yet student engagement at UM and USM in particular enjoyed a minor renaissance in the early 1980s, especially around campus-level matters and issues of human rights and social justice. This temporary upswing aligned with a period of growing vibrancy among off-campus NGOs. A 1987 crackdown, however, including the detention of over one hundred activists under the ISA, obstructed both trends. While demonstrations remained scarce, organizing, letter-writing, leafleting, and awareness-raising continued, much of it quite openly, after a few months' lull.

A particular departure from the past was in the precipitous ebb of internationally oriented activism. Malaysian students' links with most international student unions dwindled as those unions declined by the 1980s, and no longer did mainstream campus publications cover student protests abroad. The year 1989 brought a rare exception: UMSU president Shamsuddin Moner led a small protest at the Chinese embassy against that week's events at Tiananmen Square. The UMSU contingent handed over a memorandum, then police dispersed the gathering after ten minutes. The vice chancellor was unperturbed, deeming the cause reasonable, but Megat Junid, deputy home minister, promised to monitor more closely Malaysians' meddling in internal Chinese affairs.[139] Moreover, a cluster of students in the late 1980s and early 1990s organized activities through regional alliances such as the Asian Students' Association (ASA), particularly on media issues and human rights; links with ASA remained comparatively strong through the 1990s.[140]

Academic staff, too, were more chary of engagement than in the past. Still, a subset of lecturers not only recognized the possibility of educating the public on social issues through their research, but also took it upon themselves to raise

[135] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003; *New Straits Times*, December 1, 1989; Ahmad Lutfi Othman, "Gerakan Mahasiswa Islam: Sejarah Dan Pengiktibarannya," (n.d.).

[136] Interview with Yap Swee Seng, March 6, 2006.

[137] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003.

[138] "Komunis, Sosialis Musuh Kita: Siswa/i Harus Bersiap," *Suaritasiswa* 15 (September 10, 1976), p. 1.

[139] *New Straits Times*, June 9 and 13, 1989.

[140] Interviews with Tian Chua, March 9, 2006 and Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

students' awareness. Some lecturers had returned from studies overseas, keen to challenge racial barriers and make an impact back home; others were educated locally and awakened politically during their studies. Among the lecturers inclined to be politically engaged were some with close ties to labor; several associated with the Penang-based NGO Aliran or the Institute for Social Analysis (INSAN), which was active in critical research and publishing; and previous political detainees. A few authored columns in national publications, as well, for instance, Rustam Sani and Chandra Muzaffar.[141]

The organization of off-campus NGOs in particular—beginning with the Consumers' Association of Penang in 1969, followed by a few in the mid-1970s, then more in the 1980s[142]—which were openly involved with the same sorts of issues that generally engaged students, offered students a new channel for activism, and reinvigorated their efforts toward social justice and community engagement. While most advocacy NGOs developed a comparatively secular, action-oriented approach, they shared characteristics with key student organizations, not least in being largely urban and non-Malay, and in developing alongside cognate, but specifically Islamist, organizations. USM students joined, for instance, an NGO drive against alcoholism around Penang, and were exposed in the process to issues such as hardcore poverty and gangsterism; students also joined a campaign in the early 1990s to save Penang Hill from redevelopment. By the late 1980s, intrigued students could attend events or pursue internships at NGOs like Aliran, and increasing numbers continued with such work after graduation.[143] Even so, few NGOs involved themselves proactively in campus life. An exception was human-rights group Suaram (Suara Rakyat Malaysia, Voice of the Malaysian People). Guided by former student activists such as Tian Chua, Steven Gan, and Premesh Chandran, in the 1990s Suaram developed student internships and forged connections first with Chinese students, then with PAS-leaning ones. Its approach helped to build consciousness and common ground around human-rights issues ranging from the Bakun Dam, an environmentally devastating hydroelectric project in Sarawak state, to the plight of Acehnese refugees. Four students, too, were among those arrested after BN youth violently disrupted the Suaram-linked Second Asia–Pacific Conference on East Timor, in Kuala Lumpur in 1996—the first such student arrests in the 1990s.[144]

Most student organizing, though, was autonomous. For example, in the early 1980s, UMSU organized a boycott of *Pestaria*, the festival surrounding the annual university convocation, to protest its lack of multiculturalism and misdirection of funds. Nearly 80 percent of students joined the boycott and complementary protest events. The administration barred UMSU from orientation-week activities as discontent simmered.[145] In another example, a group of medical students at UM in

[141] Interviews with E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003; and Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003.

[142] See Meredith L. Weiss, "Malaysian NGOs: History, Legal Framework, and Characteristics," in *Social Movements in Malaysia: From Moral Communities to NGOs*, ed. Meredith L. Weiss and Saliha Hassan (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 17–44.

[143] Interviews with Cynthia Gabriel, March 22, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and Yap Swee Seng, March 6, 2006.

[144] Interviews with Tian Chua, March 9, 2006; and Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[145] Interview with Charles Hector, December 11, 2003.

the mid-1970s not only spent holidays and elective attachments studying infestations both in Kuala Lumpur and in rural communities in the Philippines and Bangladesh, but also organized a program under the Medical Students' Society to tutor Malay squatters near campus. This program, which later expanded under UMSU to reach additional communities, was a precursor to the Social Service Club, launched by a diverse group involved with the student union in the early 1980s.[146]

The Social Service Club was part of a broader surge under UMSU, echoing past drives for civic engagement, but with a concertedly anticommunal thrust. The leaders' aim—facilitated by friendly relations among campus communities at the time—was to revive a sense of activism among students. Its activities ranged from calling for repeal of the UUCA to billing the UM authorities for bus rentals (since the campus buses were previously UMSU's purview), and it challenged racial and religious discrimination on campus at a time when, cordiality notwithstanding, most civic engagement among students had a communal bent. (For instance, the MIC and National Union of Plantation Workers then supported UM Tamil Language Society plantation immersion programs, because they introduced English-educated, middle-class Indians to others in their community.[147]) Concerned students read avidly and widely, from Marx and Lenin to Freire and Fanon, and held regular, well-attended study sessions as well as more intensive retreats. The club was a logical vehicle for both civic education and community service. Over two hundred students participated, requiring a near-daily commitment. The initiative lasted five or six years, persisting even as campus politics lost momentum and racialism returned in the late 1980s.[148]

One of the boldest and most enduring of such programs proved the potential of an initial communal lever. In 1987, a group of around ten first-year hostel-mates at UKM started to speak out on issues related to Indian students (then about 8 percent of the student body), from the especially brutal ragging they endured, to caste politics, to corruption in the staging of cultural shows. Deciding they should do something to help those Indians living off campus, too, they drew up a plan for a medical camp. The administration was not impressed—not least since none of the organizers were medical students—and it did not sanction the camp. Instead, the students spent their first-year holidays conducting an unauthorized survey of several plantations. Unnerved by the extent of poverty they encountered, they worked with a sympathetic lecturer to develop a critical, class-oriented perspective. The following year, the students established Parti Tindakan India (PTI, Indian Action Party), modeled on an informal, semi-underground counterpart, the Chinese Consultative Council. PTI drew a prompt warning from the administration.

Spearheaded especially by one of these now-second-year students, S. Arutchelvan (Arul), and for a time allying with the culturally oriented Welfare Committee of the Perwakilan Agama Hindu (Hindu Society) the students stepped up their focus on initiatives involving estates and Indian workers. The committee members were called up for questioning by university authorities on more than one occasion, but held their ground and avoided punishment (apart from scaring off many initial supporters). Those who remained consolidated their efforts as the Jawatankuasa Kebajikan Mahasiswa India (JKMI, Indian Student Welfare

[146] Interview with Kumar Devaraj, March 14, 2006.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Interviews with Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006; and Charles Hector, December 11, 2003.

Committee; the gender-inclusive *Mahasiswa-mahasiswi India* replaced *Mahasiswa India* in the mid-1990s, leaving the acronym intact).

Initially, JKMI focused about equally on activities inside and outside campus, but it soon tilted toward the latter. Its slogan, "From Society We Come, to Society We Go" (*Dari masyarakat kita datang, kepada masyarakat kita pergi*), captured the group's concept. JKMI started off "very Indian," working only on plantation issues, but increasingly came to work also with indigenous communities, urban poor, and other disadvantaged groups, regardless of race. In those early days, the club was a hotspot at UKM, even with an active core of just around fifteen students. Moreover, academics and activism intertwined: work in the community offered grist for theses. When the initial members graduated, they formed the Community Development Council to continue their off-campus engagement, networking with youth and workers' fronts, other student groups, and the Parti Sosialis Malaysia (launched in May 1998), while supporting JKMI. Though small, unregistered (it had only a semiformal agreement with UKM's HEP), and overwhelmingly Indian (and, later, predominantly female), the group remains active today, even as other campaigns have withered.[149]

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL ON CAMPUS

While JKMI espoused a class-based perspective and other campus groups mirrored (secular) NGOs, comparable initiatives had a very different premise: the same era saw a novel burst of religious activism among students, echoing religious revivals across society. Spurring these surges on and off campus were both malaise in the face of Western values, and the vibrancy of *dakwah* (Islamist) activism, which prompted religious revival among the Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu communities. These trends were particularly pronounced among urban, English-educated, middle-class youth.[150] However unintentionally, government policies—for example, shifting policies on control of shrines and churches and the increasing difficulty of acquiring land on which to build them, or the proscription of Malay-language bibles (including those imported from Indonesia, which many Malay-educated Christians had been using)—encouraged cooperation across these faiths. One outcome was the formation of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism in 1983, which kept alert to the challenge of Islamization.[151] Another was a Charismatic Renewal among Christians of various denominations in the 1970s, echoing Catholic and Protestant revivals in the United States; a Hindu revival; and a Buddhist revival spearheaded by Theravada missionary organizations and particularly strong among Chinese undergraduates.[152] Indeed, the campus offered prime terrain for religious revival, enacted in both religious observance and social involvement. Among Malay students, the Malay nationalist camp on campus had

[149] Interviews with S. Arutchelvan, February 21, 2006, Petaling Jaya; and Nalini E. and Puhnipha D., February 25, 2006, Bangi. For the full story, see S. Arutchelvan, *Dari Kuliah Ke Jalan Raya: Kisah Sekumpulan Pelajar UKM* (Kajang, Selangor: Jerit Communications and SIRD, 2007).

[150] Judith Nagata, "Religious Ideology and Social Change: The Islamic Revival in Malaysia," *Pacific Affairs* 53,3 (Autumn 1980): 436–37.

[151] Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension," pp. 405–6, 410–14.

[152] Ibid., pp. 406–9.

lost influence through the 1970s and early 1980s. Its dependence on the state precluded development of an effective, independent leadership and turned off many students. Meanwhile, the Left was battered decisively in the early 1970s, then again in 1987. As "sensitive" issues were purged from the public agenda, the UUCA maintained its curbs on student activity, and the state sought to delegitimate and undercut political critique, religion offered a way for students of all communities to stay connected with society and alert. While these developments spanned religious traditions, they were most notable among Catholics and Muslims.

Catholic Activism

Among non-Malays, Catholic student activism was notably energetic in the 1980s and early 1990s. As early as 1955, UM's Catholic Student Society attempted "to provoke student thought on contemporary social, economic, and religious problems" through its newspaper, *The Challenge*.[153] The group was one of the first to form at UM, succeeding a Medical College Student Christian Movement established even earlier, in 1948.[154] Now, encouraged by particular lecturers and informed by the liberation theology the church as a whole was then debating (a strand of Catholic thought focused on the poor and oppressed), a subset of Catholic students homed in on issues of justice and human rights. The students involved could develop a high level of critical awareness, even if many lost their commitment once they graduated. Importantly, at a time when the campus was deeply divided along racial and religious lines, Catholic student groups brought together Chinese, Indian, Eurasian, and other students (albeit obviously excluding Muslim Malays). Students uncomfortable with communalism or not adept in their purported "mother tongue" could thus find a community based on religion. (That said, Chinese-educated Catholics felt compelled to form their own section of USM's CUS in the 1980s, expanding from a Bible-study group to establish its own camp and seminars.[155]) Muslim students, too, focused increasingly on a specifically religious identity at the same time, so this development did not necessarily mitigate social cleavages on campus so much as redirect them. Indeed, to some extent, theology aside, Catholic activism signaled non-Malays' frustration with increasingly Malay-centric campus and state institutions and, thus, non-Malays' turn to community-based self-help groups.[156]

Two exemplars of this trend were UM's Catholic Students' Society (CSS) and USM's Catholic Undergraduates Society (CUS), both of which combined study and service and fed into national and international Catholic student networks. UM's CSS had around sixty or seventy members in the early 1980s, including a greater percentage of women than in most other societies. A small core group read up on

[153] "Catholics Issue the Challenge," *Malayan Undergrad*, March 1, 1955, p. 6.

[154] K. Kanagaratnam, "Extracurricular Activities in the Period of Transition from College to University, 1940–1955," in *A Symposium on Extracurricular Activities of University Students in Malaya*, ed. A. A. Sandosham ([Malaya]: World University Service, [1954]), p. 21.

[155] Interviews with E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003; Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006; Teresa Kok, March 20, 2006; Charles Hector, December 11, 2003; Anna Har, December 20, 2003; and Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004.

[156] Tham notes a precedent in Malaysian Chinese praxis. Tham Seong Chee, *The Role and Impact of Formal Associations on the Development of Malaysia* (Bangkok: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1977), p. 63.

liberation theology and developed links both with UMSU and with Catholic counterparts serving local universities, to extend their activism further.[157] USM's CUS provided a similar outlet for prayer, analysis, and action. Members of the group visited indigenous urban poor and radical Islamist communities, analyzing those communities' situations in terms of Christianity, and also collaborated with local NGOs on humanitarian projects. By the early 1990s, the CUS had added a Social Involvement Group for more-politically oriented members, although weekly prayer meetings remained the main venue for discussion and planning.[158] Complementing these activities at individual universities was an annual camp organized by the National Coordinating Council for Catholic Students, offering two weeks' immersion in communities that the students would otherwise be unlikely to enter, such as of farmers or squatters, combined with social and theological analysis.[159]

Liberation theology then was very "in" among Catholic students. Although the church offered only limited support—leaving many student activists disillusioned with the hierarchy—the approach had its supporters within the church. Students at UM, for instance, worked with priests at St. Francis Xavier Church in Petaling Jaya and the National Office for Human Development in the 1980s. The church even rented a house near USM to house several students, and the residence served as a base for fellowship, observance, and community-service activities. Moreover, ties with international Catholic student groups sent selected Malaysian activists overseas, for instance, to India or the Philippines, for additional exposure, awareness-raising, and service. Over time, however, the bent of CSS, CUS, and their counterparts changed. Ever more students entered from the charismatic movement, their focus more on individual spirituality than their relationship with God through society, and the more progressive of the socially conscious students splintered off or graduated. Also, religious institutions increasingly encouraged students to conform. In particular, after a number of church workers were detained in the mid-1980s (see below), including the influential Brother Anthony Rogers, head of the National Office for Human Development, the mainstream church in Malaysia began to pull back from its association with the poor and to look increasingly inward.[160]

Yet many of the earlier student activists remained engaged: a cluster from USM formed the Community Action Network and met weekly for years after, while others from UM formed Christians for Justice, later renamed the Society for Christian Reflection.[161] Indeed, while Muslim student activists increasingly aligned with opposition political parties, it was largely a subset of Catholic students who took on alternative jobs and roles in society after graduation. For instance, today former Catholic student activists are disproportionately represented among the leaders and members of Malaysian service and advocacy NGOs, focusing especially on human rights, social justice, and community empowerment.

[157] Interview with E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003.

[158] Interviews with Teresa Kok, March 20, 2006; Cynthia Gabriel, March 22, 2006; and Anna Har, December 20, 2003.

[159] Interview with Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004, Kota Samarahan.

[160] Interviews with Stephen Doss, March 15, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003; Cynthia Gabriel, March 22, 2006; and Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004.

[161] Interviews with Anna Har, December 20, 2003; E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003; Charles Hector, December 11, 2003; and Cynthia Gabriel, March 22, 2006.

Interrupting these progressive initiatives, both secular and religious, was Operasi Lalang (*lalang* is a kind of wild grass), a major government crackdown on opposition parties and social activists that specifically targeted publicly active Catholics. The assault began in Singapore in May and June 1987, when Operation Spectrum targeted an alleged "Marxist conspiracy" by arresting and forcing "confessions" (in some cases, after torture and beatings) from twenty-two Catholic activists, dramatists, and others.[162] Catholics (including students) in Malaysia organized meetings and criticized the bishop of Singapore for not doing more to intervene, thus displeasing local clergy.[163] Malaysia's Operasi Lalang followed in October 1987: around one hundred politicians, lawyers, social activists, artists, and academics were detained under the ISA, and the publishing permits of three newspapers—the English-language *Star*, the Chinese-language *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, and the Malay *Watan*—were suspended. With limited parliamentary debate, the Malaysian government issued a white paper on the episode, replete with extracts from detainees' "confessions." Defining liberation theology as a strategy to foment class struggle rather than a Vatican-endorsed idea of liberation from personal and social sin, the official document alleged Marxist infiltration of Christian organizations. It cited also plans for military training and efforts—not just by Catholics—to stir up racial and religious animosities.[164] Mahathir pinned the latter efforts especially on PAS and the DAP. Such tensions, he cautioned, risked reigniting the "chaos" of May 1969, especially in the context of recession and rising unemployment.[165]

Students were not targeted, but news of the arrests reverberated on campus. For one thing, the government alleged that the MCP had "tried to resuscitate militant activities among students, especially Malays."[166] The white paper cited meetings in Beijing in 1980–81 between party leader Chin Peng and ex-students Hishamuddin Rais and Mohd. Yunus bin Lebai Ali (who was purportedly tasked with swaying Malay students in London toward communism), a series of events in 1984 commemorating the tenth anniversary of the 1974 student protests, and subsequent activities bringing together undergraduates and opposition politicians. The government alleged, too, that detained "Marxist" lecturers, including UKM's Mohamad Nasir Hashim and UPM's Chee Heng Leng, had worked "to influence the masses, especially the workers," and that former UK-based student leaders joined forces with such groups as the Selangor Graduates Society and Aliran to promote socialism through theater.[167] Moreover, the Catholic Students' Society was among the groups charged with espousing Marxism as liberation theology.[168]

Activist students were shocked and fearful. Many of the most effective opposition and civil society leaders had been arrested, decimating the Chinese

[162] For the rather bizarre details, see Michael D. Barr, "Singapore's Catholic Social Activists: Alleged Marxist Conspirators," in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, ed. Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp. 228–47.

[163] Interview with Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004.

[164] For the original white paper, see K. Das and SUARAM, eds., *The White Paper on the October Affair*.

[165] *Malaysian Digest* 18,11 (November 1987): 4.

[166] Government of Malaysia, "Towards Preserving National Security," p. 140.

[167] Ibid., pp. 140–43.

[168] Ibid., p. 142.

education and Catholic movements and putting all critics on notice amid rumors of further arrests to come.[169] Regardless, some organizing happened: a support group—progenitor of the human rights group Suaram—was formed by members of NGOs like Aliran and at least some unaffiliated students to organize discussions and assist detainees' families.[170] Solidarity among the detainees themselves buttressed cooperation across opposition parties, especially since the BN was then weak due to a serious split within UMNO. (A high court judgment in February 1988 ruled UMNO to be an unlawful society, paving the way for a breakaway faction to organize a challenge as Semangat '46.) Meanwhile, the crackdown helped to crystallize opposition to the ISA and support for interracial cooperation on campus, seen, for instance, in informal but noticeable overtures between the DAP-leaning and PAS-leaning factions involved in student council elections.[171] Overall, though, the crackdown did more to dampen protest, particularly among Catholics, than to engender new resistance.

Dakwah

The rise of Islamist activism, on the other hand, was far more sustained. Islamism among Malay students was hardly unified: a range of sometimes rival, spiritually and politically distinct organizations reflected the fragmentation of Malaysian Islam broadly. That said, at least until the early 1980s, groups that tied Islam to social issues such as poverty and corruption dominated. Most of these groups were linked with ABIM, which in turn depended heavily on students for a platform and constituency.[172] (Notably, although Catholic and Islamist student organizations paralleled one another in many of their goals and methods, these two groups of student activists rarely interacted with each other beyond agreeing to certain electoral pacts.[173]) For students, especially after 1974, pressed by ethnicism and class contradictions,[174] Islam offered an important, hard to suppress, "parapolitical outlet," at once "a genuinely religious movement" and "a critique of the bureaucratic state, its economic policies and its deracinating cultural effects."[175]

After its first rumblings on campus in the mid-1960s, Malaysia's Islamic resurgence took strong root in the early 1970s, at a time of growing Islamic activism worldwide. The 1967 Arab–Israeli war and its aftermath spurred development of a global infrastructure for Islamic solidarity, which was reinforced by the struggles of Indonesian and Southern Thai Muslims, the first oil shock of 1973, political change in Pakistan, and the Afghan resistance. Notwithstanding differences between Iran's predominantly Shia Muslim community and Malaysia's Sunni Muslims, Iran's Islamic Revolution was important not just to students, but also to ABIM and PAS. Anwar was among the first foreign observers Iran invited in March 1979, and the revolution reinvigorated PAS, then at a low ebb after its ouster from the BN in 1977.

[169] Interviews with S. Arutchelvan, February 21, 2006; and Yap Swee Seng, March 6, 2006.

[170] Interview with Andrew Aeria, August 17, 2004.

[171] Interview with Yap Swee Seng, March 6, 2006.

[172] Jomo, Hassan, and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia," p. 154.

[173] Interview with E. Terence Gomez, December 17, 2003.

[174] Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," p. 80.

[175] Clive S. Kessler, "Malaysia: Islamic Revivalism and Political Disaffection in a Divided Society," *Southeast Asia Chronicle* 75 (October 1980): 3, 9.

The influence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran drove the evolution of PAS from a more nationalist and moderate leadership to the very Iranian notion of leadership by *ulama* (religious scholars).[176] Students' cachet and mobilizational advantages combined with the autonomy and legitimacy of Islam to make *dakwah* activism "conspicuously tenacious and successful."[177] By 1974, *dakwah* had made a real impact, especially in Selangor and the newly created Federal Territory, where so many civil servants and university students suspicious of material, Western elements were concentrated.[178] Moreover, national leaders were then quite tolerant, seeing in *dakwah* a means to overcome problems of communism, moral decay, indiscipline, and drugs, especially on campus.[179] A second wave began later in the 1970s, as hundreds of Malaysian students returned from England, where they had been influenced by more radical movements such as Egypt's Ikhwan-ul-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) and Pakistan's Jamaati-I-Islami.[180] By 1979, UM alone had eleven *persatuan Islam* (Muslim unions): six at the hostel level, three at the faculty level, and two (including the largest, PMI) at the campus level.[181]

This resurgence exacerbated trends toward racial polarization already approaching crisis levels in the late 1960s. Although couched in terms of religion rather than race, most students involved were Malay, so the overlap of "Malay" and "Muslim" amplified the salience of racial identity, and the increasing adoption of Islamic dress and food highlighted ethnic distinctions,[182] particularly as the Malay language lost its place as an ethnic marker after the 1970s. Islam came increasingly to define the Malay community. Institutional shifts, especially linked with the policy of *penyerapan nilai-nilai Islam*, or assimilation of Islamic values in public institutions, launched in the early 1980s, both followed and furthered these trends. For instance, UM's HEP started offering a course on Foundations of Islam (*Asas Islam*) at the hostels in 1977, attracting about a thousand participants within just a couple years.[183] UM incorporated Akademi Islam a few years later, made Islamic civilization a compulsory subject in 1984[184] (a controversial move, since the decision was made "to a certain extent by people outside academia"[185]), then revised its dress code the following year to ban "indecent" attire (even t-shirts). However, campus authorities drew the line at *purdah* (concealment of women), which was being pressed by

[176] Interviews with Shabery Cheek, March 22, 2006; and Khalid Jaafar, December 6, 2005. See also Nagata, "Religious Ideology," pp. 412–13.

[177] Kessler, "Islamic Revivalism," p. 9.

[178] Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia," *Asian Survey* 21,10 (October 1981), pp. 1040–59.

[179] Mohd. Daud bin Ibrahim, "Kegiatan Dakwah Islamiah Di Pusat-Pusat Pengajian Tinggi Tempatan" (paper presented at the seminar Dakwah Islamiah di Pusat-pusat Pengajian Tinggi Tempatan, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, Serdang, November 9–11, 1979), p. 9.

[180] Zainah Anwar, *Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: Dakwah among the Students* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1987), pp. 24–25.

[181] Mohd. Daud, "Kegiatan Dakwah Islamiah," appendix A, pp. 3–4; *Malay Mail*, September 12, 1989.

[182] Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Pengislaman Dan Polarisasi Kaum," *Dewan Budaya* 10,3 (March 1988): 30.

[183] Mohd. Daud, "Kegiatan Dakwah Islamiah," appendix A, pp. 2–3.

[184] *Star*, July 21, 1984.

[185] Chandra, *Freedom in Fetters*, p. 143.

Islamist groups extreme enough for the authorities to consider them a political threat. Face-obscuring veils and gloves were thus prohibited for all but medical students in labs and clinics. The vice chancellor warned that violators risked expulsion, adding a requirement in 1986 that students sign an agreement during orientation week eschewing *purdah* at certain places on campus. The dress code was expanded in 1991 to include even off-campus hostels; the ban on full *purdah* was extended also to lower schools and the civil service as of March 1985, justified as necessary for security reasons, but unevenly enforced.[186]

The message of *dakwah* activism was overt. UKM's student union was overwhelmingly Malay-Muslim, and the cover story of its newsletter in May 1977, for instance, exhorted students to "Return to Islam" as the only sure way to pursue justice and truth.[187] Moreover, the movement was transformative on multiple dimensions: for its sincere religious character, the sheer scope of mobilization, the challenge Islamism posed to secular nationalism, and the social and economic forces at stake.[188] Still today, recruitment to *dakwah* starts early: organizations send representatives to secondary schools to prepare students for campus life and secure new members. Some groups are enormous. PKPIM, for instance, claims twenty thousand members, around half of whom remain engaged (especially in ABIM) after graduation.[189] Most *dakwah* organizations have some sort of *usrah* (study groups), each with generally no more than ten students of a single sex, that meet regularly, generally off campus to evade restrictions. Every campus has scores of such groups. It is here that students discuss ideology, strategy, and Islamic knowledge, thereby nourishing the group's solidarity and affirming their commitment to it.[190] Activists also travel across the region for meetings, conferences, and relief efforts; organize, attend, and teach leadership training programs; and participate in community service activities. For example, PMIUM organizes *dakwah* courses each year during the school holidays, and the Religious Section of each hostel's student council may organize additional talks or activities. In fact, the exclusion of other normal, non-*dakwah* student activities at several UM hostels controlled by *dakwah* activists led university authorities to develop a plan in 1984 to counter such influence. Other impacts aside, *dakwah* may offer confusing messages to female undergraduates, for instance, by pressing for a level of gender-role differentiation, including women's domestication, that is at odds with the egalitarian ethos and career goals university education usually fosters. One study, for instance, found that the extent to which women embraced *dakwah* ideology correlated with their acceptance of subordination, making their self-assertion, especially in the public domain, less likely.[191]

By the mid-1980s, around two-thirds of Malay university students (then totaling around 40,000) were "committed at some level or other to *dakwah*"[192]—although a

[186] *New Straits Times*, October 15, 1985, and June 25, 1986; *Malay Mail*, October 16, 1985; *Star*, June 24, 1986, and March 11, 1991; and Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 33–34.

[187] "Kembali kepada Islam—Fuad Hasan," *Suaritasiswa* 22 (May 31, 1977), p. 1.

[188] A. C. Milner, "Rethinking Islamic Fundamentalism in Malaysia," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 20,2 (1986): 51–61.

[189] Interview with PKPIM leaders, December 19, 2003.

[190] Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 49–55.

[191] A. Nilufer Narli, "Malay Women in Tertiary Education: Trends of Change in Female Role Ideology" (PhD thesis, University Sains Malaysia, 1986), pp. 288–92.

[192] Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 33–34.

more conservative 1987 estimate suggested that the same two hundred students or so participated in seminars, debates, and other events,[193] even if many more felt some degree of affinity for the movement. As it developed, *dakwah* appealed most strongly to two groups. One was young, Western-educated Muslims, many of them enrolled in the sciences and attending school on government scholarships. While studying abroad, these students interacted with students from other Muslim countries (especially Pakistan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia) and participated in their activities, met visiting *ulama*, and were inspired by publications from, for instance, the Islamic Centre in Geneva. In the UK, most were organized under the Federation of Students' Islamic Societies (FOSIS); in North America, the Muslim Students' Association (MSA); and in Australia, the Australian Federation of Muslim Students' Association (AFMSA). The students returned home more committed to Islam and less secular in orientation than when they had left Malaysia.[194]

The other group comprised Malays who flooded local universities under NEP quotas and scholarships, gravitating not toward the sciences, as intended, but arts, especially Islamic Studies.[195] The classic explanation for their engagement in Islamic organizations stresses anomie: many of these students, finding themselves in an alien, urban environment, resented being forced to conform to its norms, especially since the rewards for doing so were increasingly uncertain. *Dakwah* groups offered both "a reaffirmation of fundamental and reassuring values in a disorientatingly unfamiliar environment and ... a means of expressing the resentments and frustrations that living in so stressful a situation provokes."[196] Over time, the increasing numbers of Islamic Studies graduates fed the cycle, "invariably find[ing] employment by creating more *dakwah*."[197]

By the late 1970s, the movement hence came to rely less on the teachings of an Arabic- and religious-educated group than on youths educated in English and Malay, locally or abroad, and respected less for religious knowledge per se than for their solid understanding of Islam as a way of life and their concrete ideas for the re-Islamization of society. Yet even the urban, middle-class-based ABIM still included a phalanx of graduates of the renowned Egyptian Islamist university, Al-Azhar, and similar institutions.[198] Moreover, the Malay-educated initially lacked access to works by influential Islamic thinkers such as Syed Qutb and Maududi; the only available translations of such works were in English (although many classes even at all-Malay ITM remained in English well into the 1970s, regardless).[199]

While some *dakwah* organizations inclined more toward social engagement than spirituality, aspects of dress, food, and comportment gained new salience across the board, fostering a high degree of peer-group conformity and a reevaluation of "anti-Islamic" elements in Malay culture. The groups with the greatest impact, however, were a small number of nationally organized ones, centered among urban, educated

[193] Ahmad Lutfi Othman, "Gerakan Siswa Menghadapi Cabaran Masa Kini," *Dewan Budaya* 9,12 (December 1987): 37.

[194] Mohamad, "Islamic Revivalism," pp. 1042–43; Nagata, "Religious Ideology," p. 411.

[195] Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," p. 79; Kessler, "Islamic Revivalism," p. 4.

[196] Kessler, "Islamic Revivalism," pp. 8–9.

[197] Nagata, "Religious Ideology," p. 424.

[198] Mohamad, "Islamic Revivalism," pp. 1040–42, 1046.

