

# RACE RELATIONS IN MALAYSIA

# Race Relations in Malaysia

*Wan Hashim*



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*for*  
*Juriah, Mahsuri,*  
*and Salmatul Juita*



## *Acknowledgements*

This book is prepared with the purpose of introducing two related subjects, national integration and race relations, to students of sociology, political science, and history, and to the general reader. The problems are analysed in the context of the situation in Peninsular Malaysia.

Admittedly, scholarly works on the subject of communal relations in Peninsular Malaysia appear in professional journals or in books too advanced for students and the general reader. What is lacking is a book that introduces the subject to sixth form students and undergraduates as well as the general reader. This book hopes to fill this gap.

The original research was undertaken at Monash University Library in 1972–73, relying mainly on published secondary materials and submitted to the Department of Anthropology and Sociology as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts Honours degree.

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All errors of fact and interpretation are of course my own.

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Wan Hashim

7 March 1981

## *Foreword*

It is now almost a truism that the approach towards the study of any society ought to be multi-disciplinary. But while the idea is widely acclaimed, in so far as the study of the Malaysian society is concerned, insufficient scholars have come forward to put into practice what has so often been preached. In particular, few have seriously attempted to marry the social sciences with history. Many social scientists continue to be preoccupied predominantly with theories; numerous historians are still enswathed in trees and cannot see the woods.

Malaysia's plural society is well known but not well understood. Admittedly there is, generally speaking, a sizeable literature on the subject but few of the authors, the majority of whom are not historians, have paid more than cursory attention to history in studying the problems of ethnicity. The present book is a rare exception. Going back to the 1900s, Wan Hashim examines developments within the society which led to cleavages between Malays and non-Malays and discusses with unusual clarity the problems encountered in attempts to achieve national integration since the achievement of independence.

Most studies of ethnicity in Malaysia, for reasons not always clear, also tend not to focus on contemporary politics. Wan Hashim, on the other hand, pays singular attention to the history of political activities in Malaysia, thereby bringing into sharper focus the nature of racial conflict here – the problem as he sees it (and there is considerable merit in the view) stems largely from “the politicization of ethnic differences”.

This book addresses itself not merely to the specialist for its very readability, the use of basic sociological vocabulary notwithstanding, must surely encourage even the general reader to peruse it. The subject dealt with is a difficult one for most

Malaysians to discuss without bias and emotionalism; it is very much to the author's credit that one can detect none of these in this book.

November 1981

Khoo Kay Kim  
Professor of Malaysian History  
University of Malaya

## *Abbreviations*

<i>B.J.S.</i>	British Journal of Sociology
<i>D.M.</i>	Dewan Masyarakat
<i>J.A.A.S.</i>	Journal of Asian and African Studies
<i>J.B.A.M.S.</i>	Journal of the British Association of Malaysia and Singapore
<i>J.S.E.A.H.</i>	Journal of Southeast Asian History
<i>J.T.G.</i>	Journal of Tropical Geography
<i>M.S.R.I.</i>	Malaysian Sociological Research Institute

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY  
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## Introduction

Malaysia has been considered to be a plural society *par excellence*. Its plurality lies not only in its population where the number of indigenous Malays almost equals that of the immigrant non-Malays, but also because the ethnic divisions coincide with religious and linguistic divisions enhanced by differences in customs and ways of life. Apart from these, all the three ethnic groups have their heritage from the three great civilizations of Asia, and as a result the ethnic cleavages are underscored and deepened.

The complex communal problem in Malaysia is mainly due to the British colonial policy of encouraging a large number of immigrants from India and China into the peninsula, beginning from the early 19th century. This was followed by the policy of divide and rule, which kept the major ethnic groups in compartments, and gave rise to a division of labour on racial lines.

It is, however, inappropriate to consider the problem as totally due to the nature of its plurality. *Prima facie*, this is acceptable and indisputable. But the communal problem of today should also be considered in terms of some other variables like modernization, racial inequality, politicization of the masses, and others. The argument is that pluralism as such need not necessarily bring about communal cleavages and conflict. Perhaps the more plural a society is the less can be said about communalism since contact is minimal. It is the politicization of ethnic differences compounded by the phenomena of scarcity, inequality, and open competition that often generates communal cleavages and conflicts. The phenomenon is inherent in almost all societies which are undergoing transformation and change in the post-colonial period.

The main aim of this study is to examine race relations or communalism which hinders national integration in a new nation like Malaysia. This study covers the period between the early 1900s and the early 1970s. Concepts and theories of the sociology of race relations and national integration are introduced and discussed in the context of the Malaysian situation.

Related to this is the second aim, that is, to examine to what extent the so-called *paradox of modernization* is present in the Malaysian situation. The thesis is that Malaysia, like other new nations, faces a similar problem of communalism or what sociologists call the problem of race relations. This particular problem manifests the paradox where increased economic development and social change heighten and exacerbate communal cleavages rather than diminish them.

This study will discuss the problem in Peninsular Malaysia only, as the states of Sabah and Sarawak have a population composition and history quite different from that of Peninsular Malaysia and to include them would only complicate this study.

The study by historical analysis is relevant because the problems of today are mainly the product of the past and hence a knowledge of the past is the *sine qua non* to the understanding of the present situation. Secondly, societal development is a dynamic and continuing process. Historical analysis will provide the developmental and time dimensions of the society and this is an antithesis to conceiving society as a static entity. Since national integration is a dynamic process, the analysis of the problems related to the subject-matter has to be pursued through time depth.

Related to the above is the macrosociological approach which is considered here as especially useful and necessary for this study. One reason is that the unit dealt with here is a macro-unit of a nation. Another is that the sociological phenomena considered, like national integration, communalism, or modernization, are phenomena which have macroscopic consequences *modus operandi*. For the purpose of this study, historical and macrosociological approaches complement each other.

Chapter One introduces and discusses concepts like "new nation", the "paradox of modernization", "national integration"

and some other aspects related to the latter. Chapter Two discusses the main results of British colonialism which not only brought about modernization in Malaya, but was also responsible for the formation of a plural society in colonial times. Chapters Three and Four trace the origins and development of nationalism in pre-independence Malaya which have had negative effects in attaining national integration. These nationalist movements gave rise to the formation of communal socio-political organizations which intensified communal tension and brought about racial polarization. In Chapters Five and Six, the salient problems are discussed through four broad dimensions: demographic, economic, socio-cultural, and political. Chapter Seven presents some positive attempts of the Malaysian government to achieve integration and unity in Malaysia after the 13 May 1969 racial riots. The discussion in Chapter Eight is theoretical and should interest students of social science. In Chapter Nine, alternative solutions in concepts of the problem of ethnic pluralism and a possible solution for Malaysia are discussed.



## ONE

# New Nations and the Problems of National Integration

### The New Nations – A Comparative Analysis

The post-1945 period saw the birth of several countries classified under one category, the new nations. They had been subjected to colonial rule by the United States, Great Britain, and some Western European countries for several hundreds of years. These new nations differed among themselves in many ways. But in comparison with the advanced industrialized countries, the new nations shared some fundamental similarities. Firstly, the process of modernization and nation-building had only just begun. Secondly, poverty prevailed in most of the nations, with the probable exception of some minority groups. Thirdly, although the colonial powers had conferred benefits and improved basic services, the gap between the colonial power and the colonies remained wide, with most of the latter remaining poor and undeveloped. And fourthly, most of these countries were the suppliers of raw materials, and also served as markets for the manufactured goods exported by the advanced countries. It is for these reasons that they are classified under a general category: the new nations, or are sometimes referred to as underdeveloped countries, third world, transitional societies, less developed countries, etc.\*

A nation, according to Rupert Emerson, is "a community of people who feel that they belong together in the double sense – that they share deeply significant elements of a common

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\*Note: All these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this study, and the use of each term depends on the situation analyzed and the problem discussed.

heritage and that they have a common destiny for the future".<sup>1</sup> A new nation is thus a nation that has not had these two attributes in the fullest sense, or a nation that is in the process of attempting to acquire them.

A simple definition of new nations is provided by Edward Shils who says that new nations are "those which have come to independence from colonial states since 1945; a consideration of common experiences; and all have gone through the experience of colonialism".<sup>2</sup> Shils provides some features which he considers common among the new nations: that they have not yet reached the point where the people they rule have become nations more or less; that the people do not possess a common identity in which membership in the states that rule them is an important component; that the members of the new communities do not rest upon a "political society"; that the mass of the population is traditional and parochial in its outlook; and that civil unity is fragile.<sup>3</sup>

### Communalism as a Paradox of Modernization

Of the problem areas common to social scientists in the study of the new nations is the analysis of the disruptive features of modernization.<sup>4</sup> The problems are that of rising tensions, violence, class conflict, and racial, ethnic, religious or regional cleavages. Some scholars consider these as the "paradox of modernization"; modernization, rapid social change and development often increase and intensify rather than diminish communal cleavages. This is contrary to the views of some early scholars who argued that technological and economic development leads ultimately to the decline of communal conflict and that the emergence of new socio-economic roles and identities undercuts the organization bases upon which communal politics rests.<sup>5</sup> For that matter, several scholars working in the new nations and particularly in culturally plural societies have challenged this conventional view and assert that communalism *ipso facto* is a persistent feature of modernizing societies undergoing transformation and social changes.<sup>6</sup>

A salient phenomenon, which arises during the transition

from a traditional to a modern way of life, is what Karl Deutsch termed "social mobilization", defined as "the process in which major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behaviour".<sup>7</sup> This often generates new forms of social competition and contemporary communal antagonisms.

Usually among the newly independent countries, popular aspirations and expectations expand much more rapidly than the governments' ability to fulfil them.<sup>8</sup> The expectations for rapid material betterment have been promised by their nationalist leaders during the struggle for independence from colonial domination. Independence to the people meant an improvement in the living standards. But expectations cannot be met and this produces pressures and strains which contribute to political unrest and turmoil, including the breakdown of the fragile democratic institution established at the time of independence.<sup>9</sup>

The "revolution of rising expectations" and "rising frustration" often produce aggression or regression. Through the process of social mobilization men enter into conflict.

In the new nations, and more so where the societies are plural, primordialism is high and civil loyalties low.<sup>10</sup> People tend to organize themselves into communal groupings competing for scarce resources in intercommunal competition. This competition is further exacerbated by political leaders competing for power. Followers are mobilized on the basis of primordial loyalties whether they consist of the moral group (the core) or transactional groups (the followers).<sup>11</sup> And usually distribution of power, whether economic or political or both, is associated with race, religion, ethnic group or region. Political competition is thus between vertical groupings or specifically between communal groups. When this competition is perceived as a zero-sum game, that is, one group's failure causes another group's success, communal tension is aggravated and this often results in turmoil and open violence.

This is among the major problems faced by almost every new nation during the transition into a modern industrialized society.



For a solution to this problem, it is necessary for the leaders of the new nations to establish a "political society" and to command loyalty from various communities within each territorial boundary. This would be successful only on integration at the national level.

### The Concept and the Process of National Integration

The literature on the subject of integration is not only massive but also proliferating. Some common themes on integration are the formulae of integration, the concept of integration, the process and stages of integration, and the factors that often help to promote integration. We shall discuss each of these in turn.

Cynthia Enloe in her study of *Multi-Ethnic Politics: The Malaysian Case* provides three alternative formulae for integration.<sup>12</sup> The first is full assimilation whereby minority groups are assimilated into a larger ethnic community. The second is cultural pluralism or a continuation of ethnic separateness under the umbrella of national allegiance. This is also termed as accommodation. The third alternative is the melting pot, the construction of a genuinely new community which absorbs the present cultures but emulates no single one of them. And governments often choose one of these models in dealing with the problem of ethnic relations in a culturally plural society.

But what integration means often depends on the context in which it is used and the connotation that use is aimed at. Howard Wriggins defines integration as "the bringing together of the disparate parts of a society into a more integrated whole, or to make out of many small societies a closer approximation of one nation".<sup>13</sup> This process is particularly relevant among the new nations where there exists an ethnically or racially plural society in which each group is characterized by its own language, identity or other self-conscious cultural qualities.

Another definition is provided by John McAlister who considers national integration "the process of the creation of new and unified nations out of ancient societies having long histories of cultural fragmentation and political divisions".<sup>14</sup> This usage

of the concept is synonymous with nation-building or state-building.

Both these definitions have one thing in common: that they consider national integration a dynamic process rather than a static one. It is a movement towards a positive goal, the coming together of the communities to a closer approximation of a nation. The definitions also stress the loyalties of the communities to the nation rather than to their own communal groups.

### **Ali Mazrui's Model of Integrative Process**

A rather illuminating discussion on the process of national integration is provided by Ali Mazrui who stresses the degree of integration in some sort of continuum ranging from bare coexistence at one end to a state of coalescence at the other.<sup>15</sup> The bare coexistence end is the situation where the degree of integration is at a minimum. The group within the territorial boundary need not even know of each other's existence.

Moving along the continuum is the second degree of relationship between the groups, a relationship of contact. This indicates at least some minimal dealings with one another. The contact, he asserts, need not be friendly. It can be conflict, but it indicates a higher stage of integration.

The third degree of integration is what he calls a relationship of compromise. This is the stage when dealings between the groups "have become sufficiently complex, diverse, and interdependent to require a climate of peaceful reconciliation between the conflicting interests." Among the groups there still persists clearly distinct identities and interests of their own. It is at this stage, as he argues, that the process of national integration produces a capacity for a constant discovery of areas of compatibility.

And finally, at the opposite end of the continuum, is the stage of coalescence of identities rather than a merger of interests, for the diversity of the latter would still continue. The argument is that as society gets technically complex and functionally differentiated as it gets nationally integrated, the diversity of

interests would increase as the distinctiveness of group identities gets blurred. At this stage, as Mazrui says, there is still a need to be able to compromise. Furthermore, a conflict of interests will still take place although it may no longer be one between total identities.

Mazrui's model of the integrative process when applied to reality approximately manifests the stages of development of communal relationships in many plural societies. This is with the assumption that every society is developing and moving from one stage to another, from pluralism to partial or complete integration. But this transformation need not necessarily be smooth. It is often accompanied by strife, tension, conflict and violence. However, the intensity of tension and conflict may probably serve as an indicator of the degree of integration following the stages that have already been discussed.

### Factors that Help to Promote Integration

Unity and national integration are desired by leaders of the new nations. It is rarely left to chance but is pursued "with as much calculation as a favourable balance-of-payments or military security".<sup>16</sup> Where there exists a high degree of toleration and cooperation among the communal groups in the nation-states, their resources can be easily pooled for the common welfare which is, after all, the *raison d'être* of unification. Conversely, where the minority groups defy the government's integrative policy, e.g. by expressing a resistance to assimilation into the dominant cultural group, integration becomes difficult and the government has to turn to various legal measures of restraint and coercion. Or it may turn to extreme measures like deportation or genocide.

National integration can be achieved in several ways. Some methods are temporary or artificially created, while others are more effective and lasting. Chief among the latter is the assimilation of minorities into the dominant group. Louis Dumont has remarked that "In dealing with alien immigrants, our only solution is to assimilate, separating them from their cultural heritage and treating them as equals in a system that claims and

aims to make no differentiation before the law".<sup>17</sup> And a sociologist, Robert E. Park, observes that "The relations between dominants and minorities move through a definite cycle, with one outcome: the assimilation of the minority into the dominant society".<sup>18</sup>

For assimilation to take place, a gradual process towards decreasing social visibility is necessary. Decreasing social visibility means that the different groups are not seen as forming cliques and strong minority groups whose interests, and not those of the larger society, are the first consideration.

The first factor that unites a nation is a threat from abroad.<sup>19</sup> In Europe this has been the most important force for unifying different people — race or ethnic groups — into a nation. It is only by having internal unity that a country can be defended from foreign invasion. But this factor is temporary if the threat is temporary. To make it permanent some leaders will search for a permanent foe, real or imaginary, such as communism for countries which are against communism, while for some communist-marxist leaders, imperialism and the West become the main target.

The second factor is the political style of the leaders themselves. In the newly independent states most national leaders, especially those who led their people in the fight for independence, have become the focus of loyalty among the diverse groups. These leaders are seen as a symbol of their liberation from foreign domination. The national struggle is then continued in the post-independence period in another direction, to unite the people for progress. The defect of this approach is that these national leaders often fail to develop the countries to the people's expectations, and this leads to a decline in the popularity of these leaders. The formerly united people tend to be divided into factions. Where the leaders succeed in leading the country up to the people's expectations, the eventual loss of these "charismatic" leaders through death brings new leaders who the people believe do not have the quality of their founding fathers.

The third approach, and this is regarded as the most effective, is to have a common language which not only facilitates com-

munication between the various groups, but also represents a base for a national identity and national culture. A unilingual state, writes Ambedkar, is stable for it is built on fellow-feeling, the feeling of a corporate sentiment of oneness which makes those who are charged with it feel that they are kith and kin.<sup>20</sup> This fellow-feeling is termed as being "conscious of kind" or "the longing not to belong to other groups", and this is regarded as the foundation of a stable and democratic state. This approach of creating a single language is the most common method used by the leaders of the new nations for the attainment of national integration.

Another approach is to create an ideology which defines the goal of a nation. Ideology as defined by Wiggins is "a set of related ideas that defines objectives for the society and provides some clues as to how they can be achieved".<sup>21</sup> Ideology may, in fact, serve another function, that of legitimizing and strengthening the authority in power. This is what David Apter termed "political religion" the purpose of which is to assist policies, to define the aims and establish the policies which allow their political leaders to remain exempt from ordinary criticisms and errors.<sup>22</sup>

All these factors and approaches are the common ones which the leaders of the new nations often use to promote unity and national integration. And their success depends mainly on the internal nature of the new nations as well as on how well the government can implement them.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (1962) p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> E. Shils, "A Comparative Study of New States" in C. Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (1963).