[199] Interview with Khalid Jaafar, December 6, 2005.

Malays, particularly Darul Arqam, Jamaat Tabligh, and ABIM.[200] The first two, in particular, stayed relatively apolitical, although Arqam's autarkic stance (launched in the 1960s and centered on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, the group promoted an austere, self-sufficient communal and Islamist lifestyle), immense popularity, and concentration among civil servants and university (especially UKM) staff worried the state. Arqam had some student members, as well, and ran two houses for them at UM (one for men, one for women), but most members were more concerned with personal religiosity than with politics. Arqam enjoyed a growth spurt when PAS joined the BN in the 1970s.[201] Mission-oriented, all-male Jamaat Tabligh was less influential on campus, but its focus on intellectual analysis, rejection of Western values, and intense devotion appealed to many youths.[202] ABIM was both more a force on campus and more political than Jamaat Tabligh, especially when ABIM aligned with PAS or, later, with UMNO.[203]

Dakwah permeated both campus and the broader polity, helping to shape the government's Islamization drive of the 1980s–90s. Both Arqam and ABIM targeted "young anti-establishment students"; ABIM, in particular, even though it was an association for graduates, relied on student support.[204] It helped both that so many graduates of ABIM-run private schools went on to active roles in PKPIM as university students,[205] and that by the late 1970s most core activists in the 35,000-strong ABIM were lecturers at UM or UKM, especially in Islamic Studies.[206] Taking cues especially from Pakistan and Egypt, ABIM advocated for an Islamic state and socioeconomic institutions—contesting colonial, secular traditions—and a stress on Islam rather than Malay chauvinism (although the organization's less-public discourse still waffled on this point).[207] ABIM thrived as PAS's temporary domestication under the BN (1972–77) opened up new space for anti-establishment Islamic groups. The organization took on a more overtly partisan stance in the late 1970s, supporting PAS in state and federal elections once it left the BN. Three top ABIM leaders contested the 1978 general elections on the PAS ticket. Younger sibling PKPIM joined the fray, too, mobilizing against the then-UMNO-controlled Peninsular Malays' Students' Union (GPMS).[208] Anwar and ABIM led a coalition that successfully opposed the government's response, which had been to introduce amendments to the Societies Act to identify and curb "political societies." Yet when

[200] Nagata, "Religious Ideology," pp. 414–17.

[201] Ibid., pp. 418–20; Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 36–37; Mohamad, "Islamic Revivalism," p. 1048; and Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," pp. 80–85.

[202] Nagata, "Religious Ideology," pp. 421–23, 434; Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 37–38.

[203] On contemporaneous developments in PAS, see, among others, Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," pp. 93–102; Kessler, "Islamic Revivalism," pp. 6–7; and Meredith L. Weiss, "The Changing Shape of Islamic Politics in Malaysia," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 4,1 (January–April 2004): 139–73.

[204] Even PKPIM is not exclusive to students per se. Its leaders, based off campus, are generally recent graduates, and the organization and its state-level subsidiaries are under the Registrar of Societies rather than the universities. As a registered NGO, PKPIM accepts allocations from the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Malaysian Youth Council. Interview with PKPIM leaders, December 19, 2003.

[205] Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," p. 86.

[206] Nagata, "Religious Ideology," pp. 423–26.

[207] Mohamad, "Islamic Revivalism," pp. 1046–47; Nagata, "Religious Ideology," p. 427.

[208] Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," p. 88.

the newly installed Mahathir administration announced its embrace of Islamic values in 1981, coupled with anti-imperialistic "Look East" and "Buy British Last" policies, ABIM voiced only tentative support and foreswore partisan affiliation for the following year's elections.[209] At that point, Anwar joined UMNO, coincident with a leadership crisis in PAS, whose more nationalist old guard was displaced by a more-religious, often Arabic-educated cohort, including four from ABIM. Many Muslim students, already drifting toward less "establishment" alternatives, accorded PAS new credibility.[210] These allegiances came into relief when around fifty students gathered illegally in early 1985 to watch a video of the funeral of PAS supporter Othman Talib, who had been killed in an UMNO/PAS clash on the eve of a by-election the previous month. Nine UM students faced disciplinary action as a result of the video screening.[211]

Other *dakwah* groups, too, flourished on campus. PKPIM remained active in spiritual and social causes, retaining roots in the issues that grew out of a more-radical campus of the 1960s, from which environment PKPIM developed, with members primarily from UM and teacher-training colleges.[212] The Islamic Representative Council (IRC, now Jamaah Islah Malaysia, JIM), established in Britain in the mid-1970s among students seeking a more revolutionary counterpart to ABIM, and with ties to Egypt's Ikhwan, dominated many Malay Muslim student organizations overseas within a decade. Competition between IRC and ABIM then traveled to Malaysia by way of graduates working as lecturers in science, medicine, and engineering. The small but vocal Suara Islam had a similar profile to IRC.[213] Meanwhile, the PAS-linked Islamic Republic, an especially large and politically active group, surpassed ABIM's clout as of 1983,[214] although PMI subsequently took the lead. Yet among both students and others, many who might have aligned with PAS (if not for its temporary accommodation with the BN) eschewed politics, focusing more on intellectual and social dimensions of their faith.[215]

All sorts of *dakwah* groups, though, gravitated toward political positions to at least some extent. Unlike the nationalist UMNO, *dakwah* groups tended toward a universal or international approach, represented in links with transnational Islamic organizations, their receipt of material support (especially from Saudi Arabia), and their embrace of ideological influences from Egypt (especially Ikhwan) and Pakistan (especially Maududi's ideas on Islamic statehood).[216] Campus *dakwah* groups tend to style themselves specifically as part of both an international student legacy and a

[209] Ibid., pp. 85–89; Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 104–5.

[210] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003; Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 38–43.

[211] *Star*, February 24, 1985.

[212] Nagata, "Religious Ideology," pp. 409–10; and interviews with Khalid Jaafar, December 6, 2005; and PKPIM leaders, December 19, 2003.

[213] Interviews with Shabery Cheek, March 22, 2006; and PKPIM leaders, December 19, 2003. See also Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," pp. 100–1.

[214] Zainah, *Islamic Revivalism*, pp. 34–35.

[215] Kessler, "Islamic Revivalism," p. 8.

[216] Interview with Shabery Cheek, March 22, 2006.

burgeoning *ummah* (Islamic community). They still champion Malays, but qua Muslims, tackling "backwardness" through moral strengthening.[217]

As *dakwah* gained steam through the 1980s, non-Malays were increasingly marginalized from campus-level student leadership,[218] and even nonpartisan campus Islamist groups tended to take a hard line on social issues. For instance, UMSU president Ismail Sabri Yaakob called for a boycott in 1983 of UM's annual Pestaria Festival since several programs—especially a dinner, dance, and concert—were "un-Islamic" and contra "national culture." The administration shrugged off the charges and warned that they would enforce the UUCA in the event there was any "havoc." Indeed, the outgoing UMSU secretary-general claimed that "groups outside the union are exploiting the issue of the *pestaria* and tarnishing the union's image." With the stalls fully booked, half by students, he traced the boycott to personality clashes among union leaders.[219] The next year, Malay students abstained from the festival since the fundraising and prizes veered toward gambling.[220] And again the following year, signs and banners at UM urging students to shun the Pestaria Festival as "capitalist" prompted a warning from the vice chancellor. This last campaign came close on the heels of protests at UM and UKM against a pop concert that was criticized as not just un-Islamic, but intellectually bereft. Ungku Aziz dismissed these complaints as "ridiculous," scoffing, "we don't want people to feel that Big Brother is watching all the time."[221]

Protests against popular culture became something of a trope, however. The year 1989 was especially notable, with at least five demonstrations across three universities, involving nearly two thousand students and various penalties.[222] An ITM art and design student exhibition early in the year was cancelled when eighty robed students stationed themselves, praying and chanting against such inappropriate entertainment, in front of the outdoor stage. In August 1989, PMIUM petitioned the vice chancellor to prohibit moral decadence in the form of public displays of affection, revealing clothes, and entertainment activities devoid of intellectual or academic value.[223] And in September, PMIUM capped off a spate of demonstrations with a thousand-strong protest at UM against a concert by chanteuse Sheila Majid. (Although not involved with the demonstration, UMSU also opposed the concert on the grounds that it lacked financial, cultural, or academic merit, rather than due to any inherent sinfulness.) The fracas degenerated to the point of flying flowerpots. An unsympathetic Anwar, the education minister, called the spate of protests "unhealthy" and the protesters' confrontational approach unacceptable. Vice chancellor Syed Hussein Alatas was more to the point: "Those who do not like music can stay out of campus!"[224] Twenty-two students were arrested, including two held for a week under the ISA, and over three dozen faced charges under the UUCA. The affair dragged on through several sittings of the disciplinary committee, six appeals to the education minister, fines, at least two suspensions, and challenges to the very legality of the proceedings.[225] Yet plans were afoot within months for another rally against a rock concert.[226] Five years later, Nadi (a.k.a. PMI) led fifteen hundred students in protesting an "immoral and unIslamic" concert at UM by singer M. Nasir. The crowd dispersed after UMSU leader Ghazali Jaafar promised to work with the administration to bar future concerts.[227]

While there were few internationally directed student protests post-1974, nearly all had an Islamist slant. For instance, around three thousand UM students prayed and rallied at the Soviet Embassy in 1979 against the USSR's invasion of Muslim Afghanistan.[228] (UMSU condemned Soviet policy again in 1983, joining the DAP and Socialist Democratic Party in opposing Soviet support for Vietnamese aggression in Indochina and Thailand.[229]) The Middle East remained an especial draw, although the students' stance, however critical, largely mirrored the government's. Over two thousand students protested at the US Embassy in 1982 after the Sabra and Shatila massacres.[230] UMSU also organized a Palestinian awareness night that year, featuring a film screening and a presentation by a representative of the PLO, highlighting the situation in Lebanon. UMSU members returned to the embassy in 1986, after the United States attacked Libya.[231] Salman Rushdie's publication of the *Satanic Verses* in 1989 sparked an officially sanctioned gathering at UM of around two hundred students, replete with twenty-three speakers. The crowd got rambunctious, however, and broached other issues—from the UUCA, to a golf course project, to a gas leak in Malacca, to the lottery—and thus Anwar lost patience, insisting that students "are free to express their views, even to the extent of criticising Government policies," but only "at proper forums."[232] All along, non-Muslims (including in UMSU's multiracial leadership) championed some of the same issues, for instance, framing the Palestinian struggle as multiracial and multireligious, rather than just a Muslim cause.[233] Indeed, it was Aliran that sponsored some of the activities in which USM students joined to protest the first (US–Iraq) Gulf War, in 1991.[234]

Concerned especially about the possibility of "false Islamic teachings" or distortions, as well as PAS's widening base, the government moved to undermine dissent. UM Islamic Studies professor Lutpi Ibrahim, for instance, was detained in

[217] See Kamil Ayub Mustaffa, "Penegasan Arah Perjuangan Pelajar," paper presented at the Konvensyen Pelajar Islam Se-Malaysia (Sempena Perayaan Jubli Perak PKPIM), Maktab Kerjasama Malaysia, Petaling Jaya, November 14–16, 1987.

[218] Jomo, Hassan, and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia," p. 154.

[219] *Star*, July 6 and 8, and August 10, 1983. *New Straits Times*, August 9, 1983.

[220] *Berita Harian*, August 23, 1984.

[221] *Star*, August 10, 1985; *New Straits Times*, August 14, 1985.

[222] *Star*, October 26, 1989.

[223] Zainah, "Pray Less, Play More," p. 34.

[224] *Malay Mail*, September 11, 1989.

[225] Ibid.; *Star*, September 12, 22, and 24, and October 11 and 26, 1989; *New Straits Times*, October 11 and 20, 1989; interview with Anwar Ibrahim, April 25, 2006.

[226] *New Straits Times*, December 27, 1989.

[227] *Star*, December 15 and 16, 1994.

[228] Interview with Khalid Jaafar, December 6, 2005; *New Straits Times*, January 12, 1980; Jomo and Ahmad Shabery, "Malaysia's Islamic Movements," p. 153.

[229] *New Straits Times*, April 18, 1983.

[230] During the Lebanese civil war, Christian Lebanese forces, assisted at least indirectly by Israeli troops, killed hundreds or thousands (estimates vary wildly) of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in Beirut's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Malaysian students held the US responsible as Israel's close ally and supporter, even though the US condemned the attacks.

[231] *New Straits Times*, September 23, 1982; interview with Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006.

[232] *New Straits Times*, March 2 and 4, 1989; *Star*, March 4, 1989.

[233] Interviews with Charles Hector, December 11, 2003; and Rajen Devaraj, March 14, 2006.

[234] Interview with Anna Har, December 20, 2003.

November 1997 for spreading Shiah teachings,[235] and crackdowns on Arqam in 1994 and 1996 included the detention of at least one other university lecturer.[236] Fighting fire with fire, UMNO established its own parallel *dakwah* organizations, tightened control of religious education, touted the coupling of Islam and economic development, and denounced as ungrateful Malay scholarship students in Britain who rejected the NEP in September 1979 as materialist, Western-influenced, and too focused on the Malay bourgeoisie.[237] Fearing challenges both to its own privilege and to Malaysia's modernization, the government offered responses ranging from expressions of disapproval to outright suppression.[238] Students studying abroad were deemed especially susceptible, so the government organized special classes for selected students to inoculate them against going astray, then sent special officials, well versed in Islam, overseas to check on those vulnerable students.[239] The clampdown on students overseas "who want to overthrow the Government by force" (indicated, for example, by their branding politicians as infidels) intensified by the mid-1980s, with threats to recall them or revoke their scholarships—threats that were nevertheless cushioned by reminders from government officials that students were "free to criticise the Government."[240]

Such measures curbed and redirected activism, but did not quell engagement. For example, the United States had supplanted Britain as the primary destination for Malaysian students by the early 1980s, reaching a peak in 1986, when about 24,000 students were studying abroad in the United States.[241] About half of those students were state-sponsored *bumiputera*, and a large percentage were involved with *dakwah*. Anwar came to the United States to establish the Malaysian Islamic Study Group in 1976 to unite *dakwah* groups; it attracted as many as around two thousand students to its annual *muktamar* (convention). ABIM North America splintered off after Anwar joined UMNO, and PAS and UMNO also had their own clubs. In 1989 alone, around one thousand students (15 percent of all Malay students then in the United States) met for *muktamar* at three sites in Missouri—and by that time, the movement had already mellowed and dwindled, not least due to closer government screening and incentives to focus just on academics (compounded by the recession of the mid-1980s, which culled overseas students).[242] In sum, *dakwah* activism proved pivotally significant for its ability to recenter both a (considerably transnational) collective identity among students and the parameters and discourse of communalism. Importantly, too, Islamism could not be suppressed in the same way as was the Left, however dissident the Islamist leanings. Rather, unable to contain this particular intellectual and activist strand, the state joined the bandwagon: students

[235] Koh Swe Yong, *Malaysia: 45 Years under the Internal Security Act*, trans. Agnes Khoo (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2004), p. 156.

[236] Ibid., pp. 178–79.

[237] Nagata, "Religious Ideology," pp. 429–32.

[238] Mohamad, "Islamic Revivalism," pp. 1051–52.

[239] Ibid., p. 1054.

[240] "Decision Only Aimed at Militant Students: Musa," *Star*, March 1, 1984.

[241] Pamela Sodhy, "Malaysia and the United States in the 1980s," *Asian Survey* 27,10 (October 1987): 1092.

[242] Susumu Awanohara, "Among the Believers," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 147,4 (January 25, 1990): 34–35; also personal communication with Yusmadi Yusoff, January 30, 2006 (via email).

substantially led a trend toward Islamization across state and society, albeit less qua "students" than "Muslims."

Situating Students and the Campus

> The leaders of the masses seem to have stopped
> Leading. Now you are left with the masses.[243]

Overall, this period was marked by a certain pragmatism on campus. Different communities of students each searched for a niche, amidst shifts in both the racialized class system and the place of the university within the broader polity. Encouraged both by prevailing socioeconomic conditions and by disparaging official discourse, student activists tended no longer to style themselves as elites or even as intellectuals. Emmerson argued in the late 1960s that just getting into a university conferred sufficient status on a student in a developing state "to blur the influence of his social origin on his political attitudes and activism."[244] By the 1980s, although still only a small minority of the population pursued higher education, being a student no longer carried the same cachet in Malaysia. Moreover, while critical analysis of social issues still inspired a fair proportion of activism, this analysis was increasingly informed by faith, with students expected to contribute to society on the basis of their religious, not student, identity. Hence, the most committed of them continued in much the same vein well beyond their student days.

Such activism rejects a sense of students as a privileged class. It proliferated at a time when tertiary education was becoming more common and less a guarantee of stable, high-status employment; when intellectualism was losing its political clout; and when political discourse overall faced debilitating new hurdles. Crucially, too, no longer were university students an English-educated elite, markedly isolated and insulated from the mass of society; all now spoke Malay. Such facility of communication meant radical ideas were no longer quarantined as a result of language. Moreover, the UUCA clearly reframed the position of tertiary institutions and students in society; it did not just preclude specific forms of engagement and discipline unruly students, but fundamentally bureaucratized and depoliticized the campus and the category "student" in Malaysia—it provided the infrastructure for intellectual containment. And yet the *idea* of the campus persisted. Hence former Education Minister Anwar, for instance, urged forbearance (although he left the laws intact). He insisted both that the university could not realize its potential as a source of critical ideas if students' freedoms were too constrained[245] and that nothing in the UUCA prohibited the sort of (even controversial) activities that might produce more experienced and broad-minded future leaders, let alone development of critical thinking skills.[246]

What truly encapsulated students' demotion was a semantic shift. By the mid-1980s, UTM had changed its matriculation (student identification) cards to say *pelajar*

[243] Extract from "After the Gods, after the Heroes," in Enright, *Unlawful Assembly*, p. 25.

[244] Donald Emmerson, ed., *Students and Politics in Developing Nations* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1968), p. 396.

[245] Bakhari Ariff, "Mengikis Sikap Jumud Masyarakat Universiti," *Berita Harian*, May 24, 1998.

[246] *New Straits Times*, March 14, 1988.

(student) instead of *mahasiswa* (undergraduate).[247] In the mid-1990s, the UKM annual even questioned vice chancellor Sham Sani on whether the milquetoast students there still merited the title "undergraduate," or should just be known as, perhaps, students (*pelajar*), schoolchildren (*murid*), or "'U' kids" (*budak* "U"). (He reassured them that aggressive engagement was unwarranted, excusing their relative passivity.)[248] UKM was not unique in this "'silence of the lambs' syndrome" that had supplanted the radical images of old. However subtle, this sort of delegitimation helped to preclude further activism—to forestall or defang intellectual critiques.

After but a decade under the UUCA, the universities were in danger of producing mere flunkies. Fewer than half of campus programs, revealed an UMSU survey, aimed to "encourage the development of critical minds and knowledge" rather than just to provide entertainment, and a fixation on exams, noted president Zulkifli Yusuf, had cost students "their role as social advocates and pressure groups on important issues."[249] Even UM deputy vice chancellor Mohamed Yunus Noor complained in 1987—days before Operasi Lalang!—that tertiary students were putting too much emphasis on achieving academic excellence, and doing "very little" to improve society. He groused, "A university student with first class honours but who failed to participate in extracurricular activities is not much good to society. Those students become leaders but they do not even know how to adjust to the people they are responsible for."[250] A year later, Ungku Aziz's successor, Syed Hussein Alatas, went so far as to insist (to UMSU's pleasure) that the UUCA only prohibited students' openly supporting political parties. He avowed, "If the Act disallows students from expressing ideas and discussing issues, then I'll be the first to go against it."[251] Others were perhaps more forthright—such as a Terengganu state official who argued that students should offer only constructive criticism of the government; contrary ideas "should, as far as possible, be avoided because it will not be fair to give a negative impression of the Government."[252]

Change was both real and rapid. By the late 1980s and 1990s, an increasing proportion of university lecturers were themselves from the post-NEP, post-UUCA generation, without experience of real academic freedom. (Speeding the transition were Malaysia's colonial-era rules on retirement: as civil servants, staff of public universities had generally to retire at age 55.) Within a rather short period, a "different sort of relationship had developed between [the] state and academics"; instead of feeling obliged to confront the state as before, now academics "felt beholden" to it.[253] Even student activists had largely left off grappling with irregularities in the university to focus instead on ways to play supporting roles in society.[254] The shift was not confined to campus; intellectual containment was part of a broad program of depoliticization: of assuming the institutional shape of the state

[247] Ahmad Lutfi, "Gerakan Siswa," p. 37.

[248] "Gelaran Mahasiswa Digugurkan?" *Aspirasi* 20 (1995–96): 60–62. Indonesian students, too, clung to *mahasiswa*, quipping that only God and students were called *maha*. Personal communication with Sulfikar Amir, October 11, 2007, Washington, DC.

[249] *Star*, December 19, 1985.

[250] *Star*, October 22, 1987.

[251] *New Straits Times*, October 20, 1988.

[252] Executive Councilor Engku Bijaya Sura, quoted in *New Straits Times*, April 14, 1986.

[253] Interview with Chandra Muzaffar, February 7, 2006.

[254] Interview with Cynthia Gabriel, March 22, 2006.

had been set, basic political questions had been answered, and any further dissent would be dangerously unsettling, given the imperative of stability for economic growth. Moreover, while *bumiputera* were encouraged and inclined not to bite the hand that fed them, Chinese students, in particular, saw little alternative but to hunker down and study, given how straitened their political and economic options had become.

Still, the more precise elaboration of universities' role within national development plans raised new questions, on which consensus proved elusive. Lecturers remained less convinced than were campus or government officials that the university should instill "moral discipline," and more certain that "universities should guarantee freedom of choice in subjects and methods of research" and be managed per "democratic principles."[255] The very ideas of university autonomy, academic freedom, and, on the other hand, education for development needs, were subject to debate. These disagreements came to a head with the rise of private institutions, not subject to the UUCA; struggles over corporatization, curricula, and internationalization, especially as Malaysia again suffered an economic downturn in the late 1990s; and, most notably, the *Reformasi* movement and its aftermath, as first Anwar, then a spirit of critical inquiry, once again claimed center stage. We turn next to this final phase.

[255] Robiah Sidin, "The Roles of the Universities in the National Development of Malaysia as Perceived by Selected Government Officials, University Administrators, and Faculty Members" (PhD thesis, Ohio University, 1980), pp. 198–201.

CHAPTER SIX

PERKING UP AND CRACKING DOWN: 1998–2010

> The University is not to be seen merely as a degree grinding machine in the same way as a blachan [shrimp paste] grinding machine, where small prawns are pushed in at the top, the handle is turned, and blachan squirts out at one end. A University is much more than a degree grinder where students are pushed in and B.As [*sic*] are squirted out.[1]

The late 1990s saw a revival of activism, not just on campus, but in society at large. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 stirred up tensions in Malaysia as elsewhere in the region. By then, civil society organizations were fairly numerous and elaborate, and Islamist activism firmly entrenched. When Prime Minister Mahathir ousted his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, in September 1998, largely over economic policy differences but ostensibly for sodomy and a related cover-up, Anwar returned to his activist base. He rallied Malays as well as reformists from other communities in a massive *Reformasi* movement.[2] Despite fervent enthusiasm and unprecedented cooperation, the opposition made insufficient inroads in 1999 to dislodge the BN (Barisan Nasional, National Front) from its parliamentary supermajority. Within a few years, the economy had stabilized, and Mahathir had stepped down; the BN reconsolidated its electoral mandate in 2004 under a new prime minister, Abdullah Badawi. Yet civil society in Malaysia, including increasingly vibrant online media and blogs, continued to thrive, notwithstanding a series of crackdowns on Islamists, human rights campaigners, and others, along with students. With Anwar still at the fore, the combined opposition, joined in a semiformal coalition, posted its best showing ever in 2008, although the BN still retained majority control. Throughout, ever-increasing insistence on Malay sociopolitical dominance and economic entitlements, on the one hand, and Islamization, on the other, reinforced the difficulties of interethnic accommodation, in the BN and opposition alike, however imperative such cooperation might be, given the country's demographics. Whatever the echoes of past episodes, then, the context for activism became substantially different from the *Reformasi* era on.

The rapid and sustained expansion of tertiary education, widespread angst over Malaysia's declining academic credentials, and ongoing restructuring of higher education reconfigured the campus in important ways, altering students' opportunities and outlooks. By the late 1990s, a generation of students born and

[1] Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Hamid [1965], "The University," document, Koleksi Ungku Aziz, Za'ba Memorial Library.

[2] Meredith L. Weiss, *Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), chap. 5.

raised under Mahathir's premiership (1981–2003) had overtaken the campuses. Dubbed "Gen M," the cohort could be defined as preoccupied either with economic accumulation or with issues of democracy and rule of law, much as society as a whole vacillated between strident mobilization around issues of governance and acquiescence to a developmental order. Most members of Gen M, however, avoided political engagement, deterred by factors ranging from deference to elders, to cynicism, peer pressure, and economic and legal constraints.[3] A 2004 survey found at least 80 percent of Malaysian university and college students indifferent to upcoming general elections and to politics in general—although political leaders and students themselves tend not to define support for the BN as "politics" in the same way that they do criticism of it.[4]

At the same time, at least some Gen M students maintained activist agendas. The *Reformasi* movement proved especially galvanizing. These students campaigned with NGOs and opposition parties for social justice, civil liberties, and good governance, even if some quickly grew frustrated with the partisan tide. Such issues, together with such concerns as students' right to education and expression, more mundane matters such as interest rates on government loans (in the wake of rising tuition costs and the National Higher Education Fund Corporation's "staggering" arrears[5]), then the American attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, continued to energize the campus after *Reformasi* had stalled in the nation at large.[6]

As contemporary activists describe, if socialism and physical resistance distinguished much of student activism in the 1970s, it was *dakwah* and creative strategies that did so in the 1980s, and compromise and diplomacy by the late 1990s.[7] *Reformasi* both in civil society and on campus was less a dramatic departure than a ratcheting-up of extant trends toward political liberalism, coalitions between Muslims and non-Muslims who were frustrated with communalism, and a growing symbiosis among NGOs, student organizations, and political parties. Meanwhile, though, higher education itself was in crisis; as growth of the student population outstripped the quality of the applicants' preparation for a university education, the state struggled to chart the right course. We begin with this institutional backdrop, as it helps to illuminate the relationship among students, society, and the still-developmental state, then turn to *Reformasi* and its aftermath, then, finally, to the

[3] UPP-IKD, "Generation M and Its Role in a Democratic Malaysia," in *Values of Democracy and Youth*, ed. Nurul Mu'az Omar (Kuala Lumpur: Unit Pendidikan Politik, Institut Kajian Dasar, 2003), pp. 31–33, 36–39.

[4] Jimmy Wong, "Students Political Apathy No Surprise," *Malaysiakini*, March 18, 2004.

[5] The government responded to a coalition of student organizations demanding transparency and free public universities by warning those in default on their study loans and taking two hundred of them to court. See Beh Lih Yi, "Students Call for Free Tertiary Education," *Malaysiakini*, February 26, 2005. Mahathir proposed a year later that if students were concerned about such issues as starving children (as in Baling in the 1970s), they should repay their study loans to help the government feed the hungry. See Sira Habibu, "Dr M: Varsities Act Put in Place to Protect Students," *Star*, March 26, 2006.

[6] DEMA (Gerakan Demokratik Belia Dan Pelajar Malaysia, Malaysian Youth and Student Democratic Movement), "Students Involvement in Promoting Democracy," in *Values of Democracy and Youth*, pp. 17–18; ISREC, "Draf Laporan Pencabulan Hak Asasi Terhadap Mahasiswa," (Independent Student Resource and Legal Training Centre, 2001), pp. 14–15.

[7] Interviews with DEMA group, December 17, 2003, Petaling Jaya; and interview with Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

implications of these developments for how contemporary students understand and enact their identities.

Institutional Developments

Malaysian higher education continued to expand at a rapid clip from the late 1990s. By 2007, Malaysia had twenty public universities, fifty-nine community colleges, and twenty-seven polytechnics, along with thirty-three private universities and degree-granting university colleges (plus fifteen additional branch campuses), and four local campuses of foreign universities.[8] The number of yearly graduates from public institutions swelled by a staggering 50 percent just from 2000 to 2005. (Graduates of private institutions increased by a more modest 11 percent in the same period.) About 750,000 university students were enrolled by 2007, with nearly 100,000 more in polytechnics and community colleges. At the same time, especially after the financial crisis of 1997, few could afford to study abroad: scholarships were scarce and tuition fees soared beyond the means of middle-class families. (The "post-9/11" climate snarled visa-approval processes, too, especially for study in the United States.) The ranks of Malaysian students in the United States fell almost 50 percent from 1997 to 2000 alone, then declined by over a quarter more over the next five years; the number in the United Kingdom fell by 41 percent from 1996 to 1999, then continued to dwindle. By 2000, only 8 percent of Malaysian tertiary students were studying abroad, primarily in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.[9] A significant number of Malaysian Chinese study in Taiwan, too, and an increasing number have been studying in China: the cost is much lower there than in Europe or the United States, and the quality sometimes higher, although the Malaysian government recognizes few Chinese universities' degrees.[10] In 2005, the Malaysian government proclaimed its intention both to increase the proportion of seventeen-to-twenty-three-year-olds in domestic higher education to 40 percent and to more than double the number of foreign students (from 40,000 to 100,000) accepted into Malaysian universities over the next five years: an increase of from about 600,000 students at the end of 2005 to 1.6 million by 2010, ideally all employable upon graduation. The proportion of lecturers holding PhDs would swell, too, from 30 to 75 percent, and the teacher-student ratio at public universities would drop to 1:16 from 1:20.[11] Progress toward these goals was mixed.

Overseeing this expanding educational terrain was a new Ministry of Higher Education, launched in March 2004. The contours of higher education had already begun to shift. Admissions to public universities opened up with the phasing out, after 2000, of certain preferential policies that had previously favored *bumiputera*. In

[8] These data on institutions and enrollments are drawn from the Ministry of Higher Education's website, under "Information," www.portal.mohe.gov.my/web_statistik/index.htm, accessed January 19, 2010.

[9] Observatory, "Malaysia Launches New US$4.8 Billion Higher Education Strategy in Continued Pursuit of 'Regional Hub' Status," *Observatory on Borderless Higher Education*, April 2006.

[10] Betty Chen, "Malaysia Losing Shine as Education Hub," *Malaysiakini*, June 21, 2006; and Betty Chen, "Malaysian Students Hear the Call of China," *Malaysiakini*, June 27, 2006.

[11] Santha Oorjitham, "Higher Education Revolution during Ninth Malaysia Plan," Bernama News Agency, December 21, 2005 (available at www.bernama.com/bernama/v3/news_lite.php?id=172154, accessed March 16, 2011).

2001, all schools except UiTM (University Teknologi MARA) switched from a quota system to a modified meritocracy in their (centralized) admissions process. However, only *bumiputera* students have the option of being accepted, based on (supposedly) easier entrance requirements, after taking a one-year post-secondary matriculation program. The ethnic balance on the campuses thus changed by a mere 6 percent after 2000, resulting in a 63:32 ratio of *bumiputera* to Chinese, albeit with some increase in student quality.[12] To boost capacity, too, all public universities had launched open- or distance-learning courses by the late 1990s.[13] Furthermore, the government aggressively styled the country as a regional education hub, as it angled for a piece of the US$2.5 trillion global higher-education market.[14] The Asian financial crisis made Malaysia relatively more attractive to students from neighboring countries facing massive currency devaluations; still-lower costs and proximity have sustained those advantages, as recruiters have sought to muster students in places like Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City, Dubai, and Beijing. (Malaysia has also drawn increasing numbers of students from Africa in recent years.[15]) Government investment in higher education amounted to over 40 percent of the total allocation for education in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006–10), backed by a new quality-assurance agency and grading system for the licensing of each institution, streamlined procedures and revised criteria (for instance, credit for co-curricular activities) for applicants' admission to public institutions, an online admissions system for international applicants, a new website to facilitate placement in private institutions (and new procedures to curb abuse of student visas), relaxation of rules on language of instruction, appointment of a special ministerial envoy to internationalize the universities, and enhancements, such as upgrading the qualifications of academic staff.[16]

Still, complaints swirled that Malaysian universities had become mere factories. Students were challenged already by weaknesses in the secondary-education system, poor-quality matriculation colleges, and widespread grade inflation, which camouflaged Malaysian students' generally poor performance on qualifying exams. With the duration of the academic program for even an honors degree now set at only three years instead of four, students were graduating from the universities less well-prepared in language, technical, and "soft" skills for the job market than they had been before the mid-1990s.[17] (Studies in the late 1990s started to document a resultant decline in students' performance.[18]) Meanwhile, facilities and staff strained under rapid growth of the student population: tutorials bloated, lecture halls filled beyond capacity, and trained instructors were far too few to handle the influx of students.[19] As public university enrollments reached 300,000 in 1999, academic staff totaled just 10,920, under a quarter of whom held PhDs. The situation in Malaysia's private universities was even worse: in 2000, of nearly 9,000 academic staff members, only 4 percent had PhDs and just over one-fourth had MAs; almost 12 percent lacked even a first degree.[20] Qualified academic staff find little reason to stay in public universities, and often leave for more remunerative and stimulating careers in private or overseas universities, government or international agencies, politics, or business.[21]

Employment statistics for graduates are even more alarming. The Ninth Malaysia Plan forecast the creation of 400,000 new skilled jobs over a five-year period, during a time when 250,000 students were graduating each year from local public and private tertiary institutions—meaning up to two-thirds of the graduates would likely not find suitable employment, notwithstanding provisions to reduce the number of foreign workers, retrain graduates for new careers, and encourage job-seekers to be less choosy.[22] Unemployment among Malaysian university graduates has been endemic. Private sector employers typically complain of local graduates' poor English, lack of communication skills and initiative, and inability to think independently.[23] Attempts to boost students' skills have at times had laughable outcomes. For example, a required workshop for UM (Universiti Malaya) arts and social science students in entrepreneurship skills in early 2007 turned out to be "a lengthy exposure to direct-sales" and enlistment into selling an insurance product. Yet it encouraged "entrepreneurship" of a sort: over two hundred students filed a petition of protest.[24]

Amid these pressures and conditions, local universities have been plummeting in international rankings, most notably the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (*THES*) listing of the world's top two hundred universities. Coping with the expansion of its enrollments to serve a broader base, while trying to maintain academic standards,[25] UM fell in the *THES* rankings from 89th in 2004 to 169th the following year; USM (Universiti Sains Malaysia, Science University of Malaysia) dropped off the list altogether in 2005. (Another ranking by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University listed no Malaysian universities at all among the world's top five hundred for 2004 or 2005.)

[12] Machi Sato, "Education, Ethnicity, and Economics: Higher Education Reforms in Malaysia, 1957–2003," *NUCB Journal of Language, Culture and Communication* 7,1 (May 2005): 86.

[13] Akiko Kamogawa, "Higher Education Reform: Challenges towards a Knowledge Society in Malaysia," *African and Asian Studies* 2,4 (2003), p. 552.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Sato, "Education, Ethnicity, and Economics," pp. 83–84; Liz Gooch, "Asian Universities Court Students Nearby," *New York Times*, September 23, 2009. Neighboring countries have pursued similar measures. For instance, China now permits branch campuses of foreign universities to be established in the country, a policy that contributed to a two-thirds decline in the number of mainland Chinese students enrolled in Malaysian universities over a period from around 2001 to 2006.

[16] *Sun*, September 19, 2006; *Star*, June 20, 2006; *Utusan Malaysia*, September 17, 1998; Observatory, "Malaysia Launches New Strategy."

[17] Francis Loh, "Crisis in Malaysia's Public Universities?" *Aliran Monthly* 25,10 (2005): 8; and Sato, "Education, Ethnicity, and Economics," p. 82.

[18] Rohana Man, "Sistem Semester Punca Prestasi Pelajar UKM Merosot," *Utusan Malaysia*, May 24, 1999; and "Program Singkat Gagal Bentuk Siswa Berkualiti," *Utusan Malaysia*, July 29, 1999.

[19] Molly Lee, "Education in Crisis," *Aliran Monthly* 22,5 (2002), pp. 4–5.

[20] Molly N. N. Lee, *Restructuring Higher Education in Malaysia* (Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2004), p. 55.

[21] Loh, "Crisis," p. 7.

[22] "Graduates' Employment Problematic," *Malaysiakini*, March 31, 2006.

[23] Lee, "Education in Crisis."

[24] Wong Yeen Fern, "Students Cry Foul over Direct Sales Workshop," *Malaysiakini*, March 19, 2007; Wong Yeen Fern, "UM Students Campaign against 'Soft-skills Course,'" *Malaysiakini*, March 27, 2007; and Wong Yeen Fern, "UM VC: Company Exploited Our Students," *Malaysiakini*, March 31, 2007.

[25] Loh, "Crisis," p. 4.

UM officials faulted the *THES*'s methods,[26] but opposition leader Lim Kit Siang declared the assessment a "national shame" and "the latest confirmation of the deep and prolonged crisis of higher education in Malaysia."[27] Days after the rankings came out, a government survey counted nearly 60,000 unemployed Malaysian graduates, 81 percent of them from public universities. Those unemployed—or at least, those registered with a new government service for job-seekers—were disproportionately lower-income Malays and women, educated with support from government loans. Most had been jobless for over a year. Graduate unemployment was hardly a new phenomenon: over 30,000 graduates were left unemployed during the economic downturn of the 1980s, for instance, and recession had wreaked havoc especially in the late 1990s. However, at this point, in 2005, the economy was otherwise generally strong.[28]

The next year, 2006, UM fell another 23 places in the *THES* rankings to 192, overtaken by an ascendant 185th-ranked UKM (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, National University of Malaysia). UM vice chancellor Rafiah Salim called that "perhaps one of the saddest days in my career" and confessed that UM had "dropped the adjective 'premier'" from its soon-to-be-unveiled new mission statement. She noted, however, that while UM still believed in academic freedom, enhancing it would do nothing for the rankings. The academic publications that counted were allowed under the UUCA (Universities and University Colleges Act), and critical thinking did not require the implementation of more campus democracy. More to the point, she asserted (however solecistically): "NUS has done so well, do you think Singapore is going to allow any 'student riot'? So is Beijing."[29] By 2009, the situation was growing increasingly dire, a decline highlighted in parliament in October. With local universities still cranking out more graduates than the economy seemed able to absorb, and with those graduates lacking necessary skills, unemployment among their ranks had increased more than ten-fold from 2004 through mid-2008, representing over one-fourth of total unemployment in Malaysia by 2007. Furthermore, these data tended to undercount non-Malays, who were less prone to register with the Ministry of Human Resources to find jobs.[30] Having fallen off the list altogether, UM (and UM only) finally climbed back into the *THES* rankings in 2009, reaching number 180.[31]

The need for reform of Malaysia's tertiary educational system was undisputed—and had been acknowledged for some time already. Starting with the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–05), both private and public universities were encouraged to develop "centers of excellence" to compete with those at reputable foreign universities. Extra funds allocated for education and research would focus on

[26] Jacqueline Ann Surin and Pauline Puah, "Reforms for UM," *Sun*, August 17, 2006; "UM Defends Slide in University Rankings," *Malaysiakini*, November 2, 2005.

[27] "A Global Blow for Local Universities," *Malaysiakini*, October 29, 2005.

[28] "60,000 Undergraduates Unemployed," *Malaysiakini*, November 5, 2005; Abdul Razak Ahmad, "The Unemployable Malaysian Graduate," *New Straits Times*, March 20, 2005; Annie Freeda Cruez, "Calling Jobless Graduates," *New Straits Times*, September 20, 2005; Haslina Hassan, "Dilema Siswazah Menganggur," *Dewan Masyarakat* 40,1 (2002).

[29] Beh Lih Yi, "One of Saddest Days in My Career: UM VC," *Malaysiakini*, October 6, 2006.

[30] William Leong, "Malaysia Catches the Dutch Disease," *Malaysian Insider*, October 11, 2009.

[31] Karen Chapman, "Universiti Malaya Climbs 50 Spots to No. 180 in THE-QS Rankings," *Star*, October 8, 2009.

developing a high-technology "knowledge-based economy,"[32] targeting especially *bumiputera* and women. (Although women already constituted over half of science students by 1998, the proportion was lower in engineering and information technology.[33]) Yet the rankings of Malaysia's universities and the employment of their graduates continued to plummet.

Hence, in early 2005, the Ministry of Higher Education enlisted former director-general of education Tan Sri Dr. Wan Zahid Noordin to chair a twelve-member Committee to Study, Review, and Make Recommendations Concerning the Development and Directions of Higher Education in Malaysia. The committee was to survey current growth and development in the sector and identify problem areas, based on public feedback and comparison with "world-class" institutions overseas.[34] Releasing the report in April 2006, Higher Education Minister Mustapa Mohamed announced plans to overhaul Malaysian higher education.[35]

The Zahid committee's report was lengthy and exhaustive, spanning all aspects of educational content, university management, and pursuit of both material objectives and "the democratisation of education by ensuring access and participation of all Malaysians regardless of race, color, or political loyalty." The finished document asserts the "absolute necessity" of change and advises a "leveling up" strategy.[36] Among its priorities are a moratorium on licenses for new private universities and colleges pending a full assessment of existing ones; establishment of a Quality Control, Audit, and Accreditation Agency; pursuit of new public–private and academic–business partnerships; education in English or other languages across subjects, as appropriate; better training for teaching personnel; the facilitation of higher quality research; and graduation of 100,000 new PhDs within the next fifteen years.[37] The committee report also recommends streamlining laws governing higher education, establishing new governance procedures to enhance university autonomy, shifting more of the cost of higher education to the private sector, improving terms of employment and promotion for academic staff, ensuring transparent and appropriate administrative appointments, emphasizing creativity and leadership, adjusting curricula (for instance, to expand language offerings and promote community service), enhancing facilities for disadvantaged and disabled students, and continuing to pursue national unity through higher education.[38]

Other analysts of Malaysia's educational system proposed somewhat different emphases. One prominent local scholar, for instance, advised the introduction of more democratic procedures, peer-reviewed academic and administrative promotions, and a second tier of universities to mimic American liberal-arts

[32] Sato, "Education, Ethnicity, and Economics," pp. 85–86.

[33] Kamogawa, "Higher Education Reform," pp. 554–56.

[34] Nurul Nazrin, "Ready-to-Roll Plans for World-class Higher Education," *Malaysiakini*, June 1, 2005.

[35] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Mustapa's Plans to Overhaul Higher Education System," *Malaysiakini*, April 21, 2006.

[36] Wan Mohd Zahid bin Mohd Noordin, et al., *Report by the Committee to Study, Review, and Make Recommendations Concerning the Development and Direction of Higher Education in Malaysia: Towards Excellence* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Higher Education, 2006), Executive Summary.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., "Recommendations."

colleges.[39] Another, opposition politician Syed Husin Ali, revived the idea of a University Charter.[40] And a third scholar, P. Ramasamy, recommended the least politically feasible suggestions of the Zahid committee report: university autonomy, apolitical appointments, need-based affirmative action, and common, consistent standards for admission.[41] The National Higher Education Strategic Plan and 2007–10 Action Plan eventually announced were rather modest, adopting the committee's recommendations in such areas as selection of senior administrators, quality audits, links with industry, lifelong learning, and nurturing of favored "apex universities," but doing little in more fraught areas such as academic autonomy, creative thinking, or appropriate criteria and procedures for appointments and promotions.[42] As a first step, four universities—UM, USM, UKM, and UPM (Universiti Putra Malaysia)—were chosen for development into "world-class" research universities, and each provided with a substantial start-up grant.[43]

While widely praised, the Zahid committee report was faulted particularly for its scant reference to political context, especially the laws girding the campus.[44] Controls on students and staff had grown firmer since 1998, even as the education system as a whole floundered. A key example was a new pledge, *Aku Janji* (I Pledge), mandated in October 2001. Derived from the Statutory Bodies (Discipline and Surcharge) Act of 2000 (which extends to universities), the pledge promises "loyalty" and "good conduct," thus evoking the Suitability Certificates and codes of conduct of years past. All students and staff, as well as all civil servants, must sign the *Aku Janji*. Mahathir claimed that the requirement was to prevent "poisoning the minds" of students, ensuring they "stick to the original purpose of entering universities to gain knowledge and not indulge in anti-government activities."[45] Yet as academic Edmund Terence Gomez explained, "The 'Akujanji' is an impairment to the whole education process. It's saying—don't challenge, don't question. That's not what universities are all about."[46]

The UM Academic Staff Union campaigned against the pledge, asking members to note that they signed under duress. Only around twenty followed that suggestion, mostly from UM's law faculty. Public sector union CUEPACS, the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam, Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia), and student groups likewise protested, but with little effect. The repercussions of refusing to sign the pledge are poorly specified, but the prime minister's department assured parliament in March 2002 that officials would monitor civil servants'

[39] Loh, "Crisis," pp. 8–9.

[40] S. Husin Ali, "Defects in the Higher Education Strategic Plan," *Malaysia Today*, August 29, 2007.

[41] P. Ramasamy, "University Reform: Political Changes Needed First," *Malaysiakini*, June 22, 2005.

[42] "Major Plans to Transform Higher Education," *Star*, August 22, 2007; Hamidah Atan, "Aiming Higher: PM Maps Out Plan for World-class Universities," *New Straits Times*, September 6, 2007.

[43] Simrit Kaur, "Big Boost for Brain Gain," *Star*, July 22, 2007.

[44] "Brickbats and Praises for Zahid Report," *Malaysiakini*, April 29, 2006.

[45] Suaram, *Malaysia: Human Rights Report 2004: Civil and Political Rights* (Petaling Jaya: Suara Rakyat Malaysia, 2005), p. 96.

[46] Quoted in Pauline Puah and Nurul Nazirin, "Q&A: Varsities Becoming a Police State, Says Top Academic," *Malaysiakini*, June 13, 2005; also Nurul Nazirin, "Stranglehold over Undergrads," *Malaysiakini*, August 4, 2005.

compliance and impose penalties ranging from warnings to firing. Several lecturers and students reported being harassed or threatened for refusing to sign: some students had their exam results held up; some were unable to register for classes or were sent show-cause letters and disciplined. At least two lecturers were fired. Others apparently suffered no repercussions.[47] Protests recurred five years after the pledge's introduction. Dozens of academics and NGOs signed a petition asserting the *Aku Janji* "has inculcated a culture of fear, passivity, and uncritical thinking in the campuses, which is antithetical to the development of our universities and to the quality of teaching and scholarship."[48]

Critics even in government increasingly faulted campus culture for hindering students' development and churning out "mediocre yes-men."[49] By 2006, no less a person than Malaysia's king urged the development of independent leadership and more vocal students, insisting, "A silent culture is not a healthy culture in an institution of higher learning."[50] UM vice chancellor Anuar Zaini Md Zain blamed lecturers for doing too little to foster an intellectual culture. Academics, in turn, faulted lack of role models, over-emphasis on examinations, the Internet, and undergraduates' antiestablishment tendencies (by which the academics surveyed seemed to mean students' focus on "frivolous" or "sensational" topics).[51] Officials acknowledged that too-tight controls had been imposed throughout the universities—spillover effects of intellectual containment—but the rules that were in place hampered change. Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah, for instance, noted that it was not enough just to create speakers' corners (which he hoped would boost public-speaking skills) if students were afraid to speak there.[52]

Those aspects of the UUCA and cognate enactments that were intended to curb or contain political engagement have had the most obvious impact in whittling away space for student mobilization and the skills development such engagement allows. Under current rules, the administration must approve SRC (Students' Representative Council) events, a requirement that, at times, causes snarls in planning even uncontroversial events like student academic conferences.[53] In 1999, UM's Student Affairs Department, worried about the spread of dangerous ideas, took over the SRC's orientation-week program. At USM, the deputy vice chancellor now welcomes students with a slide show detailing what they can and cannot do and wear.[54] Matters came to a head in July 2006, when freshmen at some universities were given

[47] Suaram, *Human Rights Report 2004*, p. 97; "Seeking Academic Freedom," *Sun*, July 13, 2006; Susan Loone, "Academics Have Right to Reject Akujanji Document: Varsity Body," *Malaysiakini*, March 12, 2002; "The 'Akujanji' letter," *Malaysiakini*, August 22, 2005; Beh Lih Yeh, "Minister: 'Akujanji' is Like Prayers to God," *Malaysiakini*, September 17, 2005; Azly Rahman, "Letter to Higher Education Minister," *Malaysiakini*, September 28, 2005; and Azly Rahman, "Ranking our Totalitarian Universities," *Malaysiakini*, November 21, 2005; and interview with DEMA group, December 17, 2003.

[48] Pauline Puah, "Academics Divided over Aku Janji," *Sun*, August 6, 2007.

[49] Interview with Shabery Cheek, March 28, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[50] "King: Varsities' 'Silent Culture' Unhealthy," *Malaysiakini*, February 8, 2006.

[51] Chok Suat Ling and Deborah Loh, "Academics Bemoan Decline of Intellect," *New Straits Times*, October 7, 2001.

[52] "Universities Urged to be More Liberal," *Malaysia Insider*, January 27, 2010.

[53] Interview with Choi Kian You, March 23, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and interview with women activists (anonymous group), December 19, 2003, Petaling Jaya.

[54] Interview with Lim Hong Siang, March 10, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

a colorful fifty-page booklet titled *Isu-Isu Semasa* (*Current Affairs*). Peppered with quotations from government leaders, the document lauded Prime Minister Abdullah's patriotism and moral fiber, then presented a systematic justification of each of several recent government policies. Nine pages homed in on "illegal," "unregistered," antiestablishment student groups. Though its provenance was unclear, the booklet appeared to be part of the official literature distributed by UM. UM SRC president Mohd. Efendi Omar confirmed that the Higher Education Ministry published the booklet with the help of Biro Tata Negara (the National Civics Bureau, BTN); five thousand copies were distributed in UM. He declared the document "good for the students. It lets them recognise these groups so they won't participate in their activities."[55] Angry students at four public universities (UPM, USM, UM, and UTM [Universiti Teknologi Malaysia]) that year complained of "brainwashing," including in the form of lectures by pro-government peers cautioning against "underground political" or "antiestablishment" groups' "ruining their [members'] future."[56] In the same vein, a few months later, over two thousand USM freshmen were told at a compulsory BTN-run seminar that particular (Chinese-led) antiestablishment student groups were being sponsored by Jewish and American elements seeking to undermine Malaysia's security. Speakers showed photos of Chinese Malaysian students participating in demonstrations, and highlighted certain faces. Former students expelled for their activism joined the speakers and warned the student audience against making their same mistakes. Higher Education Minister Mustapa confirmed that allegations of Jewish sponsorship were "a reminder not to get involved with organisations from outside the country, especially those who intend to sabotage our country's peace."[57] Afraid to take risks after such exercises in dissuasion, most students self-censor, even if the government and university hesitate actually to wield the weapons at their disposal.[58]

Structural features in the university system reinforce these curbs. For example, while private universities are less fettered legally, their class schedules are tight and exam-oriented, especially in courses that are part of "twinning" programs with overseas university partners,[59] and high fees leave students focused on getting through, graduating, and paying off their loans. In contrast, the all-Malay UiTM has especially low tuition and housing fees, but the strictest discipline.[60] In addition, while Malaysia's first universities were urban, newer ones have more often been located in rural areas, where students have less interaction with the off-campus community or little opportunity to develop more than intramural networks. And, of course, by the late 1990s, communalism was at least as entrenched and visible on campus as in other public spaces, leaving interracial mobilization ever more elusive.

[55] Jacqueline Ann Surin and Pauline Puah, "Reforms for UM," *Sun*, August 17, 2006; Pauline Puah, "Keeping Varsity Elections Alive," *Sun*, September 19, 2006; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "'Propaganda' Booklet for Varsity Freshies," *Malaysiakini*, July 13, 2006.

[56] Wong Yeen Fern, "Campus Freshies Tell of 'Brainwashing,'" *Malaysiakini*, July 10, 2006.

[57] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "'Jewish Elements' Infiltrating Local Campuses," *Malaysiakini*, September 12, 2006; and Soon Li Tsin, "Mustapa's Verdict: Varsity Polls Clean and Fair," *Malaysiakini*, September 21, 2006.

[58] Interview with Shabery Cheek, March 28, 2006.

[59] Interview with Tian Chua, March 9, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[60] Interview with UBU (Universiti Bangsar Utama) group, December 21, 2003, Kuala Lumpur.

The situation for academic staff has arguably worsened over time, as well. UM's Academic Staff Union, PKAUM (Persatuan Kakitangan Akademik Universiti Malaya), is a good example. Union membership is voluntary, and only about one-third of eligible staff are members, most of them largely inactive. Still, the union has become not only more diverse, but more vocal since a team led by Rosli Mahat unseated UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) aspirant (and later deputy minister of education) Mahadzir Mohd. Khir as PKAUM leader in the late 1990s. While nonpartisan, PKAUM has, for example, supported students charged with illegal assemblies at UM and elsewhere. Only the three staff associations registered as trade unions may make statements in the press; it is primarily PKAUM that does so. While PKAUM has yet to face legal sanction from the government as a union, its members know to frame their messages carefully. The Malaysian Academic Movement (MOVE), too, has been more active since around 2003, confronting such issues as conditions of service and academic freedom. Moreover, as an interuniversity network, MOVE promises to empower academic staff more effectively than has been possible at even those campuses where academics have traditionally been most free—UM and USM.

These developments have not precluded several high-profile cases of maltreatment or dismissal of critical academic staff. MOVE chairman Wan Manan Wan Muda noted that academic freedom, having declined steadily since the late 1970s, was already "very low" by the time of *Reformasi*. He cited alarming precedents: academics involved with Islamist sect Darul Arqam were hauled up in the early 1990s and at least one person held under the ISA (Internal Security Act) after the sect was banned in 1994; an air pollution expert was taken to task in 1997 for warning about the haze at the height of a regional smog crisis, resulting in a gag order on academics; and a virologist got in trouble for challenging the official position on the nature of a deadly outbreak of disease in 1999, only to be later vindicated in her claim that the virus was not Japanese encephalitis. Such developments, he suggested, encouraged academic staff to self-censor in their own interests.[61] *Reformasi* stepped up the pace of such repressive incidents, as more academics spoke out. For instance, UM professor Chandra Muzaffar, a staunch supporter of *Reformasi*, was denied renewal of his contract in February 1999, officially for economic reasons, but, more likely, for political ones. His departure sparked a demonstration at UM, led, unusually, by a graduate student, Stephen Doss.[62] Mahathir also lashed out against UM economist Jomo K. S. when the latter filed a lawsuit challenging the electoral rolls for the 1999 general elections.[63] Jomo opted for early retirement after worsening "victimization," ranging from a libel suit to demotion.[64] National literary laureate and USM creative writing lecturer Shahnon Ahmad drew flak for his scatological, satirical political novel, *Shit*, the same year. And in October 2001, the education minister announced the dismissal, transfer, or warning of sixty-one lecturers for alleged "anti-government" activities.[65]

[61] Anil Netto, "Academics Speak out at Their Own Risk," *Asia Times Online*, June 16, 1999.

[62] Interview with Stephen Doss, March 15, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[63] ISREC, "Draf Laporan," p. 7.

[64] *Malaysiakini*, June 20, 2005.

[65] Amnesty International, "Malaysia: Students Penalized for Political Activities—An Update," November 28, 2001, available at http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGASA280342001, last viewed on March 25, 2011; ISREC, "Draf Laporan," p. 12.

Still in 2005, UPM vice chancellor Mohamad Zohadie Bardaie was (abortively) ordered to resign after reciting a poem at a function allegedly ridiculing the minister of higher education.[66] That same year, prolific UM lecturer and PKAUM vice president Edmund Terence Gomez was denied leave for a prestigious two-year secondment to a United Nations agency in Geneva. Though initially Gomez was supported by Vice Chancellor Hashim Yaacob (who had previously urged Gomez to show more loyalty to the government), that support waned after PKAUM complained of such issues as the monitoring of internal emails. (The vice chancellor denied any knowledge that Gomez had alleged such malfeasance.) After protests were staged by supporters of Gomez, ranging from fellow academicians and students to politicians, which culminated in the prime minister's intervention, Gomez was finally granted leave. (The process, though, raised questions about university autonomy: the ministry apparently overruled the university's decision.) Gomez's case catalyzed Malaysian academics' frustration with a number of repressive and inequitable policies and conditions: the UUCA, favoritism in academic promotions, selection of vice chancellors based on their loyalty to UMNO, and predations such as departments' tampering with student marks when too many students failed.[67]

Not long after, popular UKM lecturer P. Ramasamy's newly renewed contract was cancelled, with one month's notice and no explanation.[68] He asserted that he had "been victimised and discriminated [against] for being outspoken and critical on many issues," activities for which he had received warnings in the past. This case quickly drew public attention, coming as it did in the midst of both the academic term and of rife allegations of opacity and endemic racism in Malaysian public universities. Even his dean suggested Ramasamy be retained as a teacher until the end of the semester for his students' sake, a group of whom launched a signature campaign to urge UKM to reconsider. Ramasamy himself took matters to the media, offering detailed statements in his own defense. The need for transparency and consistency in post-retirement contracts now joined the list of grievances that troubled academic staff. In fact, Gomez noted his surprise that Ramasamy had been terminated so soon after two other public disputes involving public universities (his own and Mohd. Zohadie's cases), the resolution of both of which embarrassed the universities.[69] Several UTM employees, too, have claimed that they were penalized

[66] "Don't Axe Top Academics Terence Gomez, Mohd Zohadie," *Malaysiakini*, May 12, 2005.

[67] Ibid.; Pauline Puah and Nurul Nazirin, "Q&A: Varsities Becoming a Police State, Says Top Academic," *Malaysiakini*, June 13, 2005; Pauline Puah, "Goodbye Gomez, Hello Reforms?" *Malaysiakini*, June 14, 2005; Pauline Puah and Nurul Nazirin, "UM VC in the Dark over Allegations," *Malaysiakini*, June 16, 2005; "UM VC in the Light over Allegations, Claims Union," *Malaysiakini*, June 17, 2005; and Beh Lih Yi, "Gomez E-mail Lands Student in Hot Soup," *Malaysiakini*, September 19, 2005.

[68] UKM policies allow for two-year contracts to retain senior professors for up to ten years after their mandatory retirement at age fifty-five, although month-to-month arrangements like Ramasamy's are common.

[69] Nurul Nazirin, "UKM Terminates Top Academic," *Malaysiakini*, August 5, 2005; P. Ramasamy, "My Unjust and Abrupt Dismissal," *Malaysiakini*, August 8, 2005; Nurul Nazirin, "Academic Rejects UKM's Explanation," *Malaysiakini*, August 11, 2005; Edmund Terence Gomez, "Of Privileged Contracts and Silencing Dissent," *Malaysiakini*, August 16, 2005; P. Ramasamy, "Termination: Professional or Political?" *Malaysiakini*, August 18, 2005; Nurul Nazirin, "Students Launch Signature Campaign for Axed Prof," *Malaysiakini*, August 19, 2005; and P. Ramasamy, "Merit has no Relevance in Local Varsities," *Malaysiakini*, November 11, 2005.

for reporting mismanagement, misuse of power, and corruption among university authorities.[70]

In a related vein, prominent researcher Lim Teck Ghee resigned in protest from his post as the head of the Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) at the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute in 2006. As a representative of the CPPS, Ghee had published a report that found fault with official methods of calculating wealth distribution along racial lines and suggested redistributive policies might no longer be necessary. Following the publication of the study, Prime Minister Abdullah voiced reservations about CPPS's methods; other UMNO politicians contended the report aimed to "incite anger" and "confuse the Malays." Lim refused to retract the report or pronounce it flawed, but Institute president Mirzan Mahathir did so. Outcry from opposition politicians, academics, journalists' associations, and others over so bald an assault on academic freedom was intense and immediate.[71]

According to an anonymous "outside observer" writing in *Malaysiakini*, this contemporary mixture of "political interference," "strange tolerance towards mediocrity among academicians and students," and "ethnic politics" cripples Malaysian higher education. He faults practices such as administrative "numbers crunching" of the kind that lowers admission requirements to attract more (income-generating) graduate students. He also faults lecturers for publishing in obscure outlets or doing collaborative work as "pillion riders only."[72] UM Board of Directors chairman Arshad Ayub insisted in early 2006 that declining academic standards could only be reversed through the efforts of a transparent, accountable, non-racial, uncorrupt administration. Moreover, he argued, students "should have more freedom," and universities should set an example for them of "fair play and honesty," avoiding "feudalistic practices" in favor of "academic integrity" and meritocracy. "A silent culture is not an ethical culture in academia," he stressed[73]—echoing the king, but not, it seemed, most administrators, especially in a time of such unsettled politics. It was this political turmoil, however, that pressed the state to stick to its guns, fearful of the potential influence of students and intellectuals, especially in the *Reformasi* movement. We turn next to that period, then consider the legacies of *Reformasi* on campus, particularly a renewed emphasis on (campus and national) campaigns and elections, news media, and the perils of polarization.

THE *REFORMASI* ERA

> [The UUCA] is to stop people from disturbing [students], to stop them from getting involved in brainless activities like kicking motorcars. That you can

[70] Fauwaz Abdul Aziz, "Strange Twist: Punished for Being Pro-government," *Malaysiakini*, October 29, 2005.

[71] Edmund Terence Gomez, "Racialising Research: The Asli Report Debacle," *Malaysiakini*, October 12, 2006.

[72] "What Makes the Local Universities Not Tick," *Malaysiakini*, May 23, 2005.