<sup>3</sup> E. Shils, *ibid.*

- <sup>4</sup> N. Smelser, for example, postulates that modernization is followed by the process of social differentiation, integration and social disturbance. See Smelser, "Mechanism of Changes and Adjustment to Change", in *Industrialization and Society* (1963) ed. B.F. Hoselitz and Dr. W.E. Moore.
- <sup>5</sup> See R. Melson and H. Wolpe, "Modernization and the Politics of Communalism: Theoretical Perspective", in *American Political Science Review*, LXIV (Dec. 1970) pp. 1112-1130.
- <sup>6</sup> See C. Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution", in *Old Societies and New States*, ed. C. Geertz (1963); Rudolf, *The Modernization of Tradition: Political Development in India* (1967); Weiner, *The Politics of Scarcity, Public Pressure and Political Response in India* (1962); Wriggins, "Impediments to Unity in New Nations: The Case of Ceylon", in *Political Modernization*, ed. Welch (1967); and others.
- <sup>7</sup> K. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development", in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. LV, No. 3 (Sept. 61) p. 494.
- <sup>8</sup> See A. Oberschael, "Rising Expectations and Political Turmoil", in *The Journal of Developmental Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.
- <sup>10</sup> See C. Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution", in *Old Societies....*, ed. C. Geertz. He defines "primordialism" as "... the longing not to belong to other groups ..." or the "givens".
- <sup>11</sup> For an elaboration on the two concepts, see F. Bailey, *Stratagems and Spoils* (1970), especially p. 44ff.
- <sup>12</sup> C. Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics: The Malaysian Case*, Research Monographs Series (University of California, Berkeley, 1970).
- <sup>13</sup> H. Wriggins, "National Integration", in M. Weiner, *Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth* (1966) p. 181.
- <sup>14</sup> J. McAlister Jr., *Southeast Asia: The Politics of National Integration* (1973) p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Ali Mazrui, "Pluralism and National Integration", in *Pluralism in Africa*, ed. L. Kuper and M.G. Smith (1969) pp. 333-349.
- <sup>16</sup> C. Enloe, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>17</sup> L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (1972) p. 19.
- <sup>18</sup> R. Park, *Race and Culture* (1950).
- <sup>19</sup> This and other factors discussed below are based on H. Wriggins's, "National Integration", in M. Weiner, *Modernization ....* pp. 181-191.
- <sup>20</sup> Ambedkar, "Thoughts on Linguistic State", p. 111, quoted by Geertz in *Old Societies....*
- <sup>21</sup> H. Wriggins, "National Integration", in Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 190.
- <sup>22</sup> See D. Apter, *Some Conceptual Approaches to the Study of Modernization* (1968).

## Colonialism, Modernization, and the Formation of a Plural Society

### The Ethics of Colonialism

The word "colonialism" as used by some writers and leaders today has a negative emotive connotation. It is sometimes used synonymously with economic exploitation, racial prejudice and secret diplomacy. Frantz Fanon, who is often referred to as the champion of anti-colonialism of the Third World, in his *magnum opus*, *The Wretched of the Earth*, regards colonialism as an act of economic pillage, brute force, political tyranny and psychological emasculation.<sup>1</sup> The late President Soekarno of Indonesia branded colonialism and neo-colonialism as the greatest enemy of the Indonesian people. And Pannikar, an Indian historian, gives a view similar to that of Fanon: that colonialism is arrogance, cruelty and racism.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Pannikar also praised colonialism for bringing about the modernization of the rule of law, the stimulus given to national sentiment, the growth of cities, and the import of the European languages and new ideas born of them. Admiration of colonialism and the West is also expressed by Soetan Shahrir, an Indonesian nationalist and socialist, who saw the West as introducing into Indonesia a higher form of striving.<sup>3</sup> Rupert Emerson sees colonialism, despite its arrogance and negative impact, as giving impetus to the rise of nationalism among the colonized people which later led to the struggle for independence.<sup>4</sup>

In Malaysia anti-colonial sentiment among the Malays had its beginnings as early as the nineteenth century. The protest against colonialism (British intervention) came from various parts of the then Malay States; to mention a few: the murder of the first British Resident of Perak, J.W.W. Birch, in an uprising

led by Dato Maharaja Lela in November 1875; the Naning War led by Penghulu Dol Said around the hinterland of Melaka towards the end of 1875; the Pahang Rebellion led by Dato Bahaman in the state of Pahang in 1891 soon after the Residential System was extended there; the Kelantan uprising in 1915 led by Haji Mat Hassan, popularly known as *Tok Janggut*; and the Trengganu peasant uprising in 1928 led by another *Tok Janggut* or Haji Abdul Rahman Limbong. But these incidents, to most scholars, are considered as local protests and rebellions rather than as national uprisings.

It was around the 1920s that the anti-colonial movement began to take shape.<sup>5</sup> This movement was originally led by the Arabic educated students who came back from the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo. "From this new environment, they acquired, without reserve, political ideas, ideas of social change, new political ideologies, and a hatred of foreign domination."<sup>6</sup> But this group of Malay students did not get much support from the Malay community at that time because their ideas were considered "far too advanced politically for their elders at home".<sup>7</sup>

The second group, which was more organized, was the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM), formed in 1938. This group was vaguely Marxist in ideology and reflected both a strong anti-colonialist spirit and an opposition to the bourgeoisie-feudalist leadership of the traditional elite.<sup>8</sup> The activities of the members of the group were strongly influenced by the left wing, especially that of the Indonesian nationalist movement.

Among the leaders of the movement were Ibrahim bin Yaacob, Ishak Haji Muhammad and later Ahmad Boestamam, who felt that the Malays at that time had to unite in order to remedy their economic backwardness and that there was a need for Malay unity in the face of foreign capitalism and colonialism.<sup>9</sup> According to Ishak Haji Muhammad, "the relationship between the colonial bureaucracy and the Malay aristocracy was mutually parasitic upon the Malay peasantry and the Malay rich resources".<sup>10</sup> This movement was basically class-based, whereby the members constituted the Malays of the peasant class who were mainly educated at Sultan Idris Training College



(SITC) in Tanjung Malim.

In Malaya, as in the other colonized countries, colonialism had, to a certain extent, generated a nationalist feeling which was directed against the colonial masters. But this anti-colonial movement did not become widespread and have a chance to mature, for it suffered heavy suppression from the ruling elite, and especially from the Malay rulers. This idea of rebelling against the established order was foreign to the Malay community for the prevailing dogma was that "ordinary Malays must not meddle in politics because the politics of the state and its people are in the hands of the Sultan and the traditional elite who must be given complete loyalty". No Malay can betray his ruler (*Pantang Melayu menderhaka kepada Rajanya*).<sup>11</sup>

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

### Colonialism and Modernization

One of the important results of colonialism has been the modernization of Malaysia in politics and government, the economy, the introduction of Western education and thus the modern form of social organization and structure of the society.

Moore's definition of modernization is that the process involves:

The total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organization that characterize the advanced, economically prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the Western World .... In fact, we may ... speak of the progress as industrialization. Industrialization means the extensive use of inanimate sources of power for economic production and all that entails by way of organization, transportation, communication and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Moore's definition uses Western society as a model of a modern society although he does not under-emphasize the importance of industrialization as an index of progress and modernization. However, for successful industrialization and economic development to take place, there need not necessarily be a complete transformation of the value systems and thus the social structure of a particular society. Japan can be cited as an example *par excellence* where a high degree of modernization has taken place with many of the traditional culture patterns being retained. What is important in the modernization of Japan is the application of technological and scientific knowledge for economic development, rather than the total transformation of the society.

A rather more neutral definition of modernization is provided by Syed Hussein Alatas who says that:

Modernization is the process by which modern scientific knowledge covering all aspects of human life is introduced at varying degrees, first in the Western civilization, and later diffused to the non-Western world, by different methods and groups with the ultimate purpose of achieving a better and more satisfactory life in the broadest sense of the term, as accepted by the society concerned.<sup>13</sup>

The result of modernization, notwithstanding its aim, may or may not necessarily be the development of a better and more satisfactory life, for its effect can either be negative and destructive or positive and constructive. For example, modernization generally results in the increase of wealth and prosperity. But it can create tension, conflict and disorganization, and a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. This has often been the result of modernization in the colonial and even in the post-colonial societies.

What is important in this process is to stress its characteristics and the effects on the society as a whole. Smelser lays down four important characteristics of modernization, namely:

1. In the realm of Technology, a developing society is changing from simpler and traditionalised techniques towards the application of scientific knowledge.