[73] Claudia Theophilus, "UM Official: Rid Varsities of Bigotry, Prejudice," *Malaysiakini*, March 22, 2006; and Claudia Theophilus, "UM Chair: Let Independent Body Choose VCs," *Malaysiakini*, March 23, 2006.

have any idiot do, but university students who have brains should not be going around burning rubbish in the rubbish bins.[74]

The backdrop to all this soul-searching was a phase of unusual political ferment in the late 1990s that still reverberates in Malaysian political alignments and expectations. The *Reformasi* movement centered far more around civil society organizations and opposition political parties than around students, although the sense of shifting political opportunities extended to the campus. One veteran activist has suggested that, when Malaysia's economic and political crises of the late 1990s developed, students were neither prepared nor sure how to respond. Real cooperation among students sparked up only after university authorities lashed out. Then, with the arrest especially of iconic 1970s student activist Hishamuddin Rais following the arrest of Anwar, the rhetoric and issues of the 1970s crept back into student discourse, fortifying cross-racial alliances. And as was true for groups off campus, the more that students discussed the UUCA and other laws, the less they feared them.[75] While increasing numbers of students became engaged during this period, they did so through a bewildering array of vehicles: new groups and coalitions sprouted like mushrooms. The overall bent of the "antiestablishment" crowd aligned loosely with the "progressive" agenda of the *Reformasi* movement and the coalitions that it, too, spawned, while their opponents held fast to the BN line.

Anwar figured as an icon for the "antiestablishment" camp, but did not enjoy unmitigated support. Notwithstanding his pursuit of such initiatives as "civilizational dialogue" in the 1990s, critics saw Anwar as having been hostile to the Chinese education movement and a main instigator of crackdowns like Operasi Lalang (see chapter 3). Still, the younger generation tended to be forgiving (or forgetful).[76] Suara Mahasiswa (Students' Voice), operating from the Kampung Baru neighborhood of Kuala Lumpur, was the first student group to back Anwar following his arrest,[77] and it was soon joined by a campus-based Gerakan Bebaskan Anwar (Free Anwar Movement).[78] Another alliance of ten student organizations issued a September 1999 press statement urging an independent investigation into the conditions of Anwar's detention and demanding assurances of the safety, health, and welfare of all prisoners.[79] The range of groups involved—Islamist and otherwise, spanning ethnic communities—and the fact that representatives of each signed their full names to the document are testament to the sorts of coalitions that were forming and to students' unusual assertiveness at that moment. These activities were not without penalty. UiTM student Ahmad Zaki Yamani was expelled, for instance, for participating in a pro-Anwar assembly; one SRC president transferred to an

[74] Mahathir Mohamad, quoted in "Mahathir: Students Unaware Why They Dislike Govt," *Sun*, July 25, 1999.

[75] Interview with Tian Chua, March 9, 2006.

[76] Interview with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[77] Interview with Yusmadi Yusoff, January 18, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[78] Interview with Lim Hong Siang, March 10, 2006.

[79] PKPIM, et al., "Kenyataan Media 10 Pertubuhan Pelajar," September 17, 1999, available online (including the full list of signatories) at www.members.tripod.com/ris20205/_discl/00000062.htm, accessed January 29, 2010.

institution in Pakistan to avoid charges at UM; and others had to lay low until crises dissipated.[80]

A rash of new student organizations and networks took shape in 1998 and 1999, only some officially. Among the earlier ones was Gerakan Mahasiswa Lantang Negara (GMLN, National Movement of Outspoken Students), which combined Islamist and liberal socialist strands, for an overall "liberal Muslim" approach. Upstaging GMLN was the similarly oriented Universiti Bangsar Utama, named for the Bangsar Utama neighborhood near UM (UBU: the *double entendre* is intentional), launched a few months before the Anwar affair hit the news. With initially around a dozen students, mostly middle-class Malays (some of them also in GMLN), and Hishamuddin Rais as charismatic mentor, the group drew in peers from across student organizations, as well as graduates, expelled activists, and other youths, for events. Bangsar Utama had long been a gathering place for reform-minded students; discussions by informal groups, centered on political change and current affairs, evolved into a decision in April 2000 to rent space from which to organize activities for the community. UBU's activities ranged from "agitprop" (for instance, street theater) to games and free tutoring for local children, with a generally antiestablishment, but ideologically open, sociopolitical agenda.[81] With Anwar's ouster, though, "all of a sudden everything turned political," and the media started to pay attention, not least because of rumors that Hishamuddin was training participants in communism.[82] Some coverage was quite positive; for instance, there was a glowing report on UBU's free, creative, and effective programs for poor children in the area, which also touched on UBU's efforts to inculcate a social conscience in its students. The piece identified Khairul Anuar Ahmad Zainudin (a.k.a. Jonah) as "headmaster" of UBU; within a month of its publication, he was detained under the ISA (see below).[83] UBU members joined NGO activists in a fact-finding mission among Acehnese refugees and to observe the Indonesian elections in 1999; in campaigns to protect the Selangor River and oppose the ISA, also in 1999; in investigating racial clashes in the Kuala Lumpur area in March 2001; and in organizing a human-rights camp and workshop on police power and citizens' rights for undergraduates that same month.[84] UBU graduates have gone on to work with progressive think tanks, opposition parties, and the like, while the group—rebranded as Students for Pro-Democracy (Pro-DAM)—has persisted as a small collective, active in social work and joint campaigns.

Also launched in 1998, pre-*Reformasi*, was the Malaysian Youth and Students' Democratic Movement (DEMA), intended to mobilize students across public and private institutions around issues of democracy and human rights. DEMA developed out of the student and youth caucus of the Asia Pacific People's Assembly, an NGO-organized counter-meeting held in tandem with the Asia-Pacific Economic

[80] Personal communication with Chai Chee Fatt, March 7, 2006, via email; women activists, December 19, 2003; ISREC, "Draf Laporan," p. 10.

[81] Interviews with Hishamuddin Rais, March 30, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and UBU group, December 21, 2003.

[82] Interview with Herizal Hazri, January 20, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

[83] Wong Li Za, "Free Lessons in Student University," *Sunday Star*, June 10, 2001.

[84] "University of Bangsar Utama," available online at www.foruma.kr/workshop/eng/bangsa.htm, accessed July 22, 2004; also interviews with UBU group, December 21, 2003, and Herizal Hazri, January 24, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

Cooperation (APEC) meeting Kuala Lumpur hosted in 1998. DEMA started at UTM, but soon drew in students, especially from UPM, USM, New Era College, and KTAR (Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman, later Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman), with an office in a house near UM. After five years, DEMA claimed around a hundred members—mostly Chinese, although initially more multiethnic—but with a core of around thirty. Its activities included an annual human-rights camp (launched in 1999) and civilizational dialogue program (launched in 2000), exposure trips to indigenous (*orang asli*) communities and plantation areas, and the publication of a bimonthly newsletter.[85] Styling itself as a nonpartisan movement-building organization, DEMA collaborated with other (antiestablishment) student organizations, off-campus NGOs and intellectuals, and regional networks. Inspired by *Reformasi* in Indonesia, student activism in Taiwan, and the ideas of Saul Alinsky and SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) in the United States, DEMA offered a broad platform, extending from rights to education and students' civil liberties to social services, the environment, and the rights of women and workers.[86]

Linked with DEMA were the Chinese Language Society (CLS) and underground Students' Progressive Front, formed in 2001. The CLS was legal at UM and USM, and tolerated as a "cultural icon" at KTAR, to take one example; other campuses had unregistered Chinese student clubs. These organizations collaborated in the unregistered Intervarsity Council to organize activities such as annual leadership and consciousness-raising training camps. Individual chapters held their own activities, as well. USM's CLS, for instance, organized exposure trips to squatter areas, supported a coalition on housing rights in Penang, and participated in an anti-ISA hunger strike in Kuala Lumpur, but focused mainly on campus issues, from integration of hostels to rules on students' vehicles. And many students still joined the CLS out of interest in Chinese culture, not interracial collaboration or politics.[87]

Reformasi and the rising fortunes of PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) nourished Islamist activism on campus, as well, sparking a baffling cornucopia of organizations following *Reformasi*. Just a slice: the Muslim Students' Society (PMI, Persatuan Mahasiswa Islam), Gabungan Mahasiswa Islam Se-Malaysia (GAMIS, Malaysian Muslim Students' Association), WUFI (We Unite for Islam), and Himpunan Islam (Muslim Assembly)—similar organizations with different names, on different campuses—were associated with PAS, however unofficially; other Muslim groups, not least the long-standing PKPIM (Persatuan Kebangsaan Pelajar Islam Malaysia, National Association of Muslim Students of Malaysia), might agree with the former groups on issues, but were not inclined to their partisan leanings. GAMIS, established at UM in 1989 to unite PMI members across campuses, assumed a leading role in reformist student coalitions. (The coalition went semi-undercover, changing its too-well-known name to Majlis Persidangan Mahasiswa Islam, Muslim Students' Council, from 2000 to 2004, but few seemed to note the change).[88] PKPIM, for its part, claimed around twenty thousand members in 2003, although only around 10 percent were active (a slight majority of those active were women[89]), and most of PKPIM's events were held off-campus. The organization accepted support from the Ministry of Youth and Sport, ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia), and other bodies, and was affiliated with such groups as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations, and Persekutuan Pelajar Islam Asia Tenggara (PEPIAT, Federation of Southeast Asian Muslim Students).[90] PKPIM tended toward a pro-government stance until Anwar's dismissal, then shifted allegiance, for instance by collaborating with PAS-leaning WUFI at IIU (International Islamic University) in 2001. Meanwhile, a new pro-UMNO group formed at the International Islamic University: Sahabah, or "Revo."[91] A semi-underground group named Karisma (Kelab Rakan Siswa Islah Malaysia), joined the fray in 1999; it was formed by the NGO Jamaah Islah Malaysia (JIM Malaysian Islamic Reform Society) and based off campus.[92] At UM, Karisma joined with PKPIM and the Chinese-based Universiti Malaya Association of New Youth (UMANY) in a temporary electoral pact, called Gagasan, to challenge the Student Affairs Department's preferred slate, even though PKPIM usually eschews too-close identification with any bloc. Still other, smaller, sometimes underground student groups, such as Hizbul Tahrir and Jamaat Tabligh, focused just on apolitical *dakwah*.[93]

In the absence of a national student union (none had existed since the days of PKPM), issue-driven coalitions developed, comprised of new and old groups, some centered in one campus, others extended across several.[94] The ISA offered a particularly effective catalyst. Ten groups, ranging from DEMA to (briefly) PKPIM, formed Gerakan Mahasiswa Mansuhkan ISA (GMMI, Students' Abolish ISA Movement) in early 2001; this alliance expanded to include some eighty groups, headquartered at NGO Suaram. A UBU hunger strike and signature campaign launched the coalition after ten *Reformasi* activists were detained in April 2001. While focused on opposing the ISA, both among students and in coordination with off-campus groups, the anti-ISA coalition also provided a network for organizing around other issues, especially civil liberties.[95] The initiative seemed to be making

[85] Interviews with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006; and Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and DEMA group, December 17, 2003.

[86] Interviews with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006, Penang; and DEMA group, December 17, 2003; and DEMA brochure, "Pengenalan Kepada Pergerakan Generasi Baru yang Progresif Dinamik & Pro-demokrasi: Gerakan Demokratik Belia dan Pelajar Malaysia" [Introduction to a Movement for a Progressive, Dynamic, and Pro-democratic New Generation: Malaysian Youth and Students' Democratic Movement] (undated).

[87] Interviews with Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006; Lim Hong Siang, March 10, 2006; and Choo Chon Kai, February 15, 2006, Penang.

[88] Interviews with Amin Idris, February 22, 2006, Kuala Lumpur; and Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006.

[89] Although now a majority among tertiary students, women tend to be less visible and dominant than men in *dakwah* groups, or to be housed in (subordinate) women's wings. Predominantly non-Malay groups are far more likely to be led by women, but even there, actual discussion of gender and related issues tends to be limited. Interviews with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006, Penang; and Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006.

[90] Interview with PKPIM leaders, December 19, 2003, Kuala Lumpur; and PKPIM brochure (untitled and undated).

[91] Interview with Amin Idris, February 22, 2006.

[92] Interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003, Petaling Jaya.

[93] Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006.

[94] Interview with Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

[95] GMMI brochure, "Mansuhkan ISA: Akta Keselamatan Dalam Negeri 1960: Adakah ISA Masih Relevan?" (undated); and interviews with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003; and DEMA group, December 17, 2003; Koh Swe Yong,

progress; it even secured a meeting with Inspector General of Police Norian Mai to discuss recent arrests in May 2001.[96] Then matters took a turn.

The year 2001 saw some of the first large-scale student protests since the 1970s. On June 8, around four hundred students converged on the National Mosque for a peaceful but unauthorized demonstration against the ISA. Riot police armed with batons and rattan canes moved in to disperse the crowd. Several students were beaten, and seven, from four universities, were arrested.[97] The "ISA 7" were promptly suspended (one from UiTM, after first being expelled, was provisionally reinstated[98]). They faced criminal charges and even prison terms. GMMI raised funds and launched a road tour to rally support for those who had been arrested. PMI was most forthcoming, as six of the seven students were in Muslim associations. Several hundred students assembled peacefully in defense of the detained students on the first and last days of their trial; the police responded violently by beating a student when the protestors marched from the National Mosque to the court on the final day. Campus authorities harassed other student leaders, too. It was not until nearly four years later, after multiple delays, that a Kuala Lumpur magistrate's court finally acquitted the "ISA 7," since neither the unlawfulness of the protest nor their participation in it could be proved. A year later, as the appeal process dragged on—the students' having refused an earlier offer from the education minister of amnesty if they apologized—only one student had been reinstated in his university.[99]

In June 2001, students faced a heavy police presence when they demonstrated at Suhakam to protest police brutality and restrictions on campus activism.[100] The following month, two popular student leaders, UBU's Jonah and UM SRC president Mohamad Fuad Mohamad Ikhwan, were detained under the ISA for pro-reform activities. Jonah, a Malay, had been involved with protests in support of Chinese

Malaysia: 45 Years under the Internal Security Act, trans. Agnes Khoo (Petaling Jaya: SIRD, 2004), p. 327.

[96] He gave students who arrived wearing anti-ISA badges the option of removing them or leaving; two students walked out. Interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003.

[97] They included Rafzan Ramli, Helman Sanuddin, Wan Sanusi Wan Mohd Noor, Khairul Amal Mahmud, Nik Noorhafizi Nik Ibrahim, Ahmad Kamal Abdul Hamid, and Zulkefle Idris.

[98] "Pembuangan Siswa Dilapor ke Suhakam," *Suara PRM*, July 2, 2001; "Govt Scores A for Denial of Student Rights," *Suara PRM*, July 18, 2001; "UiTM and Its Worth," *Harakah*, July 1–15, 2001; "Police 'Will Not Tolerate Illegal Gatherings,'" *New Straits Times*, June 9, 2001; Zulkifli Abd Rahman, "Suhakam Helps to Get UiTM Student Reinstated," *Star*, July 13, 2001; "Politik: UiTM, Mara Ambil Tindakan Tegas," *Berita Harian*, August 20, 2001.

[99] Interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003; Aliran Executive Committee, "Compensate 'ISA 7' for Wasted Years," Aliran Media Statement, April 22, 2005; Amnesty International, "Students Penalized." See also Beh Lih Yi, "'ISA 7' Case Raised in Parliament," *Malaysiakini*, October 20, 2003; Beh Lih Yi, "'ISA 7' Case: Decision put Off, Students Frustrated," *Malaysiakini*, December 16, 2004; Beh Lih Yi, "AG's Decision to Appeal Against 'ISA 7' Acquittal Slammed," *Malaysiakini*, May 26, 2005; Beh Lih Yi, "UiTM Refuses to Reinstate 'ISA 7' Student," *Malaysiakini*, June 7, 2005; Beh Lih Yi, "No Compensation for 'ISA 7,' Dewan Rakyat Told," *Malaysiakini*, July 11, 2005; Fauwaz Abdul Aziz, "Court Grants Leave for Review of UiTM Decision," *Malaysiakini*, November 10, 2005; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Appeal against ISA 7 Acquittal Put Off," *Malaysiakini*, April 12, 2006; Wong Yeen Fern, "ISA 7 Ordered Back to Court," *Malaysiakini*, November 9, 2006; and Andrew Ong, "Students Protest at Duta Court Complex," *Malaysiakini*, June 8, 2007.

[100] ISREC, "Draf Laporan," pp. 9–10.

education—itself unusual. Mohamad Fuad had challenged Abdullah Badawi at a conference at UM and was suspected of involvement with a fire on campus. Jonah, arrested while accompanying members of the ISA 7 to the police station, was held for nearly a month; Mohamad Fuad was held for two weeks.[101] Deputy Home Minister Zainal Abidin Zin justified the two students' detention as proof of the government's love and concern for their rehabilitation.[102] The arrests, as well as the ransacking of club offices and student leaders' homes, left most student organizations hesitant to organize too aggressively.[103]

At the same time, in Penang, a security guard charged USM CLS secretary-general Choo Chon Kai with selling anti-ISA badges. Choo's July 2001 hearing on charges that he had distributed anti-ISA paraphernalia dovetailed with another on CLS members' unauthorized participation in a debate in Singapore (discussed below). Around a hundred students rallied outside the Student Affairs Department offices to support the CLS members who had been called up before the authorities—the first such demonstration to take place there in a long time. Even Muslim groups now came out to support the CLS. Subsequent hearings on the cases brought additional, smaller gatherings, resulting in disciplinary hearings for another thirty-three students. Choo was ultimately suspended from USM for one semester; other CLS members charged with having anti-ISA posters were suspended, fined, and barred from their exams.[104]

GMMI, the anti-ISA coalition, was followed by the Gabungan Pelajar Malaysia Anti Perang (Malaysian Students' Anti-War Coalition, GEMPAR), formed among nine student and youth organizations after the start of hostilities in Iraq in 2003. Antiwar activism flourished across the region, coordinated by country-specific groups or cross-national organizations, such as the Hong Kong-based Asian Students Association and ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism).[105] Malaysia's GEMPAR urged the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and advocated for US President George Bush to be brought before a war crimes tribunal. The coalition aimed for a "refreshing and creative" approach to protest. For instance, a GEMPAR program of poetry recitals and street theater at Kuala Lumpur's Central Market in April 2003 promised "to be a galore of surprises and unprecedented resentment towards war and brutality."[106]

Students developed auxiliary services to facilitate their campaigns. An important example was the Independent Student Resource and Legal Training Centre (ISREC) formed after the 2001 arrests to offer legal aid, mobilize support, and research students' rights, registering as a business rather than a student club so it could accept

[101] "IKM Student Held under ISA," *Sun*, July 6, 2001; "Govt Scores A for Denial of Human Rights," *Suara PRM*, July 18, 2001. Interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003; Suaram Urgent Appeal, "Student Leader Arrested Under Draconian ISA!!" July 5, 2001, available online at www.suaram.org/isa/update20010705-1.htm, last accessed February 16, 2002.

[102] Koh, *45 Years*, p. 326.

[103] Interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003.

[104] Interviews with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003; and Choo Chon Kai, February 15, 2006.

[105] "Youth Rage against Globalization and War," *ASA Movement News*, August 2003, pp. 1–2, 7.

[106] GEMPAR leaflets and press release, "Re: Youth Alert! Nine Student and Youth Organizations Demand for Bush to be Prosecuted by the War Crime Tribunal!," issued April 18, 2003.

outside funding. The group had a core of only around five students, but NGOs helped it establish crisis centers and paralegal services. ISREC worked mostly behind the scenes. However, it also hosted interns from New Era College and launched an Undergraduates' Rights Day in June 2002,[107] commemorated in later years through initiatives including a 2005 forum against the UUCA[108] and 2006 joint declaration on student rights.[109]

Not all the new coalitions were so narrowly issue-specific. Especially starting with the 1997 financial crisis, students flocked to Kuala Lumpur with increasing frequency for protest events. Preexisting coalitions offered an initial base, especially Barisan Bertindak Mahasiswa Negara (BBMN, National Student Action Front), an informal grouping of SRCs formed at UM in 1986, then revived in 1998 on the initiative, especially, of Islamist students then in control of most of the student councils. (The president of UUM's [Universiti Utara Malaysia, Northern University of Malaysia] SRC was suspended for holding a position in BBMN.) Pro-government students also perked up during this period. For example, the thousands-strong Undergraduate Patriotic Coalition formed before the 1999 elections and was allegedly linked to the MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), while "blue" (pro-BN) and "green" (pro-PAS) camps vied for control of SRCs, however limited their powers. Indeed, although BBMN persisted, it ceased to represent SRCs once pro-government factions took them all over.[110] Levels of organization and integration varied by campus, however, and tended to be highest at urban, peninsular universities.

Several of these coalitions and groups (BBMN, GAMIS, DEMA, and others) united in the Majlis Pelajar Malaysia (MPM, Malaysian Students' Council). Among MPM's initiatives was, for instance, sending the nation's chief justice a memo on judicial reform in April 1998, an action for which UTM's Yong Kai Ping was prosecuted under the UUCA. The case was front-page news in the Chinese press, as six hundred students and sixty lecturers from UTM signed a petition in Yong Kai Ping's defense, and friends organized a demonstration and collected penny (*sen*) donations to pay his RM200 fine. (Cases such as this taught the authorities to let students' cases drag on without resolution, and taught students to take full advantage of media and trials.)[111]

[107] ISREC, "Draf Laporan"; ISREC leaflet (undated); interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003. Suhakam followed up a few months later with a Malaysian Fundamental Human Rights Day program on human and educational rights, including at least one presentation specifically concerning campus-related issues. Mohd Izani Mohd Zain, "Mahasiswa Dan Aktor Hak Asasi Manusia," *Dewan Masyarakat* 40,12 (2002).

[108] Beh Lih Yi, "Challenge the UUCA in Court, Students Told," *Malaysiakini*, June 9, 2005.

[109] SMM [Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia, Malaysian Students' Solidarity] and GAMP [Youth and Students Association], "Deklarasi Hak Asasi Mahasiswa Malaysia 2006 Sempena Hari Hak Asasi Mahasiswa, 8 June 2006," available online at http://saifullah-zulkifli.blogspot.com/2007/03/deklarasi-hak-asasi-mahasiswa-malaysia.html, accessed June 4, 2007.

[110] ISREC, "Draf Laporan," p. 8. Interviews with Stephen Doss, March 15, 2006; and Lee Khai Loon, February 7, 2006, Petaling Jaya.

[111] Interviews with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006; and Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

MPM morphed into Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (SMM, Malaysian Students' Solidarity).[112] By early 2004, SMM had developed from a relatively ad hoc, issue-based framework, oriented primarily around ISA and antiwar activism, to a sturdy national-level front. SMM lobbied Suhakam; its Malaysian Student Rights Report 2004, for instance, called for action on fifty pending student cases related to peaceful assemblies, writings, and association.[113] The coalition also lobbied the national legislature, as when it staged a ninety-minute protest outside parliament in September 2005, calling for fair elections and "student power." The ministry of higher education's parliamentary secretary met briefly with delegates from the group, to little effect.[114] And SMM both worked with NGOs and mobilized on campus. The coalition focused on political and student issues, both domestic and international; its efforts ranged from contesting a fuel price hike, to tsunami relief, to protesting American militarism.[115] SMM launched a nationwide fundraising and signature campaign for campus freedom, and got its list of seven demands for the ministry of higher education endorsed by fifty-five organizations.[116] Yet SMM found it difficult to continue educating and engaging new waves of students on issues, and relied heavily on a few key activists. Opposing SMM was the pro-establishment Gabungan Pelajar Mahasiswa Malaysia (Federation of Malaysian Undergraduates, GPMM).[117]

Far from welcoming input from such student organizations, the government has increasingly stressed, since the late 1990s, that students should be grateful for their scholarships and places in the universities and focus on their studies rather than on politics. This response is clearly in line with a policy of intellectual containment. The government has warned that student activists are likely to be manipulated by outside agents and to give Malaysia a bad name internationally.[118] Officials deem Malay students to be especially culpable; Mahathir asserted in mid-1999 that while diligent non-*bumiputera* students succeed, Malays just "study how they want to teach the government to govern the country." Moreover, he continued, Malay students defeat the purpose of preferential admissions policies when so many enroll in Malay or religious studies courses rather than in courses of study potentially useful for national development, invest minimal effort in their studies, and then "join opposition parties and curse the government" when they fail to find jobs.[119] Groused

[112] Interviews with DEMA group, December 17, 2003; Amin Idris, February 22, 2006; Tian Chua, March 9, 2006.

[113] Suaram, *Human Rights Report 2004*, p. 98.

[114] Beh Lih Yi, "Students Demand Fair Campus Polls in Protest Outside Parliament," *Malaysiakini*, September 21, 2005.

[115] Interview with Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006.

[116] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Campaign for Campus Freedom Gains Momentum," *Malaysiakini*, November 15, 2005. The online petition, coordinated by Suaram, garnered over 1,500 signatures, but had aimed for 10,000. See "Restore Campus Democracy and Student Rights in Malaysia," available online at www.petitiononline.com/poll2005/petition.html, accessed January 29, 2010.

[117] Interview with Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006.

[118] For instance, "Anasir Luar Terbabit Demonstrasi di UKM," *Utusan Malaysia*, March 15, 1999; and "Najib: Jangan Mudah Terpedaya," *Utusan Malaysia*, March 24, 1999.

[119] "PM Tegur Pelajar Lebih Pentingkan Agenda Politik," *Utusan Malaysia*, June 30, 1999.

Mahathir, "What is the purpose of us spending a lot of money if they do not want to study?"[120]

Malaysian students studying abroad were presumed to be equally susceptible to the ploys of foreign forces coaxing them to slander Malaysia's political leaders and dishonor the country; such students are considered *bersikap kacang lupakan kulit* (ungrateful, like peanuts that forget their shells). Concerned by such dangers, the government and the Peninsular Malays' Student Union (GPMS)—which by this point lacked actual student members and a strong public profile[121]—in late 1999 arranged to send representatives to tour overseas universities that housed concentrations of Malaysian students. The tours started in the United Kingdom and continued to other countries such as Japan and the United States, and were intended to "give information about the real situation in Malaysia" and "cleanse the thinking of those already sullied by the slander of irresponsible forces."[122] Perversely, at the same time, Malaysian students overseas, as locally, were criticized for being too unassertive and reclusive, traits that reportedly prevented them from making the most of their education.[123] And at least UMNO clubs and alternatives like the UK's PAS-aligned Hizbi (which swelled after Anwar's ouster, at the expense of local UMNO clubs) were allowed abroad, if not locally, since students are not bound by the UUCA outside Malaysia.

Apparent widespread discontent worried the regime. Government leaders held dialogue sessions at local universities. For instance, four thousand students from five universities attended a ninety-minute session with Mahathir at UKM in September 1999, touching on the economy, corruption, and the political system. Mahathir conceded afterwards that "not all students are against the government, but it takes only one bad apple for other apples to go bad if we mix them together."[124] Yet it was primarily to these "bad apples" that the government responded, moving from carrots to sticks; it sent out warnings from the start of the *Reformasi* period and implemented a harsh crackdown extending well beyond. Immediately upon Anwar's ouster in 1998, the education minister reminded students to steer clear of politics, and UMNO Youth leader Hishamuddin Hussein castigated organizations for using undergraduates to meddle in UMNO's internal affairs. Even 1970s activist Kamarazaman Yacob warned that by disrupting Mahathir's fight against "economic

[120] Zubaidah Abu Bakar, "New Ruling to Enter Varsity," *New Straits Times*, July 9, 2001.

[121] Many GPMS graduates had gone on to political careers and some continued to be involved in the organization. In fact, a power struggle ensued between two UMNO politicians (one age forty-five) for control of the organization in 2006. Its plight was not unique: "youth associations today have become dominated by senior adults," explained a former officer from the ministry of culture, youth, and sports. Nearly all major Malay-based youth groups in Malaysia, except ABIM, are currently led by politicians. Facing popular criticism, the government finally announced in 2007 that it would table a Youth Act to cap the age of youth-association leaders at forty and establish a separate registry for these associations. Abdul Razak Ahmad, "Living up Nobly to a Glorious Past," *New Straits Times*, January 8, 2006; Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, "Biarkan Belia Pimpin Pertubuhan Belia," *Malaysiakini*, January 12, 2006; Ooi Kelly, "Status Quo Pledged under New Youth Act," *Malaysiakini*, May 8, 2007.

[122] Zulkifli Abdullah, "Elak Jadi Alat Kuasa Asing," *Utusan Malaysia*, June 7, 1999; and Rohana Man, "Pelajar Luar Negara," *Utusan Malaysia*, October 23, 1999.

[123] Zainah Anwar, "Don't Curb Students' Enthusiasm," *New Straits Times*, February 15, 2007; Shahanaaz Sher Habib, "Seeking a Bigger Role in Politics," *Star*, August 1, 1999; Kariena Abdullah, "Missing the Point in Campus Election 'Battle,'" *Malaysiakini*, September 29, 2003.

[124] S. Retna and V. Gayathry, "Dr M: Students not Anti-govt," *Sun*, September 15, 1999.

recolonisation," students were "joining hands with foreigners to bring the country's leadership down. Whether they realise it or not, they have become agents of the imperialists."[125] In turn, USM's vice chancellor, for instance, announced that students and staff would be monitored more closely to ferret out prohibited political activities, especially "unhealthy elements" filtering through the campus mosque.[126]

The BN cajoled and threatened all citizens to stay away from the opposition and demonstrations, but focused pointedly on students and teachers, thus confirming the premise that this was an act of intellectual containment. Government and university officials insisted that undergraduates could expect no special treatment: if caught demonstrating, they would be subject to penalties ranging from counseling to expulsion, and could find their futures "blackened."[127] The protracted onslaught targeted not just individuals, but also student societies, some of which were shut down, had their assets frozen, or were labeled (especially Islamist ones) as militant or extremist.[128] In a particularly convoluted case, reports surfaced in the media of some 2,500 students believed to be involved with an underground militant movement. Though the Ministry of Education denied the allegations, several universities launched investigations of students and staff, questioning them about ties to organizations seeking to establish an Islamic state by force, and PMI was suspended at UTM. Officials asserted that unregistered groups like GAMIS and Himpunan Mahasiswa Selangor (HAMAS, Selangor Students' Association), as well as PAS, had lured undergraduates to this shady movement. Lack of evidence made it all seem a political drama, though, designed to intimidate. The messages were not subtle—for instance, after the arrest of several lecturers, student paper *Akhbar Mahasiswa* ran a front-page story, "Militants and Terrorists: Lecturers and Students Involved," with a stock photo of a demonstration and the admonition that such activity grants terrorism a foothold.[129] The authorities also intimidated students by such (infantilizing) means as calling their families to report the students' political activities. In interviews, activists of all stripes named this last strategy as especially vindictive. Throughout, university officials who hesitated to take harsh action were denounced in the media and parliament.[130]

Warnings mounted, too, about "irresponsible" lecturers who turned students against the government. Such lecturers were urged to resign their positions and become full-time politicians "so their students will know more clearly their intentions and why they so often make wild allegations against the government."[131] Mahathir himself minced no words, charging that lecturers who owed their positions to government assistance and facilities were now "teaching us not to be thankful

[125] Shahanaaz Sher Habib, "Seeking a Bigger Role in Politics," *Star*, August 1, 1999.

[126] "Varsity Acts to Keep Politics out of Campus," *Star*, September 8, 1998.

[127] For instance, "Tindakan jika Pelajar, Guru Berdemonstrasi," *Utusan Malaysia*, April 12, 2000; "Siswa UKM Diberi Amaran Keras," *Utusan Malaysia*, April 14, 2000; and "Stay Out of Politics, Students Warned," *Sun*, September 7, 1998.

[128] ISREC, "Draf Laporan," pp. 13–14; DEMA, "Students Involvement," p. 15.

[129] *Akhbar Mahasiswa*, December 2002; Ann Abdullah, "Benarkah Pelajar Melayu Militan?" *Dewan Masyarakat* 39,11 (2001), pp. 46–47.

[130] ISREC, "Violation of Human Right on Malaysian Student (Part 2)," Independent Student Resource and Legal Training Centre, at www.isrec.org/main/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=10, last, accessed September 30, 2003.

[131] "Pensyarah Hasut Pelajar Bencikan Kerajaan Dikecam," *Utusan Malaysia*, February 20, 1999.

when we get something from anybody but instead bite the hands that feed us" and spreading an unIslamic "philosophy of hatred." As a result, "those who could not make it to university are more appreciative of what the government provides."[132] University officials insisted that lecturers might engage students intellectually, but were hardly "sowing seeds of hatred"—unlike the Internet and opposition party publications.[133]

The critical spirit of *Reformasi* lingered on campus. Animosity remained high enough that when a fire ravaged UM's Dewan Tunku Canselor (Great Hall) the day before a scheduled symposium featuring the prime minister in June 2001, BN politicians immediately accused student activists of arson; the fire department faulted bad wiring.[134] Certain students took real risks in speaking out. UUM student union deputy president Mohd Rizal bin Mohd Adnan, for instance, was suspended for three years for bringing disrepute to the university by questioning a journalist's attacks on students;[135] other students incurred similarly severe penalties for minor infractions.[136] Indeed, while the events of 1998 catalyzed activism, an escalating "politics of fear" entailed far tighter government repression on campus over the next several years, enforced by campus Student Affairs departments as much as UMNO.[137]

Even so, many students and lecturers rejected the idea that officials were monitoring their actions so carefully or were likely to press charges under the UUCA, particularly given the bad press incurred by the government whenever a student was detained. Indeed, considering the thousands of students mobilized around Anwar and *Reformasi*, a miniscule fraction suffered concrete penalties, even when they were involved in off-campus protests and opposition-party campaigns. Moreover, the political climate soon changed again, unsettling expectations. Most notably, Mahathir stepped down as prime minister in late 2003, after over two decades in power. Political opportunity structures were shifting. Student groups from across Malaysia and all communities launched into consultations on post-Mahathir roles and strategies.[138] The crackdown, however, and intellectual containment broadly, did not abate. Indeed, 2004 alone saw over forty students charged under UUCA[139]—the same year the BN coasted to electoral victory, in the face of an otherwise enervated opposition and amid hopes of a new political order.

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[132] "Seeds of Hate," *Sun*, February 19, 1999.

[133] "Dons Deny Sowing Seeds of Hatred," *Sun*, February 25, 1999.

[134] Koh, *45 Years*, p. 326.

[135] ISREC, "Draf Laporan," p. 7.

[136] Suaram, *Human Rights Report 2004*, 98; Amin Idris, February 22, 2006.

[137] Interview with KSJT (Komunité Seni Jalan Telawi, Telawi Street Arts Community) group, January 11, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[138] Interview with Lee Khai Loon, February 7, 2006.

[139] Interview with Amin Idris, February 22, 2006.

BEYOND *REFORMASI*: SOCIAL JUSTICE, ISLAM, AND NETWORKS

> A country which discourages political enthusiasm among its students will have its political movements led by illiterate malcontents twenty years later.[140]

Reformasi's focus on civil liberties, fair governance, and equity, but also its emphasis on (and the tension between) Islamism and cross-communal inclusiveness, continue to spur student organizing. Moreover, while students had played only supporting roles in *Reformasi*, the fact of their involvement, which renewed many students' sense of collective identity and potential, pressed the regime to step up its legal and discursive efforts toward containment. While the UUCA had already been a core *Reformasi* issue, prosecutions of students escalated public support for reform. Even BN parties (particularly the youth wing of Gerakan, self-styled "conscience of the BN" and, hence, a sometimes uneasy partner in the alliance) joined the chorus of criticism, noting the lack of a pressure valve to direct and release the political passions of feisty youngsters.[141] By October 2005, with the tempestuous mobilization of 1998 safely in the past, two BN backbenchers pressed in parliament for amendment of the UUCA, especially of the restrictive sections 15 and 16. They insisted that the development of critical thinking skills and of "capable leaders" requires freedom, not "blanket restrictions."[142] However, not even all students supported repeal. In late 2005, UPM's pro-government SRC vice president explained his stance:

> As students, we are not in the position to give suggestions. Only the leaders can do that because it involve [*sic*] the law. We believe the leaders always think of the students' welfare. ... [The] UUCA is protecting the students' welfare, so why do they want to abolish the act?[143]

UM's SRC president Mohd. Effendi Omar likewise worried that giving students greater freedom could lead to scenarios similar to those in Indonesia, where students "hold street demonstrations that tarnish the nation's image and scare away foreign investors," or topple national leaders before they have "space or chance to correct themselves." Students should instead raise problems only through legal, peaceful channels, and leave politics until after graduation, he suggested, although the act should allow latitude for on-campus activities.[144] Or, as he put it the following year: "We are just students for three or four years. Why do you want to get involved in

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[140] T. H. Silcock, "The University and Progress in Malaya," in *A Symposium on the Carr-Saunders Report on University Education in Malaya*, ed. Lim Tay Boh (Singapore: International Student Service Malaya, [1948]), p. 18.

[141] Interview with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006; "BN Youth Seeks Views on Universities Act," *Sun*, August 13, 1999; "Show Proof Varsities Act Stifles Students: Umno Youth," *Sun*, September 3, 1999; Hah Foong Lian and Leslie Lau, "Review Varsity Act, Govt Urged," *Star*, July 24, 1999; Bĕh Lih Yi, "Gerakan Youth Repeats Its Call to Review UUCA," *Malaysiakini*, November 24, 2004.

[142] Beh Lih Yi, "Amend UUCA, Say BN MPs," *Malaysiakini*, October 12, 2005.

[143] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Student Council Defends 'Protective' UUCA," *Malaysiakini*, November 18, 2005.

[144] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Repeal UUCA at Nation's Peril, Warns Student Leader," *Malaysiakini*, December 1, 2005.

politics outside campus?"[145] Yet another student coalition, the Majlis Perundingan Pelajar Kebangsaan (MPPK, National Students' Consultative Council, discussed below), weighed in with a memorandum endorsing the UUCA, urging the government to ignore suggestions from unregistered bodies like Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia.[146] Antiestablishment students quickly issued rejoinders.[147] Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak noted that repeal of the act was not on the table, regardless; only review and amendment were being considered.[148]

A BN brainstorming session on the UUCA later that year concluded unanimously "that students should be given more room to participate in activities" both on and off campus. Opinion was split, though, when it came to politics. MCA Youth chief Liow Tiong Lai, for instance, proposed that students be allowed to join parties or off-campus youth associations. (He denied that this was a ploy to facilitate the BN's recruitment of younger members.) Others disagreed; the consensus position, ultimately approved, was to allow students to join only off-campus associations or NGOs, but not parties.[149] Meanwhile, the opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat (Keadilan, People's Justice Party), prime vehicle of the *Reformasi* movement, convened its own working group of academics, students, and NGO representatives to make a case for abolishing the UUCA. PAS and the DAP (Democratic Action Party) echoed the call.[150] That August, as parliament edged toward tabling amendments, a coalition of fifty-three student groups, civil society organizations, and political parties formed the Gerakan Mansuhkan AUKU (Abolish the UUCA Movement). The coalition issued a lengthy statement with three core demands: repeal the UUCA and subsidiary regulations; incorporate student and staff input into any new legislation concerning tertiary institutions; and grant wider leeway for student and academic staff involvement in societies on or off campus.[151] When the dust settled, little had changed; disappointed students lambasted the final amendments as merely "cosmetic" fine-tuning.[152]

As these campaigns suggest, campus activists' connections with both the rest of civil society and political parties have deepened and expanded compared to conditions in the 1980s and 1990s, especially since *Reformasi*. For instance, UKM's service-oriented JKMI maintains close links with Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (JERIT, Oppressed Peoples' Network), a coalition of students', youth, and civil-rights organizations; with the Community Development Council (CDC), which offers ideological training, moral support, resources, and a way to stay active after graduation; with the workers' movement broadly; and at an individual level, with Parti Sosialis Malaysia.[153] Such ties shift the scope of issues accessible to students.

The next challenge after *Reformasi* waned, then, especially for the antiestablishment camp, was to "inject new ideas" into the discourse among student activists; conservative elements had been rallying while progressive ones stalled. An example of an organization focused on innovation was Komunité Seni Jalan Telawi (KSJT, Telawi Street Arts Community), which developed out of UBU and brought together left-wing as well as Islamist students. Its backers—former student activists like Fathi Aris Omar—wanted students to move beyond opportunistic alliances, develop their intellectual capacities, and build up a new society by focusing more on issues than on partisan rivalry.[154] Such voluntary efforts, often involving journalists, think-tank staff, and artsy sorts, demonstrated real dedication among progressive "adults" determined to facilitate and encourage students' engagement and awareness, but also seemed to confirm contemporary students' lack of independent initiative or incentive to rouse themselves, as they had in the 1960s, without a guiding hand from outside.

The state, too, responded to *Reformasi* challenges, in part, by offering new opportunities for networking. In 1999, the pro-*Reformasi* factions controlling most SRCs had provided students with campaign kits and urged them to go home and try to influence their parents' votes. Annoyed, the government moved to reassert control of the SRCs and launched new dialogue programs at IIU and ITM (Institut Teknologi MARA). It was apparently to initiate dialogue that Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi inaugurated the MPPK in 1999.[155] Although it ostensibly offered students direct access to decision-makers via biannual meetings—and Najib insisted the aim was not "brainwashing"—more skeptical student groups deemed the MPPK really a platform to deflate and counter criticism, justify policies, and keep feedback in the "proper channel." They declined to join, and a subset of students remained persistently suspicious.[156] So, years later, when around three hundred student representatives attended a September 2006 session with Deputy Prime Minister Najib and Higher Education Minister Mustapa Mohamed, around half that number participated in an SMM-organized rally supporting free and fair elections and against the UUCA, gathering outside the building where the session was held. A ministry official met with them, but refused to accept their memorandum. Meanwhile, a participant inside handed Najib another memorandum, calling on the

[145] Pauline Puah, "Keeping Varsity Elections Alive," *Sun*, September 19, 2006.

[146] Farrah Naz Karim, "Act Will Remain, Says Najib," *New Straits Times*, January 28, 2006.

[147] "Amend UUCA, or Face Uncertain Future," *Malaysiakini*, February 2, 2006.

[148] Simon Khoo, "Changes to University Colleges Act to Suit the Times," *Star*, March 26, 2006.

[149] Beh Lih Yi, "BN MPs: Give Students More Freedom, but Politics ..." *Malaysiakini*, July 10, 2006; Beh Lih Yi, "Let Varsity Students Join Politics, Say Party Leaders," *Malaysiakini*, July 12, 2006; and Beh Lih Yi, "UUCA Amendments: No Room for Politics," *Malaysiakini*, July 14, 2006.

[150] Wong Yee Fern and Vanmala Subramaniam, "No Accolades for Proposed UUCA Changes," *Malaysiakini*, July 11, 2006; and Beh Lih Yi, "Let Varsity Students Join Politics, Say Party Leaders," *Malaysiakini*, July 12, 2006.

[151] Wong Yee Fern, "Anti-UUCA Coalition Sets Three Demands," *Malaysiakini*, August 28, 2006.

[152] Beh Lih Yi, "Amendments to UUCA Passed," *Malaysiakini*, December 11, 2008.

[153] Interview with Nalini E. and Puhnipha D., February 25, 2006, Bangi; and interview with S. Arutchelvan, February 21, 2006, Petaling Java.

[154] Interviews with KSJT group, January 11, 2006, and Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003, Kuala Lumpur.

[155] A key broker was UM graduate student Stephen Doss, who saw an opportunity to liaise with Mahathir's comparatively approachable deputy. Interview with Stephen Doss, March 15, 2006; Aznan Bakar, "TPM Temui Pelajar Berdemonstrasi," *Utusan Malaysia*, October 9, 1999; Siti Nor Shafinaz Skeikh Maznan, "Demonstrasi: UM Jejak Ketua Dalang," *Utusan Malaysia*, October 14, 1999; Shahanaaz Sher Habib, "Dollah Meets Demonstrating UM Students," *Star*, October 9, 1999; and Ramlan Said, "DPM to Look into Students' Demands," *New Straits Times*, October 9, 1999.

[156] Marhaini Kamaruddin, "Tiada Hasrat Kongkong Pemikiran Pelajar IPTA," *Mingguan Malaysia*, August 22, 1999; "Menjalinkan Persefaman Kerajaan Pelajar," *Utusan Malaysia*, October 20, 1999; Mohd Izani Mohd Zain, "Hubungan Kerajaan Dan Mahasiswa Semakin Rumit," *Dewan Masyarakat* 39,9 (September 2001), pp. 46–47; interview with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006.

government to take action against SMM for "threaten[ing] the peace and harmony in campuses" and to reject Suhakam monitoring of elections as "transgressing into the university's rights."[157]

Since *Reformasi*, despite students' deeper ties to allied domestic organizations, student activists' international connections have remained relatively thin, regionally focused, and ad hoc. Specific categories of students pursue wider connections—for example, the ASEAN Law Students' Association links students from across the region,[158] and pro-democracy DEMA represents Malaysia in the Asian Students' Association (ASA) and dispatched a delegation to Hong Kong to protest the WTO (World Trade Organization).[159] Even ties with neighboring Indonesia are shallow. A representative from Indonesia's Partai Rakyat Demokrasi (PRD, People's Democratic Party), for instance, came to meet with students during *Reformasi*, offering lessons in mass organizing,[160] and some of the thousands of Indonesians studying in Malaysia joined *Reformasi* demonstrations—although some seemed disappointed with the comparatively tame events. At least one Malaysian activist—a founding member of UBU—was in Indonesia in time to storm the parliament with students there.[161] Yet activist networks between students in the two countries have not really been sustained.

Perhaps because of its greater integration into a broader, but specifically domestic, political order—however newly vibrant and dense that order—but clearly furthered by state efforts to manage dissent, student activism overall has grown ever more contained since before the *Reformasi* period. It relies primarily on "well established means of claim making," rather than more innovative, "transgressive" modes.[162] Notwithstanding more inventive ventures like UBU's art outreach activities, politics for students, as for the outside public, revolves increasingly around campus and national elections—albeit with ample contumely and controversy—and control of media is ever more important for mobilization (and forestalling mobilization). The two predominant themes among student activists in both electoral and media fora since *Reformasi* have been social justice, variously defined, and Islam, but the means of pursuing goals associated with these issues have been substantially regularized as the campus has come to resemble more closely the polity beyond.

Campaigns and Elections

During the *Reformasi* period, both the dramatic success of "green" coalitions in campus elections and increased student involvement in off-campus electoral campaigns reflected support for Anwar and the opposition. The BN fought back, making campus elections springboards for broader mobilization from all sides. The

[157] Claudia Theophilus, "Relax Varsity Act: Gerakan Youth," *Sun*, September 19, 2006; Soon Lu Tsin and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Students Rally against Najib, Mustapa," *Malaysiakini*, September 15, 2006.

[158] Interview with Yusmadi Yusoff, January 18, 2006.

[159] Interviews with Lee Khai Loon, February 7, 2006, and Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

[160] Interview with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006.

[161] Interview with Herizal Hazri, January 20, 2006.

[162] Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 7–8.

government boosted funding for its own student groups and publications as of 1998, while cracking down on student support for opposition parties and allegedly stepping-up Special Branch monitoring of classes and activities.[163] Indeed, many students have balked at the extent of partisanship on campus[164] amid purported meddling by both government and opposition parties. Meanwhile, overweening controls eviscerate campus elections. By the early 2000s, complains one underground publication, there was "no heated debate, no question and answer sessions between voters and candidates, no manifesto; what there was, the UUCA."[165] Even though voluntary student voter turnout tends to be comparatively low (at UM, for instance, it averages around 60 percent[166]), and despite controls imposed by the UUCA, the on-campus polls tend to be considered proxies for national-level contests, especially of contests between UMNO and PAS. Students align with particular blocs to contest SRC elections, openly or not, collaborating on strategy sessions, campaign support, and room-to-room canvassing.[167]

Given fairly extensive media coverage, candidate statements, and the fact that university administrations pick their favorite candidates, these affiliations tend to be readily apparent. As of 1999, the phrase "pro-student" or *aspirasi mahasiswa* (or more recently, "Pro-M," for *mahasiswa*, "undergraduate") came to be used for antiestablishment candidates, although their opponents called them *pihak pembangkang* (opposition forces) or just "PAS." "Pro-University" or *aspirasi universiti* meant pro-government, but the term *aspirasi Kerajaan* (pro-government), or, more commonly, just *Aspirasi*, was also used. The opponents of Aspirasi candidates claim the Aspirasi slates tend to be "engineered" rather than comprising known student leaders, and that their candidate lists mimic the communal BN's lists in structure. Not all students fit neatly into one of those camps; ABIM usually has its own faction, for instance, and some students run as independents or evade partisan pigeonholing. One 1998 candidate at UM, for instance, from a "liberal," issue-oriented wing, but troubled by the overemphasis on national politics (and specifically, the focus on Anwar) on campus, describes fliers and fiery speeches from fellow antiestablishment students labeling him a "communist" and atheist, or warning students they would go to hell if they listened to him.[168]

It is impossible to know for sure how true claims of party interference are. However, the empirical evidence of BN involvement (see below), the manifest lack of a strong following for the Aspirasi students, and the sheer scale and scope of the claims lend a fair degree of credence to those claims. Students aligned with the pro-government MCA, for instance, tend not to have an independent organizational basis, but still mobilize for elections, especially since the university selects some top

[163] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003.

[164] Kariena, "Missing the Point."

[165] "Pilihan Raya Kampus: Peraduan Ratu bercoli Hijau atau Biru?" *Berita Kampus Alternatif*, August 28, 2003, p. 8.

[166] Interview with Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006.

[167] Interview with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006.

[168] Interview with Herizal Hazri, January 24, 2006. On the broader trend, see Kariena "Missing the Point"; Mohd Izani Zain, "Pilihan Raya Kampus: Usah Ada Label-Melabel," *Dewan Masyarakat* 40,2 (February 2002), pp. 52–53; DEMA, "Students Involvement," p. 10; and interview with UBU group, December 21, 2003.

students (often English-educated) to stand.[169] Party officials allegedly dangle money and other benefits as lures to convince promising representatives of Chinese or religious organizations to run. It is said that this practice runs in the other direction, as well, and that opposition parties also offer inducements to potential contenders. One mainstream campus publication, for instance, published lurid reports of PAS and Keadilan's offering lavish bribes to "pro-opposition" candidates in the December 2002 campus elections. They were opposing Aspirasi candidates "who support UMNO's struggle," and yet could count on a mere RM10,000 per campus in campaign funds.[170] Both antiestablishment students' boycotts of the elections and the disqualifications of their opponents by university administrators have helped advance the Aspirasi slates. Moreover, the antiestablishment coalitions that formed in 1999 have not proved entirely durable, not least due to different degrees of conservatism and courage.[171]

Partisan differences escalated during *Reformasi* and remain severe still, even though wider mobilization has dwindled. Within days of Anwar's ouster, the leaders of USM's SRC and the Muslim Students' Society (PMI) issued a joint statement withholding their support from any reform movement he proposed, endorsing a recent warning by the vice chancellor against influence by outside elements, and applauding Mahathir's leadership and accomplishments.[172] (The media made much of such peer interventions.[173]) Yet antiestablishment blocs (including groups like pro-democratic DEMA and the Islamist GAMIS) won elections in most universities through the heydays of *Reformasi*. Within about five years, the winds had again shifted, although the scant power of SRCs limits the policy implications of a win.[174]

Rather than leave all responsibility for smothering campus activism to loyalist students, since *Reformasi* university administrators have augmented efforts begun in the 1980s to keep rabble-rousers out of office, with mixed results. Radical deans and college masters have been replaced, responsibility for approving a candidate's nomination papers has been delegated to university administrators, eligibility criteria have been tightened, and polling stations have been moved from academic faculties to residential colleges (where residents may not be assured confidentiality). Also, college presidents and committee members are now chosen by masters rather than elected; some have enjoyed suspicious "good fortune" in obtaining motorcycles and other perks.[175]

Student campaigns have mimicked those conducted off campus, and have involved a range of familiar activities, from poster wars to charges of vote-buying and "dirty tactics."[176] In a piece for the UMNO Youth website, a representative of

[169] Interview with Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

[170] Nuralam Akbar, "Calon Pro-pembangkang dapat RM 30,000," *Akhbar Mahasiswa*, December 2002, pp. 1, 9.

[171] Interview with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006.

[172] "We Don't Support Reform Drive, Say Students," *Sun*, September 10, 1998.

[173] For instance, Sharon Kam, "Students Politically-aware Despite Laws," *Sun*, September 27, 1998.

[174] Interview with DEMA group, December 17, 2003.

[175] Interviews with Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006, and Choi Kian You, March 23, 2006.

[176] Mohd. Shuhaimi Al-Maniri, *De Sebalik Tabir: Politik Kampus* (Bangi: Generasi Baru, 1995), pp. 20–22, 48–50.

USM's self-described "Pro-University" faction dismissed allegations of UMNO's involvement in elections as false rumors spread by PMI and CLS members eager to scapegoat UMNO. He argued that, in fact, these "opposition forces" used the dirtiest of tactics and name-calling, evoking parallels with PAS.[177] Coverage of malfeasance on the other side, too, has escalated.[178] A 2006 SMM report on that year's campus elections, for example, alleged intimidation, violence, and unfair restrictions by university authorities; authorities' screening out candidates via interviews or refusing to sign nomination forms; a lack of transparency and privacy in electronic voting; and racially incendiary campaign materials.[179] Yet overall, as UM lecturer Azmi Sharom has complained, the system of campus elections is "utterly sterile and insipid," suffocated by administrative restrictions: banners and posters cannot detail policy platforms, coalitions are banned, and the campaign period is far too brief. Moreover, according to Sharom, university authorities accord their preferred Aspirasi candidates "lavish treatment," then bully students into voting for them. He muses, "What are we teaching our young people?"[180]

IIU student Mozahiri Shamsuddin was the first to challenge university election rules in court in 2005, contesting such requirements for candidates as a minimum GPA, an English-language public-speaking test, and interviews with university officials. His affidavit called the rules not just "unreasonable, illogical, unfair, and oppressive," but unconstitutional. Moreover, he maintained that elections should be organized by the SRC, not the administration's election commission. He asked that the court reschedule and restructure upcoming elections. The case was repeatedly postponed.[181]

More immediately influential than such legal challenges were student boycotts of the elections, even though such boycotts were officially prohibited. SMM organized a series of these across campuses in the 2000s. For instance, when two universities, UPM and IIU, introduced electronic voting ("e-voting") systems in 2003, SMM and its allies voiced concerns over transparency and confidentiality. For five years prior, the antiestablishment faction at UPM had won; for two years after installation of the new e-voting system, the university faction won in clean sweeps. The apparent rigging of the election prompted a boycott the following year.[182] Meanwhile, UM's antiestablishment student bloc launched a 2004 boycott on

[177] Khairul Eruwan Abdul Halim, "Realiti Keputusan Pilihan Raya USM Dan Politik Kotor PMI," available at http://www.pemudaumno.org.my/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1666, posted September 8 [2003], accessed February 23, 2006. The author went on to work for the university.

[178] For instance, Beh Lih Yi, "PAS Calls for Probe into Campus Polls, Seeks Postponement," *Malaysiakini*, August 28, 2003, or Kariena, "Missing the Point."

[179] Pauline Puah, "Unfair Campus Elections Report Being Compiled," *Sun*, October 4, 2006.

[180] Azmi Sharom, "High Jinks in Student Politics?" *Star*, October 2, 2006. After this piece, Azmi was called up by UM for two minor "factual errors" and "advised" not to write on matters related to the university. See Beh Lih Yi, "Don Barred from Writing after Critical Column," *Malaysiakini*, December 5, 2006.

[181] Beh Lih Yi, "Student Takes UIA to Court over Campus Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September 23, 2005; Beh Lih Yi, "Student Activist vs. University Case Put Off," *Malaysiakini*, January 6, 2006; and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Campus Polls: Students' Suit Postponed," *Malaysiakini*, April 5, 2006.

[182] Interview with Chang Lih Kang, January 27, 2006, Petaling Jaya; "'E-voting' ancaman terbaru terhadap pemilihan kampus," *Malaysiakini*, October 1, 2004.

grounds that there had been procedural irregularities and that the administration had enforced antidemocratic regulations.[183]

Official (pro-establishment) campus publications grew awash in panicked warnings. A 2004 special edition of *Akhbar Api Perjuangan Mahasiswa* (a.k.a. *Akhbar Mahasiswa*, Student News) raised the specter of unemployment: companies blacklist pro-PAS students as "weak in English, close-minded and find it hard to get along with other races." Just having an "opposition stronghold" (*lubuk pembangkang*, for instance, UM's law faculty) on campus may taint all of that university's graduates, according to the authors of the special edition.[184] A related piece specifically cautioned IIU students (in English, appropriately, since IIU is an English-medium institution):

> ... the most important thing for a student is to study and graduate with flying colours and not to be involved and become an instrument of any political party, especially the opposition. The opposition has proven time and again that it will strive to do anything as long as they can stay in power, even sacrificing the future of the Malay Muslims. They would rather see our future generation perform badly in their studies, do not have any professional qualifications as long as the opposition can control the students minds to do their bidding.[185]

Students must thus "vote for the right candidate ... Don't be a traitor to your own race just because of greed that will crumble our nation just like what happened to Malacca, being invaded for 440 years, colonized and oppresed [*sic*] by the foreign powers."[186] High stakes for a student council election![187]

As this hyperbole suggests, however paltry the scope for campaigning or the authority gained by winning, campus elections were even more bitter in the decade following *Reformasi* than during it. The drama surged in 2003. At the time, antiestablishment factions dominated at five major universities: UM, UKM, UPM, USM, and IIU. UMNO Youth was purportedly determined to win them back. PAS and antiestablishment student groups charged that UPM authorities, together with apparent "student SB" (Special Branch) members, had conducted at least two separate raids on Malay female undergraduates' rooms, as well as the SRC office, in the weeks before the polls. The teams searched students' personal computer files, confiscated documents (including PAS leaflets), and brought several students before the deputy vice chancellor for a pre-dawn "interrogation." The vice chancellor had recently claimed antiestablishment students were out to topple him and vowed to rid UPM of "pro-opposition activities." (DAP Youth immediately promised to lodge a

[183] Muhamad Khairol Anwar Md. Zuki, "Kumpulan Aspirasi Mahasiswa Malaysia Boikot PRK MPM," *Berita Kampus Alternatif*, September 14, 2004, pp. 6–8.

[184] "Untuk Elak Pengangguran, Tolak MPP Berimej Pembangkang," *Akhbar Mahasiswa* 2004 (edisi khas), pp. 1, 3.

[185] "IIUM must be free from any political influence," *Akhbar Mahasiswa* 2004 (edisi khas), p. 7.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Another special edition for the 2006 polls condemned UPM's antiestablishment groups and lambasted the unregistered Students' Progressive Front for allegedly being in cahoots with both Suaram and a related Chinese-medium alternative news site, Merdekareview.com, and for stirring up racial divisions and other trouble. Kuek Ser Kuang Keng and Ng See Yin, "Tabloid Attacks UPM's 'Anti-establishment' Group," *Malaysiakini*, September 21, 2006.

protest with Suhakam, but Education Minister Musa Mohamed declined requests to investigate the situation, dismissing the reports as "hearsay.")[188] The antiestablishment groups alleged, too, that UMNO Youth had bribed pro-government candidates with cash and cellular phones, and that administrators had hindered certain students from contesting the election or obstructed their campaigns, made harassing phone calls to antiestablishment candidates' families (telling them, for instance, that their Chinese children had joined PAS), violated confidentiality and threatened to expel antiestablishment voters, queried applicants to residential colleges about their "anti-university or anti-government activities," campaigned openly for Aspirasi candidates, or called elections unduly early (since it is the minister of higher education's prerogative to do so), in order to insure that the student election could serve as an indicator for upcoming national elections.[189] PAS petitioned Suhakam for a postponement of the student elections, pending an investigation particularly into the suspicious goings-on at UPM.[190] Civil rights coalition JERIT compiled a list of purported abuses and charged the authorities at six universities with intimidating voters and obstructing candidates. UMNO denied the charges.[191] Education Minister Musa Mohamed declared the polls to be "clean enough" and asked that allegations of "money politics" not be blown out of proportion. His deputy, on the other hand, waffled, asserting that if the government were involved, PAS probably was, too, even if fewer specific allegations had been lodged against the allies and members of PAS.[192]

The next year's elections, in 2004, were no less heated. UM's SRC kicked things off with a complaint to Suhakam in late August, detailing violations: for instance, that the administration had set up a mandatory Independence and Patriotism Training Camp that "was clearly found to be an election campaign exercise," and that the principals of hostels were coercing support for their candidates.[193] Then, UKM officials launched another set of midnight raids on the rooms of at least five female PMI members, confiscating electronics and personal effects on grounds that the students were planning "underground activities." Those raided threatened legal action. At UPM, university officials allegedly assaulted two student

[188] Beh Lih Yi, "Midnight Raid on Students' Rooms, Documents Seized," *Malaysiakini*, August 22, 2003; Beh Lih Yi, "Second UPM Raid Targets Student Council Office and Hostel," *Malaysiakini*, August 25, 2003; and Beh Lih Yi, "Minister Defends UPM as Raids Continue," *Malaysiakini*, August 27, 2003.

[189] Beh Lih Yi, "Umno Youth behind 'Money Politics' in Campus Polls Claim," *Malaysiakini*, September 4, 2003; Yap Mun Ching, "Campus Polls: UKM Students Cry Foul," *Malaysiakini*, September 4, 2003; and Yoon Szu-Mae, "Students Charge Varsities with Litany of Poll Abuses," *Malaysiakini*, September 18, 2003; Beh Lih Yi, "I Don't Know, I Don't Know, I Don't Know," *Malaysiakini*, September 17, 2005. Again, it is impossible to weigh the veracity of these claims with certainty or to assess whether the wrongdoings were as one-sided as the complaints.