2. In Agriculture, the developing society evolves from subsistence farming towards the commercial production of agricultural goods. This means specialization in cash crops, purchase of non-agricultural products in the market, and often agricultural wage labour.
3. In Industry, the developing society undergoes a transition from the use of human and animal power towards industrialization proper, or men working for wages at power-driven machines, which produce commodities worked outside the communities of production.
4. In Ecological arrangements, the developing society moves from the farm and village towards urban centres.<sup>14</sup>

All these characteristics are relevant to the process of modernization that took place in Malaya during the colonial period. However, modernization did not penetrate the entire society. Its intensity varied from one region to another. Comparatively, the west coast has been more modernized than the east coast, while the urban and semi-urban centres are more modernized than the rural areas. A close study of the situation will show that modernization during the colonial period was partial rather than total.

The aspects of modernization to be considered here are the political, economic and educational aspects, and the creation of a plural society *vis-a-vis* the history of race relations.

In the political sphere, the old indigenous system was superimposed by the modern form of political system accompanied by the introduction of modern bureaucratic structures of administration. The status of the native rulers was not only maintained but strengthened,<sup>15</sup> and in this process the Sultans agreed to accept British Residents whose function was "to advise the Malay Rulers on all matters other than those touching the Malay religion and customs". One of the aims of British intervention in the Malay States, according to most writers of Malayan history, was to maintain peace, law and order, and especially to stop civil war which was recorded as endemic in the tin mining areas of Perak and Selangor (one can interpret that these troubles were the direct result of the British policy of encouraging the immigration of the Chinese into the Malay

States). But an opinion expressed by the racial Malay intellectual in modern times states just the opposite:

Contrary to the prevalent view, the British did not bring peace and prosperity to Malaya; they came as colonialists to exploit the country and by foul and fair means they put down all opposition to their rule. They turned the pre-developed feudal economy of the Malay Peninsula into a so-called developed colonial economy based on the export of rubber and tin.<sup>16</sup>

If peace and stability prevailed in the Malay States, it was only in the short run. The long term effect was the creation of racial problems which became crucial for Malaysia in the post-independence period.

The second aspect of modernization in Malaya was the modernization of the economy. Rather than modernization by promoting manufacturing, industrialization, and the production of more agricultural crops and foodstuffs, modernization in Malaya was a reflection of the Western mercantilist-expansionist policy. The capitalism set-up was commercial and extractive rather than industrial capitalism.

The result of this economic modernization has been to bring Malaya into a global capitalist system. Modern Malaya became a satellite of the British and other European countries, and its functions were twofold: to export raw materials, mainly rubber and tin, to industrial Europe; and to serve as a market for the surplus manufactured goods of the metropolitan countries. At the same time Malaya became the recipient of the surplus capital of the advanced capitalist countries and this invited foreigners, especially the British, to invest in the country.

For the purpose of this so-called economic modernization, the import of labour (mainly from China and India) was required, and this immigration was encouraged by the British without limitation.<sup>17</sup> This British policy has been criticized violently, not only by Malaysians but also by foreign scholars. As one sociologist writes:

The British may be historically responsible – or rather irresponsible – for it is they who allowed the wholesale penetration of the Malayan

mainland by aliens, aliens in nationality, language and culture, without any policy of assimilation. It is they who built an economy without building a nation; it is they who brought forth the "cult of efficiency" regardless of the national repercussions.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere Brian Harrison, a British historian, remarks:

The economic freedom that the West admired often meant for Southeast Asia freedom for acquisition of immigrants – European, Chinese and Indians – to exploit the economic weakness and the social conservatism of the native peasantry. Western rule brought wealth, but it also brought wide contrasts in wealth; it created new classes – the wage earner, the entrepreneur, the educated elite – but comparatively few of the native inhabitants succeeded in moving out of the peasant class into a better one; it brought about tremendous economic development; but it usually left the native inhabitant a poor man in a newly rich country.<sup>19</sup>

What is said by Brian Harrison is an adequate summary of the situation in Malaya during the colonial period and it changed little in the immediate post-independence period. It was this colonial policy that created the problems of communalism, tension and racial conflict in Malaysia today.

The modernization during the colonial period benefited mainly those in the urban and commercial areas. With it came the new transportation system, communication, electricity, mass media, and others. The towns and cities became centres of employment of industrial workers and government servants.

This partial and urban-biased modernization divorced the peasants from the process. The bulk of the peasants were Malays (padi planters, fishermen and rubber tappers) who had been left to lead their traditional ways of life rather than being encouraged to participate in the modern economy of the urban commercial areas. For this reason, writes Emerson:

The Malay has been economically dispossessed in his own country. He is allowed to carry on his life in his accustomed ways, but to date he plays neither a creative nor a servile role in the new economy which has supplanted his own as the dominant and the dynamic force in the country.<sup>20</sup>

This is partly due to the colonial policy of divide and rule, the aim of which was not to integrate various communities but rather to keep them apart. It was by perpetuating this policy that "peace and prosperity" could be maintained. This colonial policy is clearly reflected in the educational system which was introduced into Malaya at the beginning of the twentieth century.

English medium education had an early but limited start during the first half of the nineteenth century, first in Penang, then in Singapore and in Malacca.<sup>21</sup> This was introduced in the Malay States at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1902, a little over 10,000 children were in school but only one-fifth of these were in English schools.<sup>22</sup> Since most of the English schools were in the urban areas, they automatically benefited only the non-Malays, for the Malays in the rural areas would go to the Malay schools in their *kampung*s (villages). Furthermore, most of these schools were mission schools, and thus the Malays, being Muslims, found that these schools did not suit them, especially on the grounds of religious prohibition.

It was then decided to establish a boarding school to cater mainly for the Malays to educate them for some positions in the newly introduced bureaucratic system of administration. The Malay College in Kuala Kangsar was thus set up to train the sons of the Malay royal and aristocratic families to become an administrative elite. This residential college, which was later referred to as "the Eton of the East", rapidly acquired the manners and ethos of the English public school system, attributes which served to reinforce its appeal to the Malay ruling class.<sup>23</sup> It is this group of the educated Malays who became the privileged class and who achieved high status and position, even after independence.

The British policy at that time was to safeguard the administrative positions for the Malays, who were the rightful owners of the country, while the non-Malays were kept outside the administrative structure. The reason was that the British saw it as their obligation to the Malays to look after the "special interests" of the Malay ruling class. Another reason was that the British considered the immigrant Chinese and Indians transient groups "who were here as a temporary measure for

the economic exploitation of the country. Law and regulations were introduced to keep the communities in separate environmental and vocational compartments".<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile the number of Chinese and Indians attending the English medium schools began to increase while some of the Chinese attended the Chinese medium middle schools which were westernised (in fact, more westernised than the English medium schools, although they had originated from China). They acquired western values and training and fitted themselves better than the Malays into the modern economic structure.

However, the number of Malays who went to the English schools was limited, mainly due to the demographic distribution of the population. In 1941 the number of Malay boys and girls in English schools was not more than 5,000 and well under 10% of the total enrolment.<sup>25</sup> It was thus obvious that the influence of Western education on the non-Malays was far greater than on the Malays.

After the First World War, the British were forced by circumstances to expand the educational facilities to the rest of the Malay population. This vernacular school system was intended:

To make the sons of fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him.<sup>26</sup>

It was then decided to establish another school for the peasant group to segregate them from the elite group of the Malay College. This led to the setting up of the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) at Tanjung Malim which opened in 1922. In contrast to the Malay College, the SITC was to train the sons of the peasantry and the poor so that they would return to the Malay-speaking world of rural village schools to be Malay school teachers at primary level. In both cases there was no attempt by the British to encourage the Malays to participate in trade and commerce and to involve themselves in the economic activities. These were specially reserved for the British with the help of the Chinese and Indian immigrants.

Modernization during the colonial period was mainly for

the "privileged Malays" to enable them to take part in the British administrative structure; for some Malays from their *kampung* to be trained as better peasants and fishermen; and for the non-Malays to provide the labour force in the mining areas and rubber estates and to become traders, retailers and middlemen in the commercial sector:

That the British imperialists provided the capital, some Chinese shared in the commerce, and the rest of the Chinese and Indians provided the labour in tin mining and rubber plantations. The British imperialists and the Chinese capitalists became very wealthy, but the mass of the indigenous peasants were impoverished along with the immigrant labour.<sup>27</sup>

### Colonialism and the Formation of a Plural Society

Furnivall's concept of a plural society is mainly concerned with the effects of colonialism as an economic force.<sup>28</sup> He contends that prior to the colonial period, societies of the East were integrated by common will. Malaya during the pre-colonial period, he said, was a society with plural features but not a plural society. There were, no doubt, several ethnic groups sharing their origins from Java, Sumatra, Arabia and even from India and China. But these people did not form separate minority groups with distinct cultural features. They were assimilated into the dominant society. "There might be differences in particularism but on the whole the native-based Malayan culture was pretty well integrated."<sup>29</sup>

But the colonial period saw a great influx of emigrants from China and India. Chinese immigration into Malaya in large numbers was permitted and even encouraged by the British but no attempt was made to integrate them into a Malayan community. This immigration was mainly in response to the newly expanding economy which created a demand for labour to work in rubber plantations, tin mines, commercial centres, trading ports, etc. Freedman observed that the Chinese and Indians who arrived in Malaya had remained Chinese and Indians, not only in the eyes of the census-takers, but also in cultural and social organizations and political status.<sup>30</sup> With regard to the economic



sphere, however, Furnivall noted that there was a division of labour along racial lines.<sup>31</sup> Malaya was thus a plural society not only in a cultural sense but it had a pluralism which also included separate dwelling areas, geographical separation and specialization in occupation.

Pluralism does not necessarily lead to racial conflicts. In fact the more plural the society, the less there is to say about race relations for contact becomes minimal. This is particularly true of Malaya during the early colonial period where, as noted by Silcock, the relationships among the three racial groups were cordial and harmonious.<sup>32</sup> Racial conflict during this period was almost nil although there were some intra-racial conflicts among the Chinese secret societies. This was because the Chinese did not overtly interfere with the administration of the Malay States and thus with the politics of the country. There was then a sharp distinction between the indigenous people and the immigrants, for the Chinese at that time were only transient and their presence in Malaya was felt to be a temporary one.

But the Japanese invasion of Malaya during the Second World War altered the situation in the Malay States. The Japanese who came to Southeast Asia after four years of war with the Chinese in China regarded the Chinese as enemies only slightly less dangerous than the British. Conversely, the Japanese gave favourable treatment to the Malays and some Malays considered the Japanese as liberators of their country from foreign domination. This war marked the demographic watershed between the Malays and the Chinese and the period witnessed a steady deterioration in Malay-Chinese relations.

In the immediate post-war period there was an outbreak of inter-racial violence:

For virtually three months, between the Japanese surrender and effective British take-over, they (the MPAJA) held kangaroo courts, committed atrocities, executed many Malays and Chinese and terrorised the population wherever they held sway. During the brief period of MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army) ascendancy, the torture and killing of large numbers of innocent Malays became an episode that indelibly imprinted in Malay minds the dangers of Chinese ascendancy.<sup>33</sup>

The Malays then in revenge retaliated against the Chinese in rural areas until the British came and set up a military rule called the British Military Administration (BMA).

From the time the BMA was set up until Malaya achieved its independence, Malaya was again free from racial violence. However, this does not imply that the Malay-Chinese relationship was cordial and harmonious. In fact, the reverse was the case. Communal battles were fought in the political arena in the form of bargaining rather than in racial clashes and open violence. Attempts were made by leaders of the communal groups to come to agreement on some basic issues, especially regarding the position of each racial group *vis-a-vis* the others in an independent Malaya. Prominent during this period was the markedly greater intensity of the Malay nationalist movement that was to play a major role in shaping the future Malayan nation.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Fanon's three other books are (a) *The Dying Colonialism*, (b) *Black Skin White Mask* and (c) *Towards the African Revolution* (Penguin Publications).

<sup>2</sup> K.M. Pannikar, "An Eastern View of British Imperialism", in R. Winks, *British Imperialism* (1963) pp. 105-115.

<sup>3</sup> P. Worsley's, *The Third World* (1964). His letter entitled, "Out of Exile", was written from a Dutch prison.

<sup>4</sup> R. Emerson's, *From Empire to Nation* (1962) contains an elaborate study of the impact of colonialism on the New Nations.

<sup>5</sup> W. Roff, R. Soenarno, and some other historians are of the opinion that this period is the beginning of Malay nationalism.

<sup>6</sup> R. Soenarno, "Malay Nationalism 1896-1941", in *J.S.E.A.H.* (1960) p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> R. Soenarno, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> W. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (1967) p. 299.

<sup>9</sup> W. Roff, *ibid.*, p. 229.

- <sup>10</sup> Expression of these views is contained in his novel *Putera Gunung Tahan* (1936); quoted from Roff, *ibid.*, p. 228.
- <sup>11</sup> This is a dogma popularized by a Malay legendary figure, Hang Tuah, often mentioned regularly in *Sejarah Melayu* or The Malay Annals.
- <sup>12</sup> W. Moore, *Social Change* (1963) pp. 91–92.
- <sup>13</sup> S.H. Alatas, "Religion and Modernization in Southeast Asia" in *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie* (1970) p. 226.
- <sup>14</sup> N. Smelser, "The Modernization of Social Relations" in M. Weiner, *Modernization, the Dynamics of Growth* (1966) pp. 110–111.
- <sup>15</sup> W. Roff, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- <sup>16</sup> Kassim Ahmad, "Communalism: a Legacy of Colonialism", in *Intisari*, Vol. III, No. 5, p. 15.
- <sup>17</sup> Attempts were made to encourage migration from Indonesia but these people were found to be easily assimilated into the Malay society. The Malays refused to work for and thus to let themselves be exploited by the British.
- <sup>18</sup> Shirle Gordon, "Social Implications of Communalism", in *Intisari*, Vol. III, No. 2 (1968) p. 27.
- <sup>19</sup> B. Harrison, *History of Southeast Asia* (New York: 1954).
- <sup>20</sup> R. Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study of Direct and Indirect Rule* (1937).
- <sup>21</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Malaysia: Contending Elites", a paper presented at the seminar *Malaysia in Perspective* (1971) p. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> Wang Gungwu, *ibid.*, p. 4.
- <sup>23</sup> For a detailed study of British educational policy towards the Malays, see R. Stevenson, *Cultivators and Administrators* (1957).
- <sup>24</sup> Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, "Nation-Building in Malaysia" and "The Crisis of Values in Malaysia", *Journal of the British Association of and Singapore* (1972).
- <sup>25</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Malaysia: Contending Elites", *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- <sup>26</sup> *Annual Report on the Federated Malay States for 1920*, p. 28.
- <sup>27</sup> Kassim Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- <sup>28</sup> See J. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice* (1948).
- <sup>29</sup> Tan Sri
- <sup>30</sup> M. Freedman, "The Growth of Plural Society in Malaya", *Pacific Affairs*, XXXIII, 2 (1960).
- <sup>31</sup> J. Furnivall, *op. cit.*
- <sup>32</sup> T. Silcock, "The Effect of Industrialization on Race Relations in Malaya", in Tumin, *Comparative Perspectives on Race Relations* (1969).
- <sup>33</sup> *The May 13th Tragedy: A Report by the National Operations Council* (1969) p. 8.

### THREE

## Incipient Nationalism and the Emergence of Communal Socio-Political Organizations

The following two chapters will trace the development of nationalist movements in Malaya<sup>1</sup> from 1900 to 1957, and to analyze some selected social and political organizations which emerged as a direct consequence of these nationalist movements. It will be shown that most of these organizations are communal in contents and membership; some were formed to serve communal interests. Attempts to form multi-ethnic political organizations either failed miserably or were not as successful as that of communal organizations.

However, we shall later discover that the desire to free one's country from foreign domination and to attain independence compelled the moderate communal political parties to come together to form an alliance, thus putting national interests above those of communal ones. Also the demands of the moderates seemed more acceptable to the British government than those of the leftists. It is these moderate political parties that survived and functioned even long after independence was achieved.

### The Concept of Nationalism

Nationalism comes from the word "nation" which in German is *volk* meaning "people" or more appropriately, a political community. It is an expression of the unity of commonly held ties of race, religion, language, and tradition.<sup>2</sup> Nationalism is also a consciousness in individuals or groups of membership in a nation, or of a desire to forward the strength, liberty or prosperity of a nation, whether one's own or another.<sup>3</sup>

This first concept of nationalism based on the European experience is an ideology and a movement to unite all who speak a single language and share a broadly common cultural heritage. An example of this kind of nationalism in Malaya is that of the UMNO (United Malays National Organization) as mentioned in its book, *The Basis of UMNO's Struggle (Dasar Perjuangan UMNO)*:

The theory of nationalism pursued by UMNO is a broad concept, in accordance with the method of democratic government and international acceptance, that is, while striving for the privileges, sovereignty, and priority (*hak, kedaulatan, keistimewaan*) of the owners of this country, UMNO also acknowledged that members of other races who have become citizens, those who have severed all connections and loyalty to their countries of origin, shall also receive specific rights as citizens of Malaya.<sup>4</sup>

Another concept, looser and less meaningful, stresses the loyalty and emotional attachment of a population, regardless of its language, to an existing government and state. Some examples of this are the Soviet, Swiss, Belgian, and American nationalism. Common loyalty here comes from the people who speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds. It is this that newly independent nations are trying to achieve.