[190] Beh Lih Yi, "PAS Calls for Probe into Campus Polls, Seeks Postponement," *Malaysiakini*, August 28, 2003.

[191] Yoon Szu-Mae, "Students Charge Varsities."

[192] Beh Lih Yi, "Minister Defends UPM as Raids Continue"; Beh Lih Yi, "Umno Youth behind 'Money Politics' in Campus Polls Claim"; Beh Lih Yi, "Money Politics in Campus Polls 'Small Matter,' Says Musa," *Malaysiakini*, September 8, 2003; and Yoon Szu-Mae, "Students Charge Varsities."

[193] "UM Students Seek Suhakam's Intervention in Campus Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September 1, 2004.

representatives.[194] Students renewed their request for Suhakam to monitor the campus elections; the minister of higher education refused. Commissioner Siva Subramaniam sniped, "Suhakam can go to any restricted place in this country, even to army camps and police lock-ups, but are not allowed into universities. It gives rise to the doubt that they have something to hide."[195] The commission vowed to keep a close eye on future elections and offered proposals to rectify the "tight, cruel, and strange" regulations that had been put in place, to no avail.[196] IIU students protested both a too-short campaign period and the redelineation of constituencies, while nomination day at UM saw students throwing "shoes and other objects" at their opponents and boycotting the election over officials' refusal to endorse nomination forms. On election day, UPM students, too, joined the boycott over e-voting (noted above), while around 150 students picketed at UM against violations of ballot confidentiality. Even after the polls were over, the vice chancellor and SB questioned the victors at USM on their political views, delaying the formation of the SRC on campus.[197] Antiestablishment students won majorities, regardless, at IIU, USM, and UTM,[198] although seventeen of those elected at UTM were later disqualified for trivial campaign violations. Denying any intent to install pro-establishment students, the vice chancellor for student affairs at UTM scoffed that the SRC "doesn't do much work," anyway.[199]

Similar issues recurred the following year, 2005. News site *Malaysiakini* disclosed a series of "varsity student activities co-ordinating meetings" at UMNO headquarters and elsewhere, meetings that brought together officials from the ministry of higher education, all deputy vice chancellors for student affairs, and the heads of all pro-establishment SRCs or "aspiration clubs." UMNO representatives also attended some sessions. (A ministry representative said the UMNO representatives were not invited, but "if they were present, it was impossible for us to ask them to leave"; a Puteri UMNO official countered that this representative's own ministry had invited her.) The meetings covered strategies for the upcoming elections, including ways to influence rivals to withdraw, register protests, fish for votes, and campaign more effectively.[200] This time, most public universities initially

[194] Beh Lih Yi, "Students Mull Law Suit against Varsity over Midnight Dorm Raid," *Malaysiakini*, September 18, 2004.

[195] Selvam Arjunan, "Suhakam: Do Varsities Have Something to Hide?" *Malaysiakini*, June 9, 2006.

[196] Andrew Ong and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Campus Polls: Minister, VCs Reject Suhakam's Proposals," *Malaysiakini*, September 13, 2006; Pauline Puah, "Keeping Varsity Elections Alive," *Sun*, September 19, 2006.

[197] Pauline Puah, "Observer Role for Suhakam in Campus Elections," *Malaysiakini*, September 8, 2004; "Irregularities Alleged over Campus Polls Process," *Malaysiakini*, September 13, 2004; Beh Lih Yi, "'Anti-establishment' Camp Expects Routing in Campus Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September 14, 2004; and Beh Lih Yi, "Students Picket over 'Dubious' Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September 15, 2004.

[198] Beh Lih Yi, "Campus Polls Dominated by 'Pro-establishment' Faction," *Malaysiakini*, September 16, 2004.

[199] Pauline Puah, "Campus Polls: 24 UTM Students Face Disciplinary Action," *Malaysiakini*, November 26; Pauline Puah, "UTM Disqualifies 17 Student Reps for Breaking Election Rules," *Malaysiakini*, December 1, 2004; Suaram, *Human Rights Report 2004*, p. 99.

[200] Beh Lih Yi, "Ministry's Hush-hush Meetings Linked to Campus Polls?" *Malaysiakini*, September 12, 2005.

allowed Suhakam and other human rights groups to monitor the polls, but stalling by the ministry and universities derailed the plan.[201]

Meanwhile, the Malaysian student coalition SMM again tallied reports of potential candidates who faced unfair prerequisites and fees, of too-short and curbed campaigns, intimidation of voters and candidates, and other violations. For example, the families of six USM candidates and nominators received threats via phone and text messages; UPSI authorities organized at least nine events to promote pro-establishment candidates and threatened that students who voted incorrectly would risk banishment to remote areas as teachers after graduation; and a UM student accused of leafleting hostels claimed UM's assistant registrar had assaulted him and branded him an apostate and infidel.[202] Two hundred students protested outside parliament. Frustrated with years of abuses that had never been addressed with serious investigation or remedy, SMM called for a boycott of the election, and antiestablishment factions refused to run candidates at five campuses. (The likeminded "Students Coalition UM" took the opposite tack, nominating a glut of candidates to "confuse the campus authorities and bring victory to our coalition.") Antiestablishment students lost in all universities for the first time, not least due to the boycott.[203]

Eleven days later, on October 7, 2005, 150 students, clad in black and carrying daisies, staged a "funeral procession" for campus democracy, marching in pouring rain from the National Mosque to Suhakam's office with a flag-draped coffin for "Demokrasi Kampus" in tow. After a somber ceremony to lay the "deceased" to rest, a delegation delivered a report on campus elections to the commission. SMM also issued a resolution on "free and fair campus elections," endorsed by twenty-six civil society groups.[204] Several students racked up as many as seven disciplinary charges each, for misdeeds related to the boycott and accompanying protests. Their supporters alleged a "witch hunt" and appealed to Suhakam, which found the ministry unwilling even to discuss the issues. Tensions remained high the next month as riot police dispersed a rally of seventy students, together with NGO and opposition party representatives, organized in support of five students who were then being tried.[205]

[201] Beh Lih Yi, "Suhakam Given Green Light to Monitor Campus Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September 7, 2005; and Beh Lih Yi, "Time Runs out for Monitoring of Campus Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September *Malaysiakini*, September 7 and 28, 2005.

[202] Nurul Nazirin, "Campus Polls: Varsities Turn up the Heat Again," *Malaysiakini*, August 30, 2005; Beh Lih Yi, "Campus Polls: Public Speaking Test for UIA Candidates," *Malaysiakini*, September 12, 2005; and Beh Lih Yi, "UM Student Claims Assault by Assistant Registrar," *Malaysiakini*, September 16, 2005.

[203] Malaysian Students Solidarity, "Campus Polls Boycott," *Aliran Monthly* 25,9 (2005) offers a comprehensive enumeration of violations, protest actions taken, and demands for redress; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Boycott of Polls in Five Varsities," *Malaysiakini*, September 26, 2005; Beh Lih Yi, "Varsity Polls: Near Sweep by Pro-govt Students," *Malaysiakini*, September 27, 2005; and Beh Lih Yi, "Campus Polls: A Tame Affair but Irregularities Abound," *Malaysiakini*, September 29, 2005, and "Only One Campus to Boycott Student Polls," September 18, 2006.

[204] "Perjuangan Mahasiswa Dihidupkan Kembali," *Isu Akar Umbi*, 03/2005/06; Andrew Ong, "Campus Elections: Students Stage 'Funeral,'" *Malaysiakini*, October 7, 2005.

[205] "USM Student Facing Discipline Action for Issuing Press Statement and Distributing Leaflets," urgent appeal, February 21, 2006, available at http://asianstudents.blogspot.com/2006/02/in-malaysia-usm-student-facing.html, accessed January 29, 2010; Beh Lih Yi,

These charges fed into others, for misdemeanors ranging from promoting boycotts to unsanctioned leafleting to obstructing university officials.[206] Even BN minister and Parliamentary Human Rights Caucus chair Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz declared these charges brought under the UUCA "too trivial" and counterproductive. Advising that authorities either clean up the polls or "just appoint students you like at once," he promised to take up the issues of elections and the UUCA, averring "We should not be afraid of allowing our students freedom on campus."[207] Citing the support of Nazri and fifty-five NGOs, around thirty students rallied in support of their classmates, but Higher Education Minister Shafie Salleh denied he had the prerogative to intervene.[208]

Finally, in late January, SMM delivered a lengthy memorandum to the prime minister signed by its six component groups and twenty-one supporting organizations and networks, summarizing its campaign over the preceding six months—gatherings, memoranda, boycotts, press conferences—and listing actions the government should take to restore and protect campus democracy, recommendations that included ousting the higher education minister and repealing the UUCA.[209] The students' frank enumeration of prohibited events in which they had engaged is striking, suggesting efforts to circumvent the framework of intellectual containment. But still the crackdown continued. Months after the polls had closed, UM authorities continued to summon students for violations related to the elections and related protests. Branding such prosecutions "outdated, conservative, and ridiculous," USM's Students' Progressive Front worked to shore up support among political parties and NGOs, as well as (again) Suhakam. Again declining to intervene, the higher education minister cautioned, "We want our students to concentrate on their studies. If they breach the law, then they will be hauled up. You are studying, so don't get involved in demonstrations."[210]

Little changed in 2006. SMM again submitted a list of prodemocratic demands to the ministry of higher education and urged SRC representatives to improve campus governance and welfare.[211] Tensions were high as elections approached, although only UPM opted for a boycott. Pro-establishment students had been disrupting their opponents' outreach to new students. During the orientation period at UM, for instance, Aspirasi students physically restrained representatives of the antiestablishment UMANY from assisting new students; at USM, around ten security personnel dispersed a Students' Progressive Front (SPF) event that offered advice on adapting to campus life; and at UPM, six security guards ousted CLS and SPF students.[212] A videotaped scuffle between Chinese SPF and pro-establishment student council members at a UPM orientation event then were posted and made the rounds on the Internet, spurring racially charged media debates about campus politics and prompting *Akhbar Mahasiswa* to brand California-based YouTube an "opposition website" for hosting the video clips. An official committee of inquiry found that both sides had violated university regulations, but interpreted the video as a record of nonviolent "singing and cheering," so took no action.[213]

The elections went reasonably smoothly, but brought new evidence of partisan meddling. For instance, forty-two UM Aspirasi candidates checked into a posh hotel near campus at the Selangor state government's expense, as the UM administration organized an "entrepreneurship workshop" at another local hotel for shortlisted Aspirasi candidates, who were joined by UMNO Youth officials.[214] UPM's pro-establishment camp allegedly circulated and screened a video calling opposition parties and their NGO and media allies "puppeteers" for assisting public university students to "recruit fresh graduates and bring them to join demonstrations, create chaos, and jeopardise harmony in the campus."[215] Technical glitches with e-voting marred the polls at UPM, while UM hostel students reluctant to vote were quarantined by the administration. The efforts of the pro-establishment forces were not always successful. Antiestablishment WUFI regained control of IIU, which had both allowed student monitoring of e-voting and run short of Aspirasi candidates; all the other campuses remained in pro-government hands.[216] (It was not until 2009 that the tide turned back toward the antiestablishment camp overall, apparently reflecting the voters' dramatic turn to the opposition in the general elections the

"Campus Witch-hunt: UPM Hauls up Student Activists," *Malaysiakini*, October 21, 2005; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Disgruntled Varsity Students Turn to Suhakam," *Malaysiakini*, October 25, 2005; Beh Lih Yi, "UPM Student Faces 'Record' Seven Charges," *Malaysiakini*, October 26, 2005; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Campus Polls: Sixth UPM Student Charged," *Malaysiakini*, November 9, 2005; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "UPM Student Hearings Put Off, Riot Police at Scene," *Malaysiakini*, November 10, 2005; and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Campus Polls: Suhakam Takes Minister to Task," *Malaysiakini*, November 11, 2005.

[206] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Campus Polls: Sixth UPM Student Charged."

[207] Pauline Puah, "Nazri Pledges Support for 'Persecuted' Students," *Malaysiakini*, November 24, 2005.

[208] Pauline Puah, "Shafie: I Can Only Help in the Appeal Stage," *Malaysiakini*, December 8, 2005; and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Witch-hunt in UM, Seven Charged," *Malaysiakini*, December 9, 2005.

[209] SMM press statement, "Penyerahan memo bantahan dan tandatangan mahasiswa seluruh IPTA/IPTS di Malaysia kepada Y.A.B. Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Perdana Menteri Malaysia berhubung Kempen Selamatkan Demokrasi Kampus," January 25, 2006, available online at http://utopia.e-channel.info/index.php?go=category_10, accessed June 4, 2007.

[210] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "USM ... The Witch-hunt Continues," *Malaysiakini*, February 9, 2006; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "USM5: Students Canvass for Support," *Malaysiakini*, February 23, 2006; and Pauline Puah, "More Support for USM 5," *Malaysiakini*, February 25, 2006; Ng Ling Fong, "No Proof: UM Students Let Off," *Malaysiakini*, March 21, 2006; and "Suaram Flays 'Medieval' Mustapa," *Malaysiakini*, March 22, 2006.

[211] Wong Yeen Fern and Ng Ling Fong, "Campus Polls: Students' Group has 7 Demands," *Malaysiakini*, September 7, 2006.

[212] Pauline Puah, "Keeping Varsity Elections Alive," *Sun*, September 19, 2006; "UPM Student Alleges Assault by Fellow-students," *Malaysiakini*, July 19, 2006; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Sack Deputy VC, UPM Told," *Malaysiakini*, July 26, 2006; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "The Black Spots in Campus Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September 16, 2006; and "Only One Campus to Boycott Student Polls," *Malaysiakini*, September 18, 2006.

[213] Wong Yeen Fern, "UPM Scuffle: No Action against Mob," *Malaysiakini*, August 18; and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng and Ng See Yin, "Tabloid Attacks UPM's 'Anti-establishment' Group," *Malaysiakini*, September 21, 2006.

[214] Alvin Yap, Bede Hong, and Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Free Hotel Stay for Pro-gov't Candidates," *Malaysiakini*, September 19, 2006.

[215] "Now Showing: 'Mentors of Student Activists,'" *Malaysiakini*, September 20, 2006.

[216] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng and Bede Hong, "Campus Polls: The Good, the Bad and Ugly," *Malaysiakini*, September 21, 2006; and "Pro-gov't Students Sweep All Bar One," *Malaysiakini*, September 22, 2006.

previous March.[217]) The minister declared the 2006 student elections had been "more open and transparent than the last few years."[218]

Not all agreed. Former Malaysian Youth Council president Saifuddin Abdullah derided the controls that had been put in place, noting that "potentially good student leaders will ask themselves 'Why waste time?'"[219] NGO Aliran's Anil Netto agreed: "The restrictions for campus elections would be almost comical if they were not oppressive."[220] And long-time activist Lee Ban Chen pondered whether it were really the BN's intent "to press [antiestablishment students] to become more militant or force them to move subversively underground?"[221] The protests, harassments, and recriminations continue still. In recent years, there have been reports of more raids on students' hostel rooms,[222] of students who were disqualified as candidates because they campaigned on the social networking site Facebook,[223] and of UM students who demonstrated downtown (resulting in nine arrests) and occupied the university administration building to challenge the e-voting system.[224] As a concession, the minister of higher education did grant permission for independent election observers to oversee student elections as of 2010.[225]

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS

All told, increasingly from the late 1990s, campus politics reflected the national system: activist student organizations looked like and liaised with off-campus NGOs, lobbying for support on nearly every issue,[226] but the most heated, acrimonious, and uneven battles were fought at the polls. The election contests that engaged them were not just the ones on campus. Many students played key organizational support roles in (especially opposition) electoral campaigns. While "contained" insofar as elections—both on and off campus—are the state's preferred mode of citizen engagement, the nature of many students' intervention has indicated a reviving sense of collective identity and power, and of officials' recognition of students' political significance.

It is still forbidden under the UUCA for university students to aid any national political party (except by voting, as students over twenty-one are free to do), but parties search out recruits even as they vie for the upper hand on campus, and the government is comparatively tolerant of students' involvement with BN member

[217] Ivy Kwek, "Making Sense of Campus Politics," *Malaysian Insider*, March 1, 2011.

[218] Soon Li Tsin, "Mustapa's Verdict: Varsity Polls Clean and Fair," *Malaysiakini*, September 21, 2006.

[219] Kuek Ser Kuang Keng and Bede Hong, "Ex-MYC Chief Says Campus Polls a 'High School' Affair," *Malaysiakini*, October 14, 2006.

[220] Anil Netto, "Hard Lessons on Malaysia's Campuses," *Asia Times Online*, October 8, 2005.

[221] Lee Ban Chen, "Usaha Berterusan 'Membongsaikan' Pelajar Kita!" *Malaysiakini*, October 26, 2005.

[222] "USM Security 'Stole' Laptop, Claims Student," *Malaysiakini*, September 16, 2007.

[223] "2 Disqualified for Facebook Lobbying," *New Straits Times*, January 29, 2010.

[224] Sean Augustin and Alang Bendahara, "Students in Demo May be Expelled," *New Straits Times*, January 25, 2010, and "Angry Students Occupy UM Admin Building, Demand Fresh Polls," January 29, 2010.

[225] Sean Agustin, "Observers for Varsity Elections," *New Straits Times*, January 15, 2010.

[226] Interview with Amin Idris, February 22, 2006.

parties.[227] UMNO stepped up its efforts to recruit support on campus after its relatively poor electoral performance in the *Reformasi* elections of 1999. As Barisan Youth secretary Zulkifli Alwi explained in mid-1999, after students booed BN representatives at interparty debates at USM and UM, "We have embarked on a serious effort to begin a process of communicating with the students."[228] Mahathir explained that, in the past, UMNO honored students' desire "to focus on their studies" rather than on politics. Yet since opposition parties were meeting with students to "incite them to hate Umno," the party reluctantly "will try to build a link with them for the sake of Umno's and the country's future."[229] Both Puteri UMNO, a wing for young women formed after the 1999 elections, and UMNO Youth broadly have thus sought to curry support among students, even as existing regulations and discourse such as Mahathir's assiduously steer students away from political activity. For example, new USM students each received a t-shirt featuring a BN slogan—displayed also on a large banner on campus—in 2004.[230] The following June, UMNO Youth sent the UM deputy vice chancellor for students' affairs an invitation to send one hundred students to the launch in Malacca of Putera UMNO (the male counterpart of Puteri UMNO). Their transportation costs would be covered by the party, and each would receive UMNO Youth paraphernalia.[231] Still, the Ministry of Higher Education had agreed in mid-2004 to investigate charges that UiTM students were involved in UMNO branch meetings in Kelantan; university authorities had initially allowed them to attend for exposure, but reversed their decision on learning of their level of involvement.[232] UMNO's efforts at controlled outreach notwithstanding, not least given government leaders' countervailing and ubiquitous injunctions to avoid politics, those students inclined to participate on the national stage have tended to be those with opposition leanings. (Like UMNO, PAS and Keadilan, too, maintain close ties with students; the DAP less so.[233])

As the 1999 *Reformasi* national elections approached, and again in subsequent general elections, students offered a volley of manifestos and memoranda, albeit without staging the sort of full-on political theater of thirty years prior. Among the most comprehensive was a manifesto presented by three coalitions, GAMIS, BBMN, and Majlis Persidangan Mahasiswa Islam (MPMI, Muslim Students' Consultative Council). Its twelve points cover good governance, the legal system, religion and

[227] For instance, Beh Lih Yi, "USM Hauls up Election 'Campaigners,'" *Malaysiakini*, April 5, 2004; and Andrew Ong, "Shafie to Probe Role of UiTM Students in UMNO Polls," *Malaysiakini*, July 9, 2004.

[228] Quoted in Arjuna Ranawana, "The Angry Voice of Youth," *Asiaweek*, July 23, 1999; also Shahanaaz Sher Habib, "Seeking a bigger role in politics," *Star*, August 1, 1999

[229] Claudia Theophilus, "Link with Students: UMNO Wants Younger Generation to Understand Its Struggles," *Sun*, June 17, 1999; and "Mahathir: Students Unaware Why They Dislike Govt," *Sun*, July 25, 1999; also Pahrol Mohd. Juoi, "Umno Dan Mahasiswa: Antara Idealisme Dan Hedonisme," *Dewan Masyarakat* 37,8 (August 1999): 24.

[230] Pauline Puah, "A Pervasive Culture of Fear," *Malaysiakini*, August 3, 2005.

[231] June 13, 2005, letter (photocopy), Putera UMNO Malaysia to Jamaludin Mohaiadin; see also Animah Ferrar, "Goodness! Has UUCA Been Repealed for UMNO?" *Malaysiakini*, January 19, 2005.

[232] Andrew Ong, "Shafie to Probe Role of UiTM Students in Umno Polls," *Malaysiakini*, July 9, 2004.

[233] Interviews with DEMA group, December 17, 2003, and Teresa Kok, March 20, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

morality, education, social ills, national wealth, balanced development, mass media, women, undergraduates, global justice, and national peace and defense. The manifesto urged students and the public to "open their eyes and awaken together in asserting [their] rights and opinions as the Malaysian people," propounding a special role for undergraduates as "spokespeople for the people and society."[234] The formation of new opposition party Keadilan offered yet another outlet for activism. "Green" (Islamist) students rallied either to this new option or PAS, while Chinese students found a new hero in Keadilan's Tian Chua, long active among students as an NGO activist. Over a hundred students in Kuala Lumpur and Penang participated in Chua's 1999 parliamentary campaign.[235]

Students' objectives of steering opinion and monitoring polls during national elections had shifted little by 2004, but their approaches to that year's polls reflected a changed environment. Student groups launched a ten-point agenda for change before the general election, addressing issues of constitutionalism, religion and morality, partisanship, the legal system, education, economics and corruption, social problems (with a clear Islamist bent), police and security forces, democracy (or lack of it), and elections. The document concludes firmly, "If this situation CONTINUES, undergraduates will vote opposition, but the students' families also should vote opposition and the students' cronies too will vote opposition. WE DEMAND CHANGE FAST!!"[236] The launch at the National Mosque in early March of a similarly oriented "Manifesto Mahasiswa Malaysia" for the elections was the SMM coalition's first official act. The document touted undergraduates' role in enforcing "checks and balances" to ensure "good governance." (These terms are in English in the otherwise Malay-language document, hinting at the international human-rights framing behind it.) SMM urged Malaysians to "elect a government that truly fulfils the people's aspirations and wishes."[237]

As had happened in 1999, several students were charged with violations of the UUCA and university rules in connection with the 2004 general elections. Three USM students were cited for campaigning for Keadilan and Tian Chua, based on photographs published in two Chinese-language dailies in mid-March. Two of those accused had graduated by then, but the third, CLS president and former student council member Soh Sook Hwa, was called to a disciplinary hearing for unauthorized off-campus involvement and "tarnishing the university's image." The hearings and deliberations dragged on for months. She pointed out in her defense not only the shakiness of the evidence against her, but also irregularities in the proceedings. In advance of a verdict, Higher Education Minister Shafie Salleh informed parliament that it was clear "that she is guilty," but denied trying to influence the USM disciplinary board. Shortly thereafter, Soh was assessed a warning and fine; she escaped expulsion, the maximum possible penalty. Nine lecturers chipped in to pay her fine.[238]

[234] GAMIS, MPMI, and BBMN, "Tuntutan Mahasiswa Malaysia," undated leaflet.

[235] Interview with Yong Kai Ping, March 16, 2006.

[236] "Mahasiswa bersama Rakyat," undated leaflet, emphasis in original; also interview with DEMA group, December 17, 2003, and interview with Amin Idris, February 22, 2006.

[237] SMM, "Manifesto Mahasiswa Malaysia: Mahasiswa Menuntut Perubahan," launched March 8, 2004, Kuala Lumpur (signed by nine member organizations); and interview with Ahmad Rifauddin Abdul Wahab, March 15, 2006.

[238] Suaram, *Human Rights Report 2004*, p. 98; Beh Lih Yi, "USM Hauls up Election 'Campaigners,'" *Malaysiakini*, April 5, 2004; Beh Lih Yi, "USM Student to Face Disciplinary Proceedings," *Malaysiakini*, November 17, 2004; Beh Lih Yi, "Opposition Rallies behind USM Student," *Malaysiakini*, November 22, 2004; Lee Khai Loon, Rey Asis, and Madhav Nepal, "Charging of USM Student a Backward Step," *Malaysiakini*, November 23, 2004; Beh Lih Yi, "Gerakan Youth Repeats Its Call to Review UUCA," *Malaysiakini*, November 24, 2004; Pauline Puah and Beh Lih Yi, "USM Student to Know Verdict Tomorrow," *Malaysiakini*, December 1, 2004; Beh Lih Yi, "General Election Campaign: Student Found Guilty," *Malaysiakini*, December 2, 2004; and interview with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006.

In consultation with DEMA, and with support from SMM, NGO Suaram, the Asian Students Association (whose secretariat then included a former DEMA activist), and the leading opposition parties, Soh appealed her conviction to the minister of higher education, then to the High Court in 2005. One commentator concluded that Soh's "fabulous job in exposing her case to Malaysian and international civil society" made her case a "huge setback" for USM, and that this publicity helped explain the delayed verdict and "face-saving" minimal penalty.[239] The case offered a chance to combat the law head-on: Soh argued that Section 15 of the UUCA and portions of the 1999 USM (Discipline of Students) Act were unconstitutional and discriminated against students who were not allied to the administration. She requested her conviction and penalty be reversed. The case churned slowly through the system, before the High Court finally dismissed it in June 2010.[240]

As the state's dogged pursuit of Soh's case suggests, government authorities remained chary of student involvement in national electoral campaigns. In 2006, for instance, citing a ministerial directive, three universities acknowledged sending teams to the site of a hotly contested by-election to monitor any students involved. Their watchers trailed a team of students conducting a nonpartisan election-related survey, then detained them for engaging in campaign work.[241] And in 2008, an IIU student who had completed all his requirements and needed only to collect his degree was charged under the UUCA and barred from graduating for involvement with the unregistered Parti Mahasiswa Negara (National Students Party; this was the latest manifestation of a national students' party that, this time, initially included only graduates).[242] However anxious to win students to their side, UMNO still clearly prefers to confine student politicking to campus grounds, and remains ready to crack down on outside electoral involvement.

Media

Given limits on press freedom, Malaysian students today have limited exposure to critical media, yet longstanding traditions persist of creative communications and alternative or underground publications, which the Internet extends. Communication among students is multifaceted. Study groups—ranging from *usrah*

[239] TS, "Student Movement Trounces USM 3-0," *Malaysiakini*, December 7, 2004.

[240] Interview with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006; also statements, letters, and pleadings from the case involving Soh Sook Hwa (from private collection); SUARAM Penang press statement, "Respect Student Rights," December 2, 2004; Kuek Ser Kuang Keng, "Ex-USM Student Gets Green Light to Challenge UUCA," *Malaysiakini*, February 6, 2007; and "Ex-USM Student's Application Dismissed," *New Straits Times*, June 5, 2010.

[241] Wong Yee Fern, "Varsities on the Prowl for Students in Ijok," *Malaysiakini*, April 24, 2007; and Tricia Yeoh, "Allow Students to Experience Election Processes," *Malaysiakini*, May 4, 2007.

[242] Azreen Madzlan, "UIA Student Charged for Involvement in General Election," *Malaysiakini*, April 4, 2008.

for *dakwah* groups to discussion sessions in the CLS—are common. From the *Reformasi* period on, a growing number of students have taken advantage of more established channels, too, submitting articles to outside media that include such publications as PAS organ *Harakah* (or *HarakahDaily* online) and a number of Chinese papers, such as *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and *Nanyang Siang Pau*.[243] USM communications student and *Berita Kampus* editor Ali Bukhari Amir even helped organize a loose alliance of writers from local universities, although he himself faced censorship of and questioning over some of his articles.[244] Students have not just circumvented, but also critiqued the mainstream media. When timber tycoon Tiong Hiew King consolidated his monopoly on Chinese media by buying out the last of the four dailies that together hold a 90 percent stake in the market, nearly three hundred students, many of them former "cadet reporters" with the paper, held a peaceful sit-in at *Sin Chew* offices in 2006. Sporting "anti-monopoly" t-shirts, students sang, gave speeches, and lit candles beside a mock tombstone for "Press Freedom."

Some efforts have been especially bold; students have sent *surat layang* ("flying" or poison-pen letters), published underground newsletters and parodies of official publications, and distributed leaflets on specific issues. More brazen still for how public it was, in 2002, two members of USM's SRC set up an unauthorized counter in front of the library, with a large sheet of paper for student comments on issues of student welfare. A security guard seized the paper the third day, but unidentified students pasted up a petition (regarding the lack of Indian food on campus, a sign of racial imbalance) in the spot later.[245] University administrators have grown ever more agitated over such unauthorized communications. In August 2005, UM's Student Affairs Department posted official notices explaining how seriously the administration viewed even mere possession, let alone dissemination, of false news or rumors that might sully the image of the university. They included snippets of the sorts of materials at issue, such as PMI fliers.[246] Similar notices alerted students to the illegality of specific events to which they might be invited, citing one organized by the Anwar-linked think tank, Institute Kajian Dasar (IKD, Institute for Policy Studies), described as "an instrument or agent of an OPPOSITION PARTY" that aimed to stir up hatred against the government by corrupting the thinking and behavior of UM students. (Interestingly, though, IKD's invitation appears to have been signed by the science dean's office. IKD moved to sue for libel.)[247]

Warnings notwithstanding, a subset of students has been involved since *Reformasi* in substantial alternative publications. The Internet offers an obvious outlet. Popular sites have included the antiestablishment KampusNegara.net; the more pro-government Idealis-Mahasiswa.net; and the California-based ReCom.org

[243] Bede Hong, "Students Protest Tiong's Media Monopoly," *Malaysiakini*, November 4, 2006.

[244] Interview with Ali Bukhari Amir, via email, March 28, 2006; Nurul Nazirin, "USM Student to Face Music over Articles," *Malaysiakini*, December 10, 2004; Nurul Nazirin, "Student Told to 'Clear' Future Articles with USM," *Malaysiakini*, December 16, 2004; and Nurul Nazirin, "USM Probe Shifts to Student's Website," *Malaysiakini*, January 28, 2005.

[245] Interview with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006.

[246] Bahagian Hal Ehwal Pelajar & Alumni, Universiti Malaya, "Notis Peringatan" (from private collection).

[247] Bahagian Hal Ehwal Pelajar & Alumni, Universiti Malaya, "Pengumuman Penting" and "Notis Peringatan" (from private collection); Pauline Puah, "Notices Warn UM Students from 'Straying,'" *Malaysiakini*, August 10, 2005; and Fauwaz Abdul Aziz, "Think-tank to Sue UM over Libelous Circular," *Malaysiakini*, August 18, 2005.