In colonial societies, a nationalist movement is often associated with the struggle by colonized people against their colonial masters, or at least against indirect foreign domination. This, according to James Coleman, is the "negative aspect of nationalism" defined as "sentiment and activities opposed to alien control".<sup>5</sup> This negative aspect of nationalism often binds people together into a single community or nation against a common foe.

In contrast is the "positive aspect of nationalism" that is often associated with primordialism or communalism, a movement that unites people with a common identity and cultural background. This is typical in a society which is politically united but made up of communities divided by race, language, religion or historical experience. "This nationalism", writes

Rupert Emerson, "often works to produce racial tension emphasizing inner cleavages and setting one community against the other".<sup>6</sup> This is typical of nationalism within a plural society, which is itself a disruptive force, tending to shatter and not to consolidate the social order. The people in this society are awakened to a consciousness of their separate identity.

## Malay Nationalism

### *Kaum Muda Reformist Movement*

The seeds of Malay nationalism were sown in early 1900. It was started by the reformist movement of *Kaum Muda* (Young Generation) who were inspired by the Wahabi Movement started in the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab (1704–92). Among the notable leaders in Malaya were Shaikh Tahir Jalaluddin and Syed Shaikh Al-Hadi.

Through the newspaper, *Al-Imam* (1906–08), the movement advocated the learning of modern sciences and emphasized the importance of technological and material progress. "It was the *Kaum Muda*", writes Khoo Kay Kim, "who were the first to campaign for the social and economic up-lifting of the Malays".<sup>7</sup>

The *Kaum Muda*, whose leaders were largely educated in the Middle East, urged the Malays to modernize to compete against the economically advanced non-Malays. They warned that if the Malays remained apathetic to education and material progress, they would soon be displaced by the immigrants. There was thus a rising consciousness of themselves as a distinct race in the peninsula. This was the consequence of the presence of an already large number of aliens who were mainly Chinese and Indian. This consciousness of the Malays was basically an awareness that they, as an ethnic group, "were economically backward compared to aliens in the country".<sup>8</sup>

Apart from this realization of economic backwardness the reformists called for a return to the correct teachings of Islam, with heavy stress on education to overcome their backwardness. They insisted that education ought to be accompanied by liberty and freedom, and argued that the root cause of Malay economic backwardness was caused by the lack of freedom, and not just

lack of education.

The Kaum Muda movement helped set up modern Islamic educational institutions in the Malay States such as the Madrasah Muhammadiyah in Kota Bharu (1917), Madrasah Al-Masyhur Islamiah in Penang (1920), Sekolah Al-Diniah in Padang Rengas (1924) and Daeratul Maarifil Wataniah in Kepala Batas (1925).<sup>9</sup> Through these Arabic schools the ideas of freedom, liberty, and progress were propagated.

The Kaum Muda were covertly anti-colonialist. They also criticized the existing religious hierarchy or Kaum Tua (Older Generation) and this implies that the attack was on the aristocratic class including the Malay rulers.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, the reformist movement was checked by the existing religious hierarchy and the Sultans. It did not have enough time to mature and call for mass support from the Malays in general.

The Kaum Muda movement was more of a religious reform movement than a political organization. What the leaders advocated mainly was a return to the original teachings of Islam and the active participation of the Malays in modern education and economic enterprise. The movement played a very important role in awakening the Malays to political questions and of themselves as a distinct ethnic group. This was done through their radical religious teachings. One historian regarded the period from 1906 until the foundation of Kesatuan Melayu Singapura in 1926 as a religious phase in the history of the rise of Malay nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

In a broad historical context, this movement can be considered as "a continuation of the struggle between Islam and the West which was first restricted to the Mediterranean region and later extended to other parts of the world".<sup>12</sup> In Indonesia, for example, a similar movement which gained powerful mass support and appeal was the Sarekat Islam. In fact, a parallel can be drawn between the aims of the Sarekat Islam in Indonesia and the Kaum Muda movement in Malaya.

The period after the First World War saw the formation of state-based Malay associations in Perak, Selangor, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, and Singapore, the earliest one being the Singapore Malay Union, founded in 1926. It was the direct

result of Chinese nationalist activities in the peninsula that challenged the claim by the Malays that Malaya was a country belonging to them. These associations were led mainly by English-educated Malays who emphasized the need for unity and to improve their social and economic backwardness. These associations, in fact, preceded the United Malays National Organization, (or *Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu*), formed in 1946.

In 1939, these Malay associations held their first *Pan-Malayan Malay Congress* in Kuala Lumpur, followed by the second one in 1940 in Singapore. A third meeting planned to be held in Ipoh in 1941 was cancelled because of the Japanese Occupation in December 1941. The associations revived their activities after the Japanese surrender and united themselves to organize the Pan-Malayan Malay Congress to protest against the introduction of the Malayan Union by the British government.

#### *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*

We have mentioned that Malay political consciousness began germinating from the late 1920s. This was helped by the opening of the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in Tanjung Malim in 1922, aimed at training young Malays of peasant background to become teachers. From SITC emerged such figures as Ibrahim Haji Yaacub, Mohammad Isa Mahmud, Hasan Abdul Manan and Yaacub Mohammad Amin, who were also exposed to the Indonesian political thinking of *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian Nationalist Party) led by Sukarno and Hatta.

After leaving SITC, these men, with student representatives from the School of Agriculture in Serdang, the Technical School in Kuala Lumpur, and some journalists, held a meeting in May 1938 to form the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Young Malays' Union) or KMM. The founders were Ibrahim Yaacub and Ishak Haji Muhammad who were educated in SITC and Malay College Kuala Kangsar or MCKK respectively, and the co-founders were Hassan Manan, A. Karim Rashid, and Isa Muhammad who were described as first generation Indonesian immigrants from Indonesia. The aim of Kesatuan Melayu Muda was to arouse



nationalistic feelings among the Malays to fight against British colonialism and to declare independence with Indonesia, within a larger political territory of Greater Indonesia or *Melayu Raya*.

It is sometimes suggested that the idea of merging with Indonesia into a larger Malay nation had some ethnic considerations. It was based on the fear among the Malays in Malaya that an independent Malaya outside Indonesia might make the Malays a minority group in a country dominated by Chinese and Indians who were not the indigenous people of this country.

Radin Soenarno referred to the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* as a Pan-Indonesian group for the awakening of political consciousness of this group was given impetus by the Indonesian revolt against the Dutch in 1926.<sup>13</sup> This revolt was a failure and some refugees like Djamaluddin Tamin, Tan Malaka, Sutan Djenin and Alimin, who were all responsible for the revolt, fled to Malaya for shelter and protection.

While they were in Malaya, they preached their political doctrine and the idea of revolt against established authority. They taught the Marxist ideology which stresses the revolt of the suppressed people against the suppressor who could be either colonialists or the national bourgeoisie, or both.

It was also this group which attempted to spread communism among the Malays in Malaya. Some, in fact, held important posts in the communist organization in Malaya.

The leader of the movement, Ibrahim Yaacub, was described as anti-colonialist in general and anti-British. Another prominent figure, Ishak Haji Muhammad, not only condemned the British as a greedy race but also the Sultans and Malay chiefs for having allowed themselves to be subordinated by the British. To both, the term "protection" used by the British was a mere eyewash to cover their real intention which was to exploit the wealth and the people of this country.

The movement, owing to its anti-ruler and anti-establishment doctrine, did not gain support from the Malays. The idea of a revolt against established authority and in particular the Malay ruler was alien to most Malays. Conversely, they upheld the tradition of loyalty to the ruler and forbade any form of defiance against the established order as exemplified by the

great Malay legendary figure, Hang Tuah, who preached that "No Malay must betray his raja".

Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Kesatuan Melayu Muda was banned by the British and its leaders rounded up and put in prison. But the Japanese, who occupied Malaya in early 1942, released them and allowed them to raise a para-military organization called Pembela Tanah Air (Defenders of the Homeland) or PETA, sponsored by the Japanese. They later formed another organization called Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung (Union of Peninsular Indonesia) or KRIS, to work for the independence of Malaya with Indonesia. But with the early Japanese surrender and the return of the British, the association was weakened while Indonesia was declared independent by Sukarno and Hatta, without Malaya.

### **Chinese Nationalism**

From the early 1900s until mid 1930s, the attitude and loyalties of the Chinese still leaned towards China. Their political activities in Malaya were a reflection of the political situation in their homeland. Most Chinese supported the nationalists morally and materially, to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and later the Kuomintang Nationalist Party to free China from the domination of western powers and from Japanese facism.

#### *Kuomintang Nationalist Movement*

The first Chinese political party in China to advocate a revolutionary overthrow of the Manchu dynasty was the Hsing Chung Hui founded by Dr. Sun Yat Sen.<sup>14</sup> Some years later, Hsing Chung Hui was strengthened when it combined with other parties and associations committed to a nationalist revolution to form the Tung Meng Hui, still headed by Dr. Sun. In 1906, a Singapore branch of the Tung Meng Hui was formed, followed by branches in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Seremban, Malacca, and Kuala Pilah.

At this juncture, the Chinese both in China and in Malaya were divided between those who supported Tung Meng Hui and

those loyal to the Manchu government but support for the nationalist movement was increasing.

From 1900, there were dozens of uprisings that ended in victory for the nationalists. Also around this time, many Chinese associations were formed in Malaya to raise funds for the nationalist movement in China. This successful nationalist revolution gave birth to the Kuomintang nationalist party in the newly formed Republic of China.

Initially, the British government allowed Kuomintang branches to be formed in Malaya since its activities were not considered anti-British. But around 1925, after the death of Dr. Sun, the British government discovered that some leaflets distributed by the Kuomintang contained anti-British propaganda. The British government was thus compelled to ban the political party as an official body. Apparently, these extremist ideas of the party were spread by some leftist elements who were mostly communists. When Chiang Kai Shek took over the leadership of the Kuomintang after Dr. Sun's death, he purged the communists in the party and this led the communist wing of the party to break away and form a separate political party against the Kuomintang.

We have seen that between 1900 and the 1930s the Chinese in Malaya did not show a deep interest in local politics. Except for the Straits Chinese who were born in Malaya, they regarded themselves as transients and their sojourn in this country as temporary. This was in line with one of the three fundamental principles in the teachings of Dr. Sun that the Chinese wherever they may be were Chinese nationals.

Chinese political activities in Malaya, therefore, did not have any direct effect on Malay-Chinese relations. But there were some indirect effects. Firstly, there was already the fear among some Malays, especially the educated, that the Chinese domination of the economy might strengthen their foothold in this country and ultimately displace the indigenous Malays. Secondly, there was the fear that the Chinese nationalists might take over Malaya as the Nineteenth Province of China. Some years later, there was also the fear that Malaya would be converted to a communist state ruled by the Chinese since communism or

the communist party was often associated with the ethnic Chinese.

### *The Communists*

The earliest Chinese organization in Malaya after the First World War was the anarchist movement which was formed in 1919.<sup>15</sup> Anarchist associations were founded in major towns like Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban, Penang and Singapore.<sup>16</sup> The formation of these associations was initially inspired from outside and in particular from the May Fourth Movement which took place in China. The movement was a protest against the concession of Shantung Province to Japan.

The anarchist movement was, however, short-lived. The massive support for the Kuomintang followed by the spread of communism as a popular ideology among the working class and peasants led to the weakening of anarchist associations which became extinct around the year 1925.

A popular movement that attracted many Chinese was communism. In China, communism formed part of the Chinese nationalist movement spearheaded by the Kuomintang (KMT) fighting against Western and later Japanese imperialism.

Communism in China and Malaya was under the direction of Comintern (Communist International) which had its base in Bolshevik Russia. The primary aim of Comintern was to initiate a workers' revolution and establish a Soviet Socialist Republic in China and Malaya, and ultimately to convert the whole of Asia to communism.

Soviet communist agents started work in Shanghai as early as 1924. Since Comintern was sympathetic to the Chinese struggle against imperialism, Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the pioneer of the Chinese nationalist movement, agreed with the Bolsheviks to allow Chinese communists to become members of the Kuomintang.<sup>17</sup>

In Malaya the communist movement became better organized around 1926. Various publications on communism by the Bolsheviks were distributed. Night classes to teach communist ideology were held in the major towns.

A single ethnic group among the Chinese which dominated the movement was the Hailam group or the Hainanese. In its

developed form the movement outlined its aim of a military overthrow of the British colonial government and to replace it with a Soviet State of Malaya.<sup>18</sup> This was seen as a possible outcome since the working class in Malaya then constituted 30 per cent of the population, the majority of whom were Chinese and Indians.

Attempts were made to spread communism among the Malays. Japanese documentary evidence studied by Gene Hanrahan suggests that it was the Indonesians who made the earliest effort to spread communism in Malaya. Prominent leaders among them were Alimin and Tan Malaka whose work was followed by Moeso, Winanta, Boedisoejitro, Soebakat, and Sutan Perpatih.

However, the Indonesian communist influence among the Malays in Malaya was limited and insignificant. Tan Malaka, in fact, admitted that communism could not be easily spread among the Malays because in his view, they were not politically conscious and unaware of their economic backwardness; neither was there any attempt to unite themselves into a single community.<sup>19</sup> Tan Malaka's views on the Malays were incorrect. As we have already shown, the Kaum Muda movement was an example of Malay political consciousness and the realization of their economic backwardness.

Towards the end of the 1920s and following the split between the Kuomintang and communist forces in China in 1927, Chinese communists in Malaya also broke away from the Kuomintang nationalist group. In 1930, the communists, who by now had a relatively large following, formed the Malayan Communist Party or MCP. A Vietnamese communist, Lai Teck (or Loi Teck), became its first leader and later its Secretary-General, remaining thus throughout the Japanese Occupation.<sup>20</sup>

During its early years, the Malayan Communist Party suffered setbacks. Many of its leaders were rounded up by the police as they were responsible for strikes, riots and unrest that broke out in the early 1930s in Malaya and Singapore. The British government also enacted a legislation which enabled it to deport many of the MCP members to China.

The Second World War had a tremendous impact on the

overseas Chinese including those in Malaya. Communism, with its militant ideology, preached against any form of foreign domination and thus championed the Chinese in Malaya to fight against Japanese aggression, initially in China and later in Malaya. This greatly helped the MCP to recover from its early setbacks. When the war broke out, increasing numbers of Chinese rallied support behind the MCP struggle against the Japanese.

Members of the MCP (since its inception in 1930 until the outbreak of the Second World War which was later followed by the Japanese Occupation of Malaya from December 1941) were almost exclusively Chinese. Attempts to spread communist ideology among the Malays were unsuccessful. The Malays regarded communism as alien to them and regarded it as part of the belief-system or political ideology of the Chinese.

### *The Babas*

Towards the end of the 1930s, a small number of Indians and local born Chinese, popularly known as *Babas*, began to take an interest in local politics. The leaders of both the Straits Chinese and the local born Indian communities argued strongly that they should be given equal rights with the Malays. Newspapers and periodicals were filled with discussions on these demands. The equal rights for them, they argued, were to be at least in proportion to their contribution to the country's economy.

These demands caused alarm among some educated Malays, especially with the denial by the non-Malays that Malaya was a Malay country. A typical Malay response to this demand was that:

... If you get someone in to build a house, you don't ask him to live with you afterwards.<sup>21</sup>

Those who were most vocal in demanding Chinese equal rights with the Malays were the *Babas*, the Straits Chinese who were descended from families long settled in Malaya. Their population was concentrated in Penang and Malacca.

They regarded Malaya and especially the Straits Settlements as their permanent home. They were generally indifferent to the Kuomintang nationalist movement. As their family backgrounds were predominantly middle-class, they were equally unsympathetic to the communist activities of the working-class Chinese. They were very proud of themselves as British subjects and through their Straits Chinese British Association or SCBA, sought to be recognized as citizens of Malaya. They also demanded to be regarded as equal in status with the indigenous Malays.

Prominent among them was Tan Cheng Lock, a Straits Chinese leader who served as a legislative councillor in the Straits Settlements Council from 1923 to 1934.<sup>22</sup> Tan Cheng Lock was the first Chinese to put forward the idea of making Malaya a single country belonging to all the races living in it. He advocated equality of all races who had chosen Malaya as their permanent homeland. This was later found in the Malayan Union proposal which possibly incorporated some of Tan Cheng Lock's ideas. Furthermore, he opposed the pro-Malay policy of the British.

In 1940, Tan Cheng Lock and other Straits Chinese leaders proposed forming a Malayan Chinese association to unite the Chinese into a single community. This idea materialized only in 1949 with the formation of the Malayan Chinese Association or MCA.

The Malays, consequently, reacted angrily to the demand for equality. Dato Onn, a representative of Malay nationalism in pre-independence Malaya, in response to the demands of the non-Malays had strongly emphasized that:

We know very well that there is not only one race staying in Malaya, that there are also other Asiatic races inhabiting this land. We have kindly allowed them to stay here; but now they have even started to clamour for our land. But notwithstanding all their attempts, we shall always firmly maintain that this land belongs to us. I speak so because I notice that the other races in the peninsula affirm that they have the right to demand equality of treatment. Whatever comes we will never consent to this. We wish to make them understand that they are only tenants of the house but not the owners

Perhaps it was alien pressure on the Malays and the Malayan mainland, which they claimed to be theirs, that aroused the Malay nationalist movement, which reached its peak immediately after the Second World War. Chinese interest in local politics compelled the Malays of different ethnic origins to unite and form a single community, or a Malay nation. The Japanese Occupation of Malaya between early 1942 and August 1945 helped to accentuate further the germinating Malay nationalism that had its roots in the early 1900s.