(Reborn Community, the "Worldwide Malaysian Student Network") for Malaysian students and recent graduates living overseas. Student blogs are increasingly common, as well, and various student clubs and networks maintain websites. Other publications have appeared in print. For instance, DEMA launched itself with funds raised from two quite successful publications, *Lidah Reformasi* (*Reformasi* Mouthpiece), then *Pantang Undur* (No Retreat) in 1998.[248] Around the same time, publisher and bookseller Chong Ton Sin helped to organize a Chinese student magazine.[249] That venture helped kick off a trend. Recent UTM graduate Yong Kai Ping, for instance, edited a professional looking Chinese-language magazine, *Cili Padi*, which served as an outlet for criticism of repressive government policies and as a connection among Chinese student contributors. (Making use of legal loopholes, *Cili Padi* varied its name to pass as a book instead of a magazine until it eventually secured government registration. While nonpartisan, the magazine adopted a reformist stance. Its establishment provided students with office space, too, shared with a local NGO. Unfortunately, the magazine suffered problems with circulation and finances, and it failed when the editor left for further studies overseas. Yet Internet-based venues were by then emerging, including a Chinese version of *Malaysiakini* and the independent *Merdeka Review*.[250] And *Malaysiakini* itself—Malaysia's leading "alternative" news source, launched in 1999—has been a key resource for students, albeit less as an outlet for students' own writing than for its extensive coverage of student affairs. Print and mainstream media have conventionally covered far less news of student activities, especially relating to antiestablishment factions.

In a different vein was *Varsiti*, the UM SRC's high-profile annual magazine. The 2001 edition included articles and images that "ridiculed and insulted national leaders," among other problematic content (according to a mainstream newspaper that received a copy).[251] Both the vice chancellor and the head of the SRC pleaded ignorance, and the latter hurried to file a police report, claiming the edition was a fake.[252] Indeed, the issue did seem to have evaded the usual approval processes.[253] A USM CLS member carried out a similar stunt, launching the professional-looking, but anonymous and unauthorized, *Berita Kampus Alternatif* in July 2003. Friends helped him distribute it surreptitiously in the wee hours: they "would just throw it in the lecture hall and run," dodging security guards.[254] The paper mimicked the pro-administration and censored, although student-produced, *Berita Kampus*. Although he was hardly a fiery activist, the editor was inspired by the greater freedom evident in back issues of *Berita Kampus* from the 1980s, and so he began writing on student welfare issues that he felt should be examined from an alternative perspective: increasing university fees, misguided educational priorities, the SRC's inadequacies, and more. After the first issue came out, other students started contributing funds and content. The paper, which lasted through several issues, began to be a source of

[248] Interview with Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

[249] Interview with Chong Ton Sin, March 11, 2006.

[250] Interview with Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

[251] Marhaini Kamaruddin and Akmar Hisham Mokhles, "Majalah *Varsiti* Terbitan MPMUM Mencemuh Pemimpin," *Utusan Malaysia*, June 8, 2001.

[252] Ibid.

[253] Mohd Izani, "Hubungan Kerajaan Dan Mahasiswa."

[254] Interview with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006.

intra- and intercampus student communication, particularly on issues like elections.[255] A classmate issued a subsequent edition under the name *USMKini.com* (despite its name, a printed leaflet), homing in on hostel fees and student loans,[256] and then a more Islamist third editor continued *Berita Kampus Alternatif* for another two issues. USM's HEP never did find out who was behind the project.[257]

A handful of academic staff, too, used media—both new and old—to press for reform, particularly amidst the hullabaloo over declining educational quality and rankings. UM law lecturer Azmi Sharom, for instance, made use of his regular column in the *Star* to put forward "basic, common sense issues" about university standards and reforms. His March 2006 open letter to the new minister of higher education started something of a firestorm, even though he had published a similar piece in the *Sun* several months before.[258] In the earlier piece, Azmi lambasted local authorities' "total lack of understanding as to what a university education is all about." He suggested they consider seriously the criteria for a good university, then work on improving Malaysia's tertiary institutions in those areas rather than just bristling at poor rankings.[259] In the *Star* column, Azmi argued against the hasty creation of new universities proposed as political favors and urged maintenance of academic freedom, high admissions standards, and transparent, merit-based appointments and promotions. He effectively dismissed fears of breeding radicalism on campus.[260] Azmi was quick to note improvements in the educational system, for instance, the slightly more open process of appointing a new UM vice chancellor that had been implemented in 2006. (Rafiah Salim was appointed—the first woman to lead a public university in Malaysia.[261]) More importantly, his continued, highly visible criticism helped to validate others' claims about the need for institutional and academic reform.[262]

PKAUM, the UM Academic Staff Association, followed up with a letter to the editor agreeing with Azmi's assessment and stressing, in particular (since the issue was germane just then), the need for appropriate, apolitical selection of vice chancellors.[263] Well before Azmi's writings, PKAUM had called for an independent

[255] For example, on the UM election boycott: Muhamad Khairol Anwar Md. Zuki, "Kumpulan Aspirasi Mahasiswa Malaysia Boikot PRK MPM," *Berita Kampus Alternatif*, September 14, 2004, pp. 6–7.

[256] *USMkini.com*, November 17, 2003.

[257] Interview with Lim Hong Siang, March 10, 2006, and email correspondence, March 12, 2006.

[258] Interview with Azmi Sharom, March 23, 2006, Kuala Lumpur.

[259] Azmi Sharom, "How to Judge a Good University," *Sun*, November 17, 2005.

[260] Azmi Sharom, "An Open Letter to Mustapa," *Star*, March 11, 2006.

[261] Coming to office amidst cries for reform, Rafiah immediately announced that there would be changes: greater transparency and academic rigor in promotion decisions and administrative appointments, support for "some amendments" to the UUCA (especially to reinforce academic freedom), more systematic support for faculty research and mentoring, and so forth. At the same time, she did not feel students were so "clamped down" as many claimed and believed they should be using taxpayers' money to develop their abilities within the campus, not outside it. Jacqueline Ann Surin and Pauline Puah, "Reforms for UM," *Sun*, August 17, 2006.

[262] Jacqueline Ann Surin, "Seeking Academic Freedom" and "Treat Them Like Adults" *Sun*, July 13 and July 20, 2006 (a two-part interview); and interview with Azmi Sharom, March 23, 2006.

[263] Rosli Omar (for PKAUM), "Form Search Panel to Pick V-C for Universiti Malaya," *Star*, March 21, 2006. A dissenting letter was submitted and published by PKAUM member Azizah Hamzah (writing on behalf of likeminded members). It insisted: "Trying to tarnish the rock of credibility that UM stands for is unnecessary and unfathomable for the proof of excellence in UM is staring at every nook and corner of the campus, even by international standards." "Let UM's Reputation Speak for Itself," *Star*, March 24, 2006; also Claudia Theophilus, "UM Chair: Let Independent Body Choose VCs," *Malaysiakini*, March 23, 2006. The PKAUM leadership had longstanding disputes with both management-level faculty and those members who disliked the union's open criticism of the university and its standards.

inquiry into such issues at UM as alleged inconsistencies in academic promotions, administrative tampering with student grades, and the misappropriation of funds for residential housing development. Substantiation of these charges proved difficult, though; while unattributed complaints agreed that problems such as racial bias and "playing politics" were widespread, no lecturer would go on record with such criticisms for fear of retribution.[264] PKAUM's letters of complaint to the minister, vice chancellor, and Anti-Corruption Agency went unheeded until Higher Education Minister Shafie Salleh belatedly dismissed them. PKAUM complained anew, urging establishment of a public commission of inquiry and mechanisms to prevent further violations.[265] Again in February 2006, PKAUM addressed newly appointed Minister Mustapa Mohamed, urging him to ensure transparent selection of vice chancellors, make the recent Wan Zahid Committee's report on higher education public, and review—and ideally repeal—the UUCA as incompatible with international conventions on academic freedom and detrimental to teaching and research. Azmi Sharom would touch on many of these same issues in his published letter to the new minister the following month.[266]

Even university presses came under suspicion. Most notably, UKM Press's publication of books on Malay communist leaders Shamsiah Fakeh and Ibrahim Chik (part of a larger series of memoirs) sparked outraged letters in *Utusan Malaysia*. UKM set up a special commission "to investigate the publication of books said to depict former communist terrorists as freedom fighters" and "to ascertain if the books were published with certain motives or agendas." [267] Albeit based in historical fact, these biographies dealt with a highly contentious dimension of Malaysian history. As the university's response to these publications demonstrates, the government's policy of purging the historical record to make particular identities or campaigns seem unimaginable extends beyond the topic of student activism in Malaysia. UKM vice chancellor Mohd Salleh Mohd Yassin reminded lecturers of the risk of disciplinary action or expulsion for such transgressions.[268] In short, both students and staff took advantage of available media space, open and underground, online and in print, yet, given entrenched curbs on the more independent campus press that thrived through the early 1970s, their writings were now no more immune to challenge than those of other citizens.

[264] Nurul Nazirin, "Politics of Promotion in UM," *Malaysiakini*, August 2, 2005

[265] Adriana Nordin Manan, "Academic Staff Speak out on Issues Ailing UM," *Malaysiakini*, May 28, 2005; Beh Lih Yi, "Minister: No Truth in UM Allegations," *Malaysiakini*, June 24, 2005; and "Minister Fails to Probe UM Allegations," *Malaysiakini*,July 2, 2005.

[266] Andrew Ong, "Hopes Aplenty on New Higher Education Minister," *Malaysiakini*, February 18, 2006.

[267] "Dua Bekas Naib Canselor Siasat Buku Komunis," *Utusan Malaysia*, November 30, 2004.

[268] Beh Lih Yi, "Local Varsities Not the Venue to Promote Communism," *Malaysiakini*, December 2, 2004, and James Wong Wing On, "A Tale of Two Malay Communist Memoirs," *Malaysiakini*, February 4, 2005.

RACE AND RELIGION

Racial and religious polarization remained stark, even as student groups made ever-bolder efforts to undercut, or at least circumvent, these divisions. Institutional factors amplify segregation at the tertiary level: Chinese are more likely to be in private institutions and Malays to be in public ones, and few join integrated associations. A 2002 study of UM undergraduates, for instance, deemed levels of interethnic mixing "satisfactory," but difficult to further with so few students actively engaged in academic and social clubs where they might mingle.[269] Most students prefer to study and room with members of their same ethnic group, for example, and they rate ethnic relations on campus worse than in the country overall.[270] The general consensus was "that while there was no racial conflict in the campus, students tend to keep to their own group."[271] The report recommended involvement above all. To this end, it advocated campus Unity Clubs (akin to the cultural societies the Higher Education Ministry had approved a few years previously to "promote diversity through integration"[272]), exchanges among clubs and societies, and cross-cutting academic and social programs, as well as mixed study groups, more elective courses, race-blind hostel assignments, and similar measures.[273]

Groups such as the Islamist GAMIS and the CLS did make efforts to cooperate with each other, especially after *Reformasi*. Collaboration tended to be shallow, however, and usually geared toward elections, although the launch of the SMM coalition helped formalize these initiatives. Disagreements ran deep, for instance, on issues like dress codes, and men from some Islamist groups were uncomfortable working with female leaders of partner organizations. Even in discussing inter-ethnic collaboration, students could not always speak freely or comfortably with each other. Muslim students tended to be divided into "green" and "blue" camps, Indian students were such a minority that few ventured to stir things up, and Chinese students remained under perennial suspicion. Even groups open to all races, like DEMA and JKMI, tend to remain largely monoracial.[274]

Communalism permeated the level of official university policies, too, and has been especially obvious in persistent mistrust of the CLS. CLS chapters were deregistered in 1972, decades before *Reformasi*, and the group is recognized now only at UM and USM. Tensions surrounding the club reached a peak in May 2001, when USM authorities declined at the last minute to allow CLS members to participate in an international debate competition in Singapore, citing minor bureaucratic errors in

[269] Jahara Yahaya, et al., "Ethnic Relations amongst University of Malaya Undergraduates," in *Ethnic Interaction and Segregation on Campus and at the Workplace*, ed. Jahara Yahaya, Tey Nai Peng, and Yeoh Kok-Kheng (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Economic Development and Ethnic Relations [CEDER], University of Malaya, 2004), pp. 29–30.

[270] Ibid., pp. 33–64.

[271] This depiction is eerily reminiscent of Mahathir's sketch of the lead-up to the May 1969 riots: "There was a lack of inter-racial strife. There was tolerance. There was accommodation. There was a certain amount of give and take. But there was no harmony ..." Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1970), pp. 4–5.

[272] Ee-Lyn Tan, "Dons: Cultural Societies Will Bring Races Together," *Star*, April 11, 2007.

[273] Jahara et al., "Ethnic Relations," p. 73.

[274] Interviews with Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006; Lim Hong Siang, March 10, 2006; and Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

their application. The members each still participated in an individual capacity, but argued that the authorities' decision had violated their freedom of expression, especially as Malay and English debate teams enjoyed greater funds, trainers, and leeway to travel.[275] Six USM students were suspended and four were fined for participating in the debate, then over thirty more were punished for taking part in an illegal assembly in their support.[276] The club leadership released a statement backing the team—but communication with the press was itself a violation and punished. The club was hassled by the administration afterwards. The club faced ten different charges, their accounts were frozen, their activities were suspended, and leaders of CLS had to sign the loyalty pledge, *Aku Janji*, on behalf of the organization; this last act of obedience was not required of other campus clubs. On the plus side, the experience fostered stronger multiethnic cooperation, including the development of the (still primarily Chinese) Students' Progressive Front.[277] However, attempts since then to resuscitate Chinese Language Societies throughout the university system have fared poorly. A 2006 request by UPM's unofficial CLS to lift that university's ban on the club was rejected, on grounds of an (undocumented) ministry policy against race- or language-based associations. Similar attempts to revive or establish CLS chapters have met a similar fate at three other universities.[278]

The rigidity of the campus environment multiplies opportunities for communal tension. For instance, on dress codes, conservative guidelines on (women's) dress across campuses tend to be supported by Muslim organizations and opposed by Chinese ones. A government-backed 2005 IIU ruling requiring non-Muslim women to wear *tudung* (headscarves) on campus is a case in point. The minister for National Unity described the rule as "not religious in nature but a matter of uniforms that must be followed."[279] Opponents disagreed. The use of labels, too—that campus groups are puppets of PAS or the DAP, or are "terrorists"—while hardly new, is especially effective at shutting off debate.[280]

Official measures and curricula have, at times, aggravated matters. For example, a textbook written by two UPM lecturers and introduced at the university in 2006 for a mandatory course on ethnic relations referred to Chinese calls for exclusively need-based affirmative action policies as "extremist," pinned 2001 racial clashes in Kampung Medan (on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur) on Indian youths, blamed the largely non-Malay DAP for the May 1969 riots, and misrepresented constitutional guidelines on religious proselytization among non-Muslims. As both opposition and government MPs noted, the book left out instances of Malay "extremism," failed to credit Indians' contributions to Malaysian development, reified ideas of "Malay supremacy," and otherwise presented a selective view of history. (UMNO MPs

[275] Interview with Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006.

[276] Beh Lih Yi, "USM Student to Face Disciplinary Proceedings," *Malaysiakini*, November 17, 2004.

[277] Interviews with Lee Yenting and Chai Chee Fatt, March 5, 2006; Lim Hong Siang, March 10, 2006; Soh Sook Hwa, February 14, 2006; and Choo Chon Kai, February 15, 2006. ISREC, "Draf Laporan," p. 6.

[278] Andrew Ong, "Gov't Urged to Lift Ban on Chinese Language Club," *Malaysiakini*, November 30, 2006.

[279] "IIU Can Make Non-Muslims Wear Headscarves," *Malaysiakini*, October 26, 2005.

[280] For instance, Kamal Azman, "Perebutan kuasa politik di kampus," *Akhbar Mahasiswa*, December 2002, p. 13; and interview with Lim Hong Siang, March 10, 2006.

grumbled, too, at the mere one page devoted to the struggle of UMNO.) The higher education minister defended the book as one that presented "historical facts," albeit with the occasional typo, and defended the authors' "academic freedom"; suggested disagreement would foster classroom debate; and promised to provide a standardized version for all universities. The book was eventually withdrawn, yet the furor continued, both over the specific text and more broadly over the mandatory course. (More productively, student group Youth for Change offered around eighty students a week-long "Alternative Ethnic Relations Course" in response.)[281]

While ethnic relations had been taught in some universities since the early 1970s, the process now raised hackles. After the UPM text was alleged to be biased and inaccurate, the government appointed a panel of five academics, all of them Malay and "known to be keen government supporters," to draft a new one, rather than leave syllabi and texts to the universities. Academic and politician Syed Husin Ali declared, "I consider cabinet interference in and approval of a fully academic matter, such as this, to be the final nail driven into the coffin of University Autonomy." (He noted, too, continuing serious deficiencies in the module's analysis and balance, especially the scant and "damning" mention of contributions by politicians opposed to the BN.)[282] It is small wonder so many students are chary of engagement or critique, given such models.

RESITUATING UNIVERSITIES AND STUDENTS

> The hard fact of the matter is that, by and large, our graduates do not have the sort of qualities that would make overseas employers want them, nor do our graduates have the qualities to go out beyond the coconut shell to offer their services to the world.
>
> This is because Malaysian public universities treat students like children. Their freedom of speech is curtailed. Their freedom of assembly is controlled. Their freedom to vote is interfered with. Without such freedoms, students can't grow.
>
> Sure they will get their degree, but they won't have the confidence, the chutzpah, and the guts, to grab the world by the throat and scream their arrival.[283]

Developments since the late 1990s confirm the penetration of intellectual containment into Malaysia's system of higher education, but also the real frailties of that approach. By the time of *Reformasi*, partisanship on campus seemed a matter of course. Even when students spoke obliquely of *aspirasi kerajaan* (pro-government) and *aspirasi mahasiswa* (pro-student) blocs, the party referents were blatant. Moreover, "systematic programming to be depoliticized"—to see politics as *only* about party affiliation and elections, if germane at all—was deeply entrenched and

[281] Beh Lih Yi, "MPs up in Arms, Mustapa Grilled over Textbook," *Malaysiakini*, July 18, 2006, and "Ethnic Relations: What They Say," *Malaysiakini*, July 19, 2006; and Wong Yeen Fern, "Students Get 'Alternative' Ethnic Relations Curse," *Malaysiakini*, August 12, 2006.

[282] Syed Husin Ali, "Module Sounds Death Knell for University Autonomy," *Malaysiakini*, February 9, 2007.

[283] Azmi, "How to Judge a Good University."

disempowering by the late 1990s.[284] Few students now are active, fewer still show a critical bent, and many are not even aware of the extent to which their civil liberties have been curtailed.[285] Moreover, society as a whole, however literate and educated, is not inclined toward "intellectualism." The average Malaysian reads 1.5 pages per day, with a worrisome predilection for "light entertainment magazines."[286] And lecturers increasingly focus more on "'what' (can) be thought" than on "'how' to think" or on academic freedom.[287] As one USM alumna fumes in a letter to the editor in response to Soh Sook Hwa's prosecution: "The next time you hear of apathetic youths, unwed young mums (and don't forget the rascally unwed dads), and youths with a host of 'social ills', remember that they were probably treated like zombies and discouraged from having convictions about anything. We reap what we sow."[288] Indeed, it was just such "social ills" that led UTM deputy vice chancellor Alias Mohd Noor to announce a controversial ruling in 2005 making it compulsory for students to reside on campus. Alias reasoned that the move would facilitate supervision and enhance racial integration. An ad hoc "hostel crisis team" quickly protested against Alias's crass explanation that "the Malay students are found to be influenced by drugs and loitering frequently when they stay outside campus, whereas a majority of Chinese students cohabit, and for Indian students, of course, it is gangsterism."[289] Fifteen UTM students submitted a memo to Suhakam claiming a right to choose where they would live.[290] (Deputy Higher Education Minister Fu Ah Kiow deemed UTM's ruling unnecessary.[291]) This incident aptly represents the heavy-handed paternalism criticized by the USM graduate cited above, but also demonstrates the typical tidily institutional response.

By the late 1990s, student activism had revived significantly, but thanks to the specific nature of repression and changed institutional context, it had taken on new forms and priorities. Despite the proliferation of student clubs and networks, most students, it seemed, had internalized deeply an understanding of activism as transpiring within the realm of formal politics: elections, on campus or off. The ratcheting up of activism in the early 2000s only accentuated this trend toward containment. The emphasis of almost all political campaigns was on memoranda to authorities (however strident), elections, and comparatively low-effort, low-risk efforts through coalitions of supporters off campus. These strategies borrowed far more from repertoires and frames of "adult" politics (parties and elections) and the NGO sphere ("urgent appeals," memoranda) than from the little-known past experience of more independent, inventive, and strategically varied student activism

[284] Interview with Fathi Aris Omar, December 11, 2003.

[285] Interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003.

[286] Samsudin A. Rahim, "Development, Media and Youth Issues in Malaysia," in *Reading Asia: New Research in Asian Studies*, ed. Frans Hüsken and Dick van der Meij (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), p. 41.

[287] Fathi Aris Omar (quoting a local senior lecturer), "Kebebasan Akademik: Apa Sudah Jadi?" *Malasyiakini*, September 15, 2003.

[288] Chuah Siew Eng, "USM Should Get Its Values Right," *Malaysiakini*, November 23, 2004.

[289] Beh Lih Yi, "UTM: 'Stay on Campus' Ruling to Curb Social Ills," *Malaysiakini*, March 8, 2005.

[290] Nurul Nazirin, "'Stay on Campus' Rule: UTM Students Turn to Suhakam," *Malaysiakini*, March 11, 2005.

[291] "Retract 'Racist' Remark, Students Tell UTM Deputy VC," *Malaysiakini*, March 9, 2005.

in Malaysia, partly because the context for student activism in the 1960s—shaped by the powerful UM student union, the Speaker's Corner, and international displays of effective student power—had by then been so diminished or downplayed. The covert nature of so much student organizing (evidenced by "underground" or unregistered organizations, anonymous or online publications) and the ease with which the administration could silence known agitators via disciplinary rules and the UUCA limit the potential space for broader mobilization. And the state's demonstrated readiness to crack down harshly on activist students, using weapons such as the ISA, for objectively trivial offenses, offers unambiguous evidence of the risks of nonconformity—although its disproportionate response simultaneously signals how threatened the state feels by any stirrings among students. Moreover, deep polarization on campus has made it less likely for a student champion to gain broad, cross-ethnic support, no matter how much leaders from different camps may like and respect each other. Students remain important as political actors, but in much the same way as NGOs, using comparable strategies, but with less autonomy, less inherent stature, and less independent efficacy than in the past.

At the heart of the mixed messages students receive, internalize, and repeat is a pervasive, debilitating disjuncture in understandings of the nature of the category "student." The discourse surrounding the identity has changed dramatically from that of decades past. It was once encouraging and ambitious, and is now disparaging and patronizing. This manufactured evolution lies at the heart of a strategy of intellectual containment. Yet repression in Malaysia is subtle. Most students have come to believe that they are *not* so special or different from other citizens as the global trope suggests, and have recalibrated their collective-action frames and strategies accordingly.[292] In a Gramscian sense, they are complicit in their own subordination.

The government deems the identity of "student" to be a functional identity: students are defined by the fact that they are enrolled in school, and in ever vaster numbers. (And yet politicians' rhetoric still at times acknowledges the national pride attached to the campus and the legitimation offered by pro-government students' support.) Critics—whether from the campus or outside—cleave to a mobilizable collective identity, yet may find it harder to see students as a class of actors with a moral and political purpose. While they write off the political potential of counterparts in most private institutions, these students work across public universities, at least, to assert a common identity and purpose, albeit more as concerned citizens than as students per se. And the fact that the majority remain disengaged, whatever their reasons, seems completely appropriate now, and hardly cause for alarm and recriminations, as in earlier times. One activist of the mid-1990s, looking back on *Reformasi* and its aftermath, explained that the "basic sense as a student is lost."[293] Or, as another UM graduate noted of students post-*Reformasi*, "the new generation of undergraduates were taught to believe that intellectual freedom exists only outside Malaysia ... To use a popular Malay saying, they have crawled back under the coconut shell."[294]

[292] See Vince Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship: Repression and Protest in Southeast Asia* (New York:, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

[293] Interview with KSJT group, January 11, 2006.

[294] Neil Khor, "Flawed Execution of NEP the Real Problem," *Malaysiakini*, May 13, 2005.

The period since *Reformasi* on campus carries implications for society, in part due to the fact that contemporary graduates are less prepared than their predecessors for engaged citizenship, but also due to the career choices of those who do engage in politics. Continuing a trend in evidence since the 1980s, increasing numbers of activist students are joining local and regional NGOs and alternative media, as well as political parties, after graduation. In some ways, the trend is for student organizations to take a rather cliquish "younger brothers" approach, as with the progression from PKPIM to ABIM: grooming protégés through specific student groups for particular parties and organizations.[295] (Trade union work is less an option now; organized labor has been even more severely eviscerated than the campus.) Still, positions in NGOs and alternative media, alike, remain relatively scarce and poorly funded, and the panoply of coercive rules still applies.

Students perennially note the deterioration of radicalism, or bewail the "golden age" they missed. Engaged forbears serve as links to those past examples and nudge students toward activism.[296] Still, even those who cite a "duty of being rebellious" and the tradition in Malaysia of an upstart, nonconformist *kaum muda* (youth cohort) concede that few students are even aware now of local activist history or of what their rights and options could be.[297] Indeed, however prevalent and ominous the various disciplinary laws, seldom are they used: students rarely take actions that might bring about reprisals. Explains a lecturer, cynically, "The law hangs over our heads, yes, but it hasn't really come down with any real force."[298] Moreover, disciplinary cases raise public awareness and sympathy. Yet it is intriguing how comparatively trivial some of the issues prosecuted are, and how complete the authorities wish their control to be. It seems that they are less concerned by bad press than by any slip in their grip. Discourse about university "excellence" and "world class" status notwithstanding, norms of academic freedom and autonomy are unlikely to regain their lost cachet anytime soon, and undergraduates are likely to grow ever more ordinary in their status and strategies.

[295] Interview with Yusmadi Yusoff, January 18, 2006.

[296] Interview with Tian Chua, March 9, 2006.

[297] For instance, interview with Shazeera Ahmad Zawawi and Syahrir Mahmood, December 22, 2003.

[298] Interview with Azmi Sharom, March 23, 2006.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE POLITICS OF INTELLECTUAL CONTAINMENT

> Students are students the whole world over. They're bright; they burn with zeal, and they help to keep the older people on their toes.[1]

> [T]he great weakness of student protest is that it is conducted by students. They are, almost by definition, young, reckless, and prone to immaturity. They often espouse a naïve vision of the world and employ tactics which, due to [students'] lack of experience, fail to take account of the cruel realities of institutional power ... A striking feature of student protest is the apparent inevitability of failure.[2]

Two contributions to a 1993 forum on universities and dissent in Singapore sum up the tensions in the foregoing chapters. PAP (People's Action Party) leader and former vice chancellor Toh Chin Chye explained the assumptions behind a state policy of intellectual containment: "The university has no political role as an institution. It exists by act of parliament with its role clearly defined as a teaching institution."[3] Sociologist Kwok Kian Woon offered a radically different logic: "In our society, officially, the political has been conceptualized very narrowly, to become synonymous with party politics ... But why shouldn't the university be a place for public discourse, for thinking hard through public issues and problems which concern all of us?"[4] Nondemocratic societies invariably restrict unfettered public, and especially political, discourse, so if Kwok is right, universities pose a likely target. Yet coercion is not the state's only way to hit that target. Merely containing student and staff engagement physically—restricting student marches to within campus bounds, for instance, or transplanting universities outside urban areas—helps dampen activism, but this strategy is less effective, over the long term, than disrupting the intellectual legacy and the empowering ideas that are so critical to mobilization in the first place. In other words, a clever or cautious state like Malaysia will address both structural and normative aspects of campus life.

This duality helps explain why today's Malaysian students tend to be so much less engaged than their counterparts across the region. While nonactivism may have many causes, contemporary students' much-bemoaned disinterest is at least partly

[1] Alexander Oppenheim, oral history, A000220/08, reel 8, September 18, 1982, NAS, OHC.

[2] Gerard DeGroot, ed., *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), pp. 5, 7.

[3] Quoted in "The University and Its Discontents," *Commentary: Journal of the National University of Singapore Society* 11,2 (1993): 51.

[4] Ibid., p. 61.

due to their shaky historical knowledge of more raucous times on campus, and partly engendered by that very same historical lacuna. In the past, peaking with the massive protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Malaysian students were not just known, but lauded, for their principled engagement, even if, as anywhere else, only a minority were truly active. By now, in 2011, not only are students overall less prone to engagement, but the legacy of activism is hardly recognized at all. Relatively few Malaysians, especially from young cohorts, know much about the more contentious or critical aspects of their history, including of student activism; most have internalized the trope of Malaysian complacency and carry it into post-graduation life, as well. Such lack of awareness indicates that intellectual containment has been successful; in fact, it has virtually erased activists' histories in Malaysia. The measures traced in the preceding chapters—controls on media at all levels, circumscription of curricula, politicization of academic appointments, expulsion of "sensitive issues" that might roil political tempers from the public sphere, endless reminders that students tend to be gullible and immature, and self-censorship born of uncertain out-of-bound markers—obscure alternative narratives. These strategies compound the effects of campus and state authorities' physical containment: erecting fences, establishing campuses away from city centers, removing public spaces for students to gather, channeling activism toward less-than-meaningful elections and petitions (for many, the limits of the known repertoire), and co-opting student activists into political party machines.

Simply detailing this history in full, conjoining and expanding on prior accounts, helps to document a little-known legacy that activists might invoke—Malaysian counterparts to the May Fourth Movement in China, the Generation of '66 in Indonesia, or the October 14th uprising in Thailand. Student activism need not end in mass violence or political cataclysm to merit notice, and students have played significant roles in the course of Malaysian political development. Yet how students interpret that legacy reflects their reading of contemporary campus ecology: if students understand the campus as isolated and protected from things political, and know little of the repertoires and past experience of student activism, then the campus's particular potential to foster mobilization diminishes. Especially when evaluating intellectual activism, which rests on students' collective identity as opinion leaders and trades in ideas as well as policy demands, we must understand containment not just in terms of strategies and actors, but of intellectual resources, as well.

Implicit in processes of intellectual containment is the suppression of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Students and academic staff not only claim authority as analysts and advocates based on their presumed intelligence, creativity, and eloquence, but also are the ones expected to reproduce histories and ideas through studying, teaching, and writing. Absent the liberty to perform these functions freely, safe from personal or institutional reprisals, academics find it difficult to engage in work conducive to critical engagement and activism across society. Thus, with suppression of activism on campuses, not only are students themselves less prone to engage, but others in society will less likely gain the information and validation that might have enabled them to contest the state's numbing narratives of complacent acquiescence. Seen in this context, students' persistent investment in underground media and the eagerness of the activists with whom I spoke to hear their own stories told carry more resonance.