### **Indian Nationalism**

In the early 1920s the Indians in Malaya were similarly supporting the struggle of the Indians to free India from British colonialism. The Indian nationalist aspirations were then India-oriented. Most active in the movement were the Indian Muslims who played an important role in spreading Indian nationalism in Malaya because most were merchants who made frequent visits to India and thus had the latest news on the political situation then.

Muslims and Hindus in India managed to form a united force against British rule only for a short while under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. With the outbreak of communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in India from 1923 onwards, the unity of Hindus and Indian Muslims in Malaya was split. After this time, Indian Muslims began to take less interest in the Indian nationalist movement. By 1926, it was documented that all propagandist work by them had practically disappeared.<sup>24</sup>

From then onwards, the Indians, who were the fewest in number compared to the Malays and Chinese, began to show an interest in local affairs especially in the welfare of their own group. A few educated Indians, driven by national pride, were dissatisfied with the appalling conditions of unskilled Indian labour in Malaya.

In 1928, they organized the first Pan-Malayan Conference of Indians to discuss the problems of Indian labourers especially those in rubber plantations. Requests were made to the Indian government in India to look into the problem of Indian labour



in Malaya. This was followed by protests against the British policy towards Indians who felt that the British were "depreciating the Indians as a nation by importing the latter into Malaya to work as unskilled labour".<sup>25</sup>

In 1936, the same English-educated, middle-class Indians founded the Central Indian Association of Malaya or CIAM to look after the social welfare and economic conditions of the Indians in Malaya. The organization was anti-British and influenced by the Indian nationalist movement in India. However, the Indians were not united, either with the nationalist Chinese or with the left-wing Malay nationalists who were also anti-British in Malaya.

From the foregoing analysis, we see that the early nationalist movement in Malaya comprised separate streams based on distinct ethnic groups. While Chinese and Indian nationalism largely, though not exclusively, echoed of events in China and India, early Malay nationalism was influenced by the resurgence of nationalism in the Middle East and Indonesia.

By the 1920s, however, Malay nationalism was locally oriented as a reaction against the pressure of alien Chinese and Indians. The Malay nationalist movement was also directed against foreign, particularly British domination: the idea of freedom and liberty was imbued in their nationalist ideology. Chinese and Indian political consciousness towards local affairs emerged towards the end of the 1930s but became more intense after the Second World War.

The nationalist movements of the Malays, Chinese, and Indians in Malaya were in fact dominated by what Coleman terms the "negative aspect of nationalism". It is a movement against either direct or indirect alien control and foreign domination. But ironically, the nationalist movement in Malaya did not bind the three major races together to fight a common foe. This is because these nationalist movements were also associated with the "positive aspect of nationalism", a movement which unites people with a common identity and a similar cultural background.

- <sup>1</sup> "Malaya" is a term to be used in these two chapters as "Malaysia" came into being only in 1963. Malaya refers to the nine Malay States in the Malay Peninsula (*Semenanjung Tanah Melayu*), plus the Straits Settlements of Penang (originally Pulau Pinang or Tanjung), and Malacca (originally Melaka). The original name for Malaya commonly used even in colonial times was Tanah Melayu, literally translated to mean "Malay Land" or "Land of the Malays".
- <sup>2</sup> J. Kautsky, "Nationalism", in *Politics in Transitional Societies*, ed. H.G. Kobschull (1968) p. 112.
- <sup>3</sup> J. Kautsky, *ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in John Funston, "Malay Political Parties and the Concept of Malay Nationalism", seminar paper *Malaysia in Perspective* (Monash University: 1971) pp. 19-20
- <sup>5</sup> J. Coleman, *Nigeria, Background to Nationalism* (1958) p. 196.
- <sup>6</sup> R. Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (1962) p. 330.
- <sup>7</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "A Survey of Early Malaysian Politics", in *Solidarity*, Vol. VI (1971).
- <sup>8</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "The Malay Peninsula: A Political Survey, 1900-1941", in Zainal Abidin b. A. Wahid, *Glimpses of Malaysian History* (1970) p. 81.
- <sup>9</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "Suasana Politik di Tanah Melayu sebelum Perang Dunia II", *kertaskerja Kongres Sejarah Malaysia* (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi: 1978) p. 12.
- <sup>10</sup> For a detailed study on Kaum Tua and Kaum Muda, see W. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (1967).
- <sup>11</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "The Malay Peninsula: A Political Survey, 1900-1941", *op. cit.*, p. 80.
- <sup>12</sup> S.H. Alatas, on "The Need for a Historical Study of Malaysian Islamization", in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1963) p. 63.
- <sup>13</sup> R. Soenarno, "Malay Nationalism, 1896-1941", in *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. I (March 1960) p. 16.
- <sup>14</sup> The following discussion on the Kuomintang nationalist movement relies heavily on V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (1978 reprint) pp. 208-221.
- <sup>15</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "Gerakan Anarkis di Tanah Melayu", in *Jebat* (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bil. 2, 1972/73).
- <sup>16</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, *ibid.*, p. 69.
- <sup>17</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "A Survey of Early Malayan Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- <sup>18</sup> G. Hanrahan, *The Communist Struggle in Malaya* (1979 reprint) p. 44.
- <sup>19</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "Komunisma di Tanah Melayu; Peringkat Awal", in *Jurnal Sejarah* (Universiti Malaya, Jilid X, 1971/72) p. 93.

- <sup>20</sup> R. Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya, 1945-1963* (1973) p. 37.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in D. Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia* (1971) p. 237.
- <sup>22</sup> J. Gullick, *Malaysia* (1969) p. 91.
- <sup>23</sup> From *Malaya Tribune*, 1 March 1947, quoted in J. Funston, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- <sup>24</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "A Survey of Early Malaysian Politics", *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- <sup>25</sup> J. Gullick, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

## FOUR

# Japanese Occupation and Pre-Independence Malayan Politics

The brief Japanese rule between February 1942 and September 1945 had an adverse effect on communal relations between the three major races in Malaya. It intensified racial feelings among the Malays, Chinese and Indians that in later years hindered the formation of a united Malaysian nation.

### Malays during the Japanese Occupation

The Japanese Occupation of Malaya helped the Malay nationalists who were already politically conscious in their struggle for freedom and independence. The invaders indoctrinated the Malays with nationalistic feeling for their country, thus drawing a clear division in their treatment of the Malays and the non-Malays. While Malays and Indians were favoured the Chinese were often ill-treated and persecuted.

Civil servants, military police (*kempeitei*), auxiliary troops (*heiho*), peace preservation corps (*jikeidan*), volunteer army (*giyugun*), and Japanese special branch (*toko*) were recruited mainly from the Malay population, and to a lesser extent from among the Indians. This gave the impression that the Malays welcomed and supported the invaders. But this was not so. Many joined the civil service, police force, military force, and others to avoid being victimized by the Japanese but deep in their hearts there was contempt and hatred for the Japanese. The success of British liaison officers of Force 136 in recruiting Malays to oust the Japanese was a striking example of the Malay preference to be under the British rather than the Japanese.<sup>1</sup> Malays also joined in the guerrilla movement to fight against

the Japanese, such as the guerrilla units of *Askar Melayu Setia* (Loyal Malay Army) around Grik in Upper Perak and *Wataniah* (Motherland) in Pahang.

The leaders of the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*, imprisoned by the British in early 1941 for their anti-British activities, were subsequently released by the Japanese. The KMM pretended to welcome the Japanese "liberators". But secretly, they collaborated with other Malayan resistance movements, especially the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), to liberate Malaya from any form of outside domination and ultimately declaring independence. But in June 1942, the Japanese banned the KMM when they discovered that the KMM had established contact with the illegal Malayan Communist Party.

However, the KMM leaders were not put in prison. As their hatred of Western imperialism, especially British colonialism, still impressed the Japanese, they were allowed to raise a Japanese-sponsored volunteer army called *Pembela Tanah Air* (PETA) or Defenders of the Homeland. Its leader, Ibrahim Yaacob, was promoted to the rank of Colonel.

Towards the end of their rule the Japanese realized that the war was going against them and that the British would return. They, therefore, helped the leaders of PETA to form another organization called *Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung* (KRIS), or the Union of Peninsular Indonesians, to arrange for the independence of Malaya with Indonesia as a single political territory. The Japanese intention was to give independence to Malaya and to prepare the Malays to resist the return of the British.

### Chinese and Indians

The Chinese were persecuted by the Japanese because they had given moral and material support to the Chinese nationalists in the Sino-Japanese War. This persecution only aroused Chinese hatred against the invaders. Except for a few who collaborated with the Japanese "in order to live" or to avoid being harmed, the majority of the Chinese population in Malaya supported either the organized resistance led by the military wing of the

MCP, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) or the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union (MPAJU), a loose organization of non-communist Chinese squatters and villagers. Another armed resistance group active in the jungle was the Kuomintang