This same eagerness, though, poses particular challenges for the researcher. Students and academic staff are perhaps inevitably highly self-aware and generally self-reflexive subjects; the university is both site and source of this current research. Beyond this awareness is a degree of nostalgia for happy student days and consciousness, too, of the trope of the idealistic student against whom students everywhere may be counterpoised. Possibly perpetuating the assumption of left-wing dissidence in the present work is not just the fact that much *is* left-wing, but also the fact that self-described "progressive" and "Islamist" students (these categories often overlapping) were far easier to pin down for interviews than those from the pro-establishment side, apart from long-ago students now securely ensconced in government posts. While, as noted above, triangulation and healthy skepticism help to rectify this imbalance, such dilemmas are intrinsic to research on activism; nonactivists are invariably harder to capture. Moreover, while there *is* an enduring global trope of "the student activist," new readings of that category are also available, particularly given changes in popular culture and the array of expectations and distractions youths today face. Our subject, however self-conscious, thus presents a surprisingly unstable and elusive object of study.

Student Movements as Social Movements

Generalizations about student activism as a phenomenon are difficult. One prominent Southeast Asianist concludes, "Students in politics are important but unpredictable."[5] Regardless, as threads running through the foregoing discussion suggest, Malaysian experience highlights four core mechanisms or dynamics that distinguish student movements from other social movements; it is worth disentangling these threads for their analytical value, both in making sense of Malaysia and to facilitate broader comparison. They include the nature of protest cycles, the effects of political opportunity structures (dimensions of the political environment that favor or discourage activism), the role of environmental and structural factors, and, perhaps most importantly, less tangible, normative implications of student activism. All these factors clarify the enduring salience of the collective identity category of "student" and help explain why curtailment of campus protest has such extraordinary ramifications, but also suggest how distinguishing carefully among movement types, rather than assuming all function in basically the same way, can help refine theories of contentious politics.

Protest Cycles and Catalysts

Like any social movement, student activism tends to be cyclical. Moreover, both universities and student movements are tied intrinsically to other national and international structures, producing particular patterns: moments of apparent worldwide student "revolt," as in 1968, or more narrowly bounded waves of protest. Feeding these patterns are processes of frame diffusion: activists in one country actively borrow "cultural ideas, items, or practices," such as norms of student empowerment and protest tactics, then tailor these to fit the local context.[6] Given the

[5] Josef Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," *Pacific Affairs* 49,2 (1976): 212.

[6] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 627.

importance of such cross-cultural borrowing to sustaining an apparent *global* movement, a dip in activism in one country may well reverberate elsewhere. As we see in Malaysia in the 1960s and 1970s, ideological currents, tactics, and interpretive frames travel among students across borders, spurred by journals, international meetings, and (especially) informal communications.[7] In much the same way, counter narratives that emphasize students' unsuitability for political engagement or heedless radicalism may also diffuse among a movement's opponents. The simple fact that student protest erupts elsewhere, however, does not explain its outbreak in any given location. Student activism surged in Malaysia in step with developments in the West, but peaked later, then dropped off more sharply. These waves do not align with patterns in other countries. In South Korea, for instance, periods of near-constant activity have alternated with periods of calm, with few obvious international triggers.[8] Plainly, any demonstration effects (impacts in one setting from events observed elsewhere) at work are complex, multivalent, and filtered through local political opportunity structures. Moreover, the specific character and targets of student activism vary dramatically with time and place. Hence, rapidly changing domestic contexts complicate an understanding of student protest cycles at the international level.

That said, the Malaysian experience does reflect a certain postcolonial norm. Throughout the postwar period, postcolonial states both have sought to assert a national identity, not least through policies on education and language, and have faced generic issues of educational capacity and objectives in the course of development. Especially in the early years of independence, in Malaysia as in other postcolonial nations, students and societies alike fumbled for relevant models for democratic politics and social harmony. Nevertheless, as exemplified in postwar Malaysia, students—being comparatively well-informed in those early days—were expected to "help the nation" by engaging in national politics, whatever the consequence for their studies. State elites and the public gradually devalued student opinion as the ranks of the educated grew, leaving students less inclined to take a stand and rendering their own issues less "liable to develop into national political issues."[9]

Political Opportunities

Amidst these changes, universities are expected to be postcolonial trailblazers, rapidly generating national pride, technological capacity, and trained leaders. Yet many such institutions struggled to meet expectations almost from the outset. Already by the early 1960s,

> ... many Asian universities found themselves adrift institutionally with depleted staffs, inadequate resources and facilities, rapidly rising enrollments, and without any significant achievements in science and scholarship to justify self-esteem and public appreciation ... Serious questions of university reform have had to be neglected in order to meet this primary obligation to expand in response to the greatly whetted appetite for educational qualifications, which is so characteristic of formerly colonial territories.[10]

[7] Philip G. Altbach, "The International Student Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5,1 (1970): 156–74.

[8] Richard W. Wilson, "Wellsprings of Discontent: Sources of Dissent in South Korean Student Values," *Asian Survey* 28,10 (1988): 1066–67.

[9] T. H. Silcock, *Southeast Asian University: A Comparative Account of Some Development Problems* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1964), p. 24.

Meanwhile, even though Southeast Asian governments wielded limited control over the direction and policies of their public universities, both developed symbiotically: universities needed funds and states needed graduates to staff growing bureaucracies.[11] (At the time, private universities throughout Southeast Asia were nonexistent or insignificant except in the Philippines.) Political opportunity structures shifted as that relationship changed.

Changes in political opportunities may not map precisely onto movement attributes.[12] While political opportunity structures are ultimately objective features, agency matters: activists act on their understanding of these structures—in the jargon of contentious politics, on their attribution of opportunity and threat.[13] Yet as the effects of political changes in Malaysia suggest, variations in political opportunity structures do help to explain differences in levels and forms of student (or other) activism across states. Similarly identified, similarly endowed activists will sculpt their strategies and timing to fit prevailing conditions, from dramatic expression to timidity and self-suppression; elites, too, "can channel dissent into particularly unthreatening, and perhaps less effective, forms of activism."[14] Attention to political opportunity structures offers leverage in understanding both states' efforts to check or confine campus-based protest, and how states and students mutually calibrate their approaches. For instance, it is hardly coincidental that students have repeatedly chosen visits by foreign dignitaries as moments for protest, even when their target is more their own government than that of the emissary in question. For example, consider the Thai, Indonesian, and Malaysian student demonstrations against visits by Japanese politicians in the early 1970s. The short temper of government forces under such circumstances guaranteed a good show for the media and, hence, a chance for students to rally sympathy for the cause.

Indeed, while political opportunity structures are significant to any movement's strategies, student activists may be unusually susceptible to changes in them, given the fungibility of their position. As Josef Silverstein notes, "So long as the political environment is stable, students probably will not become politically active off the campus. In periods of instability, they will provide a source of leadership when no other political force offers it."[15] However, since students' primary purpose is *not* political activity, the average student "is usually willing to leave the barricades for

[10] Joseph Fischer, "The University Student in South and South-East Asia," *Minerva* 2,1 (1963): 41.

[11] Ibid., pp. 41–43.

[12] David S. Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 134, 139.

[13] For instance, Hanspeter Kriesi, "Political Context and Opportunity," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 77–79.

[14] Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," pp. 128, 136.

[15] Silverstein, "Students in Southeast Asian Politics," p. 209.

his books if he believes a start has been made and that it will be followed up by others whose business is politics."[16] The enhancement of institutional politics in Malaysia—both the maturation of an array of parties and the increasing power of the central state—has thus pushed students out of the limelight; the latter have been most influential when institutional outlets have been scarce, discredited, or still developing (e.g., during the colonial era, the early 1970s). In times of "normal politics," students seem especially prone to eschew any political role.

Environment and Structure

Environmental and structural considerations relate not merely to exogenous political opportunities, but to the structure and function of the campus itself. The modern university campus anywhere is at least in part a political institution. It is not an incidental matter that political debates and mobilization occur there or that special rules may apply to those connected with the campus, structuring its interaction with other political institutions. Those special rules may allow for a more liberal environment to thrive on campus than off. When students then try to extend their reach, the state may react badly, by arresting student leaders, as it did during Malaysia's 1974 Operasi Mayang or, even more dramatically, by shooting students, as Iranian troops did at the gates of the University of Tehran in 1978[17] and Indonesia's New Order government forces did outside Trisakti University twenty years later.[18] Even the more clearly functional aspect of the university's mandate is politically tinged. Universities develop human resources, but of a special sort: especially initially in the (post-)colonial world, they were to staff the state itself. Explained a Malayan undergraduate, looking ahead to independence, "University students can no longer consider themselves as divorced from Malayan political and social movements which need the guiding hand of educated leaders; [leaders who] in the years to come must be provided by the university."[19]

These various roles come together in the unique environment of the campus. Dormitories, residential colleges, and other student accommodations and facilities expose students to protracted peer pressure, as well as granting them access to resources and networks, socializing students toward understanding their role in a collective, political sense rather than just a functional one. The UM Socialist Club's house in the 1960s, where club members lived and gathered, or UM's Union House in the 1960s–70s, where UMSU staff mingled, offered such spaces. The physical layout and boundedness of the campus foster what sociologist Dingxin Zhao terms "ecology-dependent strategies." In April 1989, he explains, students in Beijing began by marching and shouting inside campus, then attracted a crowd that grew larger and "created an atmosphere of excitement and heightened the pitch of [crowd members'] anger. Finally, they built up enough courage to march out."[20] Protests that

[16] Ibid., pp. 210–11.

[17] "The Shah's Fight for Survival," *Time*, November 20, 1978.

[18] David Cohen, "Indonesian Forces Kill 6 Students at Jakarta Protest," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 22, 1998, p. A51.

[19] Polioscope, "The University and the Malayan Community," *The New Cauldron*, Hilary Term (1952–53): 41–48.

[20] Dingxin Zhao, "Ecologies of Social Movements: Student Mobilization during the 1989 Prodemocracy Movement in Beijing," *American Journal of Sociology* 103,6 (1998): 1517.

began at UM's Speaker's Corner and moved outward mirrored this pattern. The proximity of campuses to each other replicates those advantages on a larger scale: given the closeness of UM, UKM, and ITM in the late 1960s and early 1970s, students could see their peers marching and count on safety in numbers.

And yet the campus environment is hardly impervious to manipulation; it is vulnerable to some of the most obvious and simple means to quell protest. Even slight variations in spatial arrangements on campus, and not just density or homogeneity, shift potentials for mobilization.[21] This condition helps explain General Ne Win's destruction of the student union building at Rangoon University in July 1962[22] and the subsequent disassembling of the institution into smaller, gated and guarded campuses;[23] the closure of the Union House and demolition of the Speaker's Corner at UM after the drama of 1974; and the development of the National University of Singapore's Kent Ridge campus without a central gathering space. Such immediate, tangible initiatives to hamper mobilization are hard to envision for other sorts of movements; it is student movements' intrinsic connection to the campus that makes them both so agile and efficient, and so deeply vulnerable.

It is the students' environment, too, that helps to channel their objectives and targets. Students retain a complex identity, affiliated with an institution (which however autonomous, has its own administrative apparatus), a place of origin and social status, and (especially in flagship public universities) a nation. These levels of identification intersect, at times propelling political action. Hence, issues affecting rural Malays, for instance, gained ascendance on the Malaysian campus of the 1970s, as students who shared that identity filtered through the ranks. One study of the mid-1960s thus frames the distinction between radical and conservative students as one that concerns the relative integration of students' "role image," positing that radical students understand the roles of student and citizen as inseparable and student life as part and parcel of national political life; conservative students, in contrast, "tend to see themselves as full-time students preparing for a career."[24]

Student activists' identities are nevertheless not merely reactive or ascribed; movement leaders may creatively frame issues and identities to sustain mobilization. For instance, students in late 1980s China were heirs to a tradition stretching from critical scholar-officials in the imperial period to state-sanctioned ideologues and critics of the early communist state; their position could be framed in terms of a history of "critical defiance" or of "loyal service."[25] Students in Singapore confronted cognate dilemmas as they evolved from advocates to adversaries of the consolidating PAP regime. This sort of conflict-based legacy leaves space for purposeful articulation of a collective identity—so long as that legacy is at least known and still

[21] Ibid., 1518–19.

[22] Fischer, "The University Student," p. 39.

[23] As if to showcase campuses' impermeability, the junta reportedly housed overflow political detainees at (temporarily closed) universities and schools in the aftermath of the September 2007 protests. See Martha Ann Overland, "Myanmar's Junta Said to Use Universities to Hold Arrested Protesters," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 1, 2007, available online at http://chronicle.com/article/Myanmar-s-Junta-Said-to-Use/39680, accessed on May 1, 2011.

[24] Glaucio A. D. Soares, "The Active Few: Student Ideology and Participation in Developing Countries," in *Student Politics*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1967), p. 125.

[25] George T. Crane, "Collective Identity, Symbolic Mobilization, and Student Protest in Nanjing, China, 1988–1989," *Comparative Politics* 26,4 (1994): 399.

credited among students, a point to which we return shortly. Even then, students may select among multiple interpretations of past events.

Moreover, from a different perspective, it can be said that students may define their targets at any level, from the institutional to the national or even supranational. However helpful coherent organization may yet be, this potential for "object shift" allows low-level, tightly bounded activism to be sustained even absent more strident and visible engagement, facilitating maintenance and renewal of student organizations, leadership, and repertoires in a way not possible for many other social movements. Such a lens offers an unconventional reading of Malaysian student activism post-1974: as coordinated, massive protests tapered off, mobilization around such issues as morality on campus flourished instead.

The tremendous variety of universities' possible institutional arrangements, too, may appreciably structure student protest. Ian Weinberg and Kenneth Walker elaborate this relationship, finding that regime structure and quality, as well as linkages between the political system and higher education, affect forms of student politics and organizations, ranging from national student unions to campus-level student governments, political clubs, party branches, and extra-institutional protest actions.[26] In Malaysia, too, private universities, attracting largely self-funded students, have generally seen far less student activism than their public counterparts. Finally, and quite plainly, by changing the rules regarding students' involvement in political parties, universities have starkly reshaped the parties' recruitment strategies on campus, and rendered students' leadership in either government or opposition parties a thing of the past.

Normative Dimensions and the Effects of Stifling Students

What makes these political and systemic attributes so relevant is the special status universities occupy. While not all institutions fit the mold, universities confer prestige, both for those attending and for the polities in which they reside. Universities are, or have the potential to be, truly national in makeup, cutting across bounds of race, religion, geography, and even class in a way no other institution may be able. Universities enjoy, ideally, a tradition of autonomy; despite being under the aegis of the state (especially if a public institution), universities generally can claim extra latitude in the name of academic freedom. Regardless of the actual content of student activists' concerns, these are amplified by the social, and specifically intellectual, position of the claimants, particularly when overall education levels nationally remain relatively low. Indeed, university affiliation confers a form of quasi-class status, apparent in undergraduates' interactions with students at other levels. It is because this status matters that the discursive diminution of Malaysian undergraduates, from *mahasiswa* to *pelajar*, is so important.

Empirically, while specific tactics and effects vary, states' repression of challengers tends to increase as elites feel more threatened.[27] The severity of state reactions suggests that student identities, ideologies, or tactics are often among those factors that political elites deem especially menacing or worth repressing. Even when

[26] Ian Weinberg and Kenneth N. Walker, "Student Politics and Political Systems: Toward a Typology," *American Journal of Sociology* 75,1 (1969): 80.

[27] Charles D. Brockett, "The Structure of Political Opportunities and Peasant Mobilization in Central America," *Comparative Politics* 23,3 (1991): 262–64.

it does not stifle activism altogether, repression changes the dynamics of students' mobilization, since what the state attacks and how it does so signals what the state will (not) tolerate. Activists' strategies and movement cultures adjust in response.[28] Such repression may be either physical or discursive; coercion may be at least as effective and far less controversial when targeted and subtle, especially when executed through (even dubious) legal means.[29] Most importantly for our purposes, intellectual activism, and particularly that of students as a recognized and bounded category, requires a fair amount of validation to be effective: intellectuals trade on the assumption that they know what is right better than the authorities they challenge. Intellectual containment serves as a form of calibrated coercion. Sidestepping physical repression, it denies the value of political engagement among members of an identity category that still carries both felt and public resonance, and that can be useful for the state itself. The sharply diminished deference officials have come to accord students in Malaysia is itself thus innately repressive. Intellectual containment, in turn, changes the character of student protest. Thus, Malaysian students, for example, may engage not just more or less, but *differently* than in the 1960s or 1970s, in response to new structural and normative (dis)incentives.

Furthermore, student activism in illiberal states is qualitatively different from that elsewhere, particularly in terms of the relative weight of specific aspects of mobilization. Where physical organization is curtailed, symbolic mobilization—centered around ideas, images, and legacies—may be pivotal. In late-1980s China, for instance, students unable to express themselves openly constructed a collective identity by representing their movement's moral purity, selflessness, and sincerity through heavily laden, but concise, easily readable, and hard to suppress symbols such as music and iconic sites. Repression then played into the movement's self-definition, by exaggerating the contrast between defenseless students and a bullying state.[30] In fact, Crane argues, this careful management of representation and spectacle fostered a particularly sturdy collective identity and cognitive framework, facilitating long-term maintenance of the movement in China.[31] The relative *lack* of shared symbols and mementos of past campaigns in Malaysia, given their suppression on campus and in the media, has had the opposite effect, leaving subsequent student cohorts less convinced of their own collective potential.

The meaning with which many societies vest student activists, and states' awareness of how galvanizing a crackdown might be, fosters official ambivalence toward suppression of student activism. Such hesitation leaves students uniquely efficacious in a situation where strong political control is otherwise enforced. In Malaysia, the state's initial prevarication over enforcement of the UUCA in the early 1970s left the door open to the largest protests ever *after* the UUCA's promulgation. Given the state's previous delicacy, few student activists likely expected the crackdown that followed, or the lingering shift in public discourse about students' proper place.

[28] Vince Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship: Repression and Protest in Southeast Asia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 8–11.

[29] Simon Barraclough, "The Dynamics of Coercion in the Malaysian Political Process," *Modern Asian Studies* 19,4 (1985), pp. 787–822.

[30] Crane, "Student Protest in Nanjing," pp. 401–3.

[31] Ibid., pp. 409–10.

Clearly, student activism is neither automatic nor uniform in attributes or effects. Commonly, though, too-facile characterizations of students as youthful idealists or as "kids acting like kids" are used to obscure the variability within and across student movements. For example, the salience of ideology to these movements may vary over time. Certain Indonesian ex-student activists from the 1980s were disappointed with their successors' comparatively reactive, ideologically tenuous approach, for instance. A more solid ideological footing and clearly ideological messages may have lessened the mass appeal of the student protests in 1998, but then sustained the movement over time and prevented it from deflating as soon as students' immediate targets had been met.[32] Any exploration of student activism must thus take seriously external and internal contexts, subtle and overt expressions, and the iterative interplay of activism and repression in sometimes different ways than would be the case for any other social movement. With this lens in mind, we delve deeper into *why* and *how* Malaysian student activism has changed over the years, to recap why these patterns are so well worth studying.

SITUATING STUDENT MOVEMENTS IN MALAYSIA

More than thirty years ago, Justus Van der Kroef suggested that, despite Malaysia's comparatively meaningful formal (electoral) political opposition, much as was the case elsewhere in Southeast Asia, opposition came primarily from extra-parliamentary interest groups: the military, religious and ethnic groups, communists, and, most importantly, students and intellectuals.[33] The ranks of salient players have shifted a lot since then, but students and intellectuals would still make the list. Simply reviewing the historical experience of students' activism offers a glimpse of their significance relative to other social sectors, but understanding what students in particular contribute, why individuals choose to engage as *students* rather than under the rubric of some other identity, why the government has taken the steps it has to curb student activism, and the full implications of those steps sheds light on the broader context of Malaysian postwar political development.

The general sequence of events and cleavages on the Malaysian campus parallel those of the state. Placed on a timeline, the peaks and valleys of campus protest clearly align with times of greater and lesser mobilization in the broader political arena, but the direction of causality between campus and state is neither clear nor consistent. The rise and decline of the Socialist Club, for instance, paralleled the progress of socialist parties, despite the lack of sustained, formal connections between the campus and these parties; both reflect the course of left-wing politics in Malaysia. The racially fraught tensions that erupted in riots in the late 1960s were manifested in ongoing ferment on campus, as students combated the state's seeming inattention to Malays' poverty and cultural claims. The shift from student demonstrations to appeals to Suhakam (Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia, Malaysian Human Rights Commission), the rise of narrow partisanship and "money politics" on campus, and the curbs on associations and media likewise correspond to patterns of containment of transgressive forms of contention across the polity after

[32] Dave McRae, *The 1998 Indonesian Student Movement*, Working Papers on Southeast Asia, #110 (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 2001), p. 34.

[33] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Patterns of Political Opposition in Southeast Asia," *Pacific Affairs* 51,4 (1978–79): 622, 636.

1969, and especially under Mahathir. The relative preeminence of Malay, Islamist activism and leftist, multiracial frameworks and approaches has been similarly in step on campus and off. And all the while, if the majority of students at any given time has remained disengaged or supportive of the "safe" status quo, substitute "citizens" for "students" and that description pretty much holds.

Indeed, it would be wrong to exaggerate the exuberance of Malaysian students' political proclivities. As one commentator scoffed, even as student protest scaled new heights in the late 1960s: "It is an understatement to say that students are apathetic to student government and student welfare in the campus." He estimated that only about 2 percent of UM students were involved with student societies or the student union, and less than half this small group "actively" so.[34] While the scale of protest events confirms this estimate to be an understatement, what surge there was had been largely beaten down by an angry state within a decade. In another fifteen years, by the mid-1990s, with campus dynamism at a low ebb, students were derided as "passive, indolent, weak, clumsy, and not aggressive."[35] Despite the steady advance of *dakwah* starting in the 1970s and a handful of outbursts through the 1980s, most students seemed too focused on graduating and finding secure employment to take any undue risks. The deterrent effects of stiff penalties and dire consequences for student activism are one explanation for this inaction, but an insufficient one if the experiences of neighboring countries—for example, New Order Indonesia, Marcos' Philippines, and Ne Win's Burma, as well as China and South Korea to a degree—are taken into account. (While the 1980s were a relatively slow decade for student activism in many regions, that does not hold true for Asia.) Relative to Malaysia, students elsewhere in Southeast Asia brave far graver repercussions to take a stand, and those repressive enactments and approaches against which students used to protest in Malaysia still remain in place.

As undergraduates have been normalized, that is, held in less esteem and become increasingly numerous and academically less remarkable, they have come to resemble other social groups in their proclivity to form alliances (since there is little danger of sullying a moral purity they no longer claim) or to eschew involvement. They have, accordingly, been little more likely than other citizens to risk penalties at a time when the Malaysian government has become ever less indulgent of mass unrest or other challenges. As early as 1966, foreshadowing what would become a common refrain, the Tunku complained in a convocation speech that, by being so political, students were acting like an opposition party.[36] Yet the very vehemence of the state's response and diminished tolerance for student protest—previously permitted even when other sectors were suppressed—is testament to students' (potential) potency and position.

Passage of the UUCA brought to a head the unique contradictions inherent in controlling students. The act discouraged student engagement with off-campus issues or organizations even as "overkill in controlling student activism is grudgingly recognized by some educational authorities … [as having] adverse

[34] S. Balakrishnan, "Student Government and Welfare," in *Student Problems in Southeast Asian Universities*, ed. Chatar Singh and Tan Beng Cheok (Bangkok: Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, 1969), pp. 58–59.

[35] "Suara Mahasiswa: Di Tahap Manakah Penerimaannya?" *Aspirasi* 20 (1995–96): 68–70.

[36] Josef Silverstein, "Burmese and Malaysian Student Politics: A Preliminary Comparative Inquiry," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1,1 (1970): 17.

implications in terms of student alienation, inexperience, and lack of leadership abilities."[37] The UUCA whittled away at the intellectual characteristics and resources of the university, foregrounding its bureaucratizing function. Moreover, the majority of students today have only a limited understanding of the UUCA, the basic policy framework governing their lives on campus. Knowing no other way, most students see the constraints they face as natural and remain complacent and uncritical. These trends matter not just for Malaysians' understanding of the role of students and academics in society, but for the new generation's preparation for later political participation.[38] Whereas in the 1950s apathy was something to be bemoaned and dissuaded—a pathology born of conflicting loyalties and overweening self-interest—by the 1990s, disengagement was to be expected and encouraged. Yet, if students are not allowed to exercise citizenship skills on campus, they may not be able to develop them later. An ineffective campus-based polity may translate into an increasingly less effective formal government and opposition over time.

Even "nanny-state" Singapore is concerned about the lack of "fire in their belly" among today's undergraduates: a dull campus life sets a precedent for enduring dispassion.[39] Members of Singapore's "post-1965 generation," now dominant, feel little connection to the ruling party and its struggles of the past and have little sense of the spontaneity that keeps politics vibrant, a passive response that perturbs a regime constantly alert to the need for renewal. In 1999, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong even proposed supplementing the weak campus political clubs still operating with party-identified alternatives. When students did not rush to take him up on that idea (not least since the laws remained unchanged), Goh backtracked, conceding that Singapore was not ready for that innovation yet. Instead, he simply urged students to take an interest in current affairs.[40] Nevertheless, a polytechnic student challenged a government minister at a 2001 student forum to be receptive to student involvement: "Singapore politics is like a book with restricted rating and confined to those twenty-one years old. Moreover, everyone already knows the ending. Hence, how can the government blame the young for not being interested in politics?"[41]

INTELLECTUAL CONTAINMENT

The theoretical and empirical strands of containing student activism come together as we consider how the Malaysian state encounters and redirects students as collective, critical actors. The nature of the state's crackdown offers insight into not just Malaysian political development, but social movement dynamics. Student activists differ from others in the nature of the collective identity they adopt, especially the moral and intellectual value ascribed to that identity; the breadth of issues they may champion, including matters with no apparent connection to

[37] K. S. Jomo, Hassan Abdul Karim, and Ahmad Shabery Cheek, "Malaysia," in *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook*, ed. Philip G. Altbach (New York, NY: Greenwood, 1989), p. 154.

[38] Junaidi Abu Bakar, *Mahasiswa, Politik, Dan Undang-Undang* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993), pp. 105, 108–110.

[39] Eunice Lau, "Special Memories for Class of '76," *Straits Times*, April 30, 2001.

[40] Huang Jianli, "Positioning the Student Political Activism of Singapore: Articulation, Contestation, and Omission," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7,3 (2006): 423–24.

[41] Quoted in ibid., p. 425.

students' own interests and positions; and the location of their mobilization, which exploits the spatial and communicative dimensions of the campus. It is the first of these dimensions that catalyzes the others: students are generally *expected* to take a stand and respected for doing so by dint of their status as students rather than on the basis of their particular knowledge or experience. If the state can undercut those normative presumptions, making student mobilization seem not inevitable and right, but presumptuous and ill-advised, it can effectively short-circuit student mobilization. And that is what the Malaysian state has done, as a project of intellectual containment. Inasmuch as it is a known legacy of past activism and valor that substantially creates and bolsters identity claims by current protesters, erasing or concealing that history makes mobilization and validation via the shortcut of invocation all the more difficult, compounding more generic factors hindering mobilization (e.g., the swelling ranks of students and proliferation of leisure time pursuits). By obscuring the history of student (and other, especially left-wing) activism, the Malaysian authorities have significantly stymied mobilization. Today, students are told that it is out of character for Malaysian students to engage politically. Most students have no evidence to the contrary, and thus no reason not to believe and internalize that mantra. Once internalized, such acquiescence and non-activism may carry over into post-graduation life, as well.

Central to this project of rewriting history and atomizing students to preclude collective action has been the general degradation of facilitating aspects of campus environments. These efforts, often deliberate and obvious, impede mobilization directly, but also by disrupting students' collective identity, tied as it is to the campus as a physical site. The obliteration of venues for mingling and interaction, like UM's Speaker's Corner, some of them with keen symbolic or historical value, removed even visual reminders of past foibles, let alone easy nodal points. Like in Singapore, as described above, new campuses in Malaysia were designed without central gathering places and often far from urban centers, with spatially separated faculties and hostels, and sprawling but merely functional student centers and other facilities. Moreover, the dissolution or enervation of once-active and critical student media has played a particularly key role. Lack of such media complicates not only transmission of local activist history or news of student movements elsewhere (and the perhaps inevitable over-glamorization one might then expect), but also communications more generally. Curtailment of student media makes it difficult for students to frame their position and function in a way that stimulates collective identification, and interferes with negotiations among students and student organizations that make collective action feasible.[42] Meanwhile, the nature of academe is such that "intellectuals" reproduce their own erasure through their internalization of apolitical mandates and warnings against activism and through

[42] The Internet has reshaped activism across Malaysia as elsewhere. While Malaysian students were relatively slow to take to online forums for mobilization (not least given restrictions on campaigning on sites such as Facebook, as noted in chapter 6), activists now routinely upload documentation of predations and events to YouTube, read and keep blogs, and network online. That said, inasmuch as the Internet *does* come to supplant or at least supplement in-person mobilization, undergraduates will become ever more like any other citizens: the particular ecology of the campus offers no edge online, apart from the fact that students are especially likely to have Internet access. For more on the growing impact of online mobilization (and especially the rise of a new cohort of blogger-politicians) in Malaysia, see Meredith L. Weiss, "Edging toward a New Politics in Malaysia: Civil Society at the Gate?" *Asian Survey* 49,5 (2009): 753–55.

their teaching—or at least, not questioning—a sanitized version of events. The historical narrative has not only been rewritten, but effectively transmitted to exclude the history and mythos of student activism.

Yet this rewriting calls into question the place not just of students, but of the universities they occupy. The prolific public angst and hand-wringing that take place when the nation's universities fall in international rankings reflect not just what that decline means in terms of practical training and human resources, but what universities represent more broadly. Their purpose is not just to provide pragmatic, cost-effective teaching and marketable research, but to showcase the nation's priorities and its intellectual capacity and promise. Students and staff are a necessary part of that equation. It is not least for this reason that the critical vanguard among student activists tends to come from premier institutions—the same institutions presumably most vested in the status quo. Contemporary Malaysian students are structurally conditioned to be mute and uncritical, yet the nation's image and capacity falter when pedagogical approaches and academic institutions are designed to stifle students' and professors' natural curiosity and freedom of expression.

Unpacking the dynamics of collective identity, mobilization, and suppression in Malaysia makes clear that student activism carries deeper implications for political development than the straightforward effects of that engagement. Universities and students have lost much of their once-substantial autonomy and agency in Malaysia, despite being both products and producers of changing regimes. Yet, however much the collective identity *student* may change in character or clout, no modern state can eschew intellectual production altogether. Given the buffer of their "intellectual" status, however tempered by new social and structural pressures, students stir the state's anxieties for a reason: they retain unique political potential, whether in the service of or to the irritation of political and social elites. The Malaysian experience offers an apt window on these processes, not because Malaysian students have been a regime-changing, transformative force—since they have not been so—but because the university is particularly central to this postcolonial, developmental state's ambitions, and because, given both regime characteristics and demographic challenges, students have been unusually starkly reframed and repositioned over time. We see in Malaysia the interplay of movements, markets, and elite manipulations in a modernizing, globalizing state, with resonance far beyond Malaysia's borders.

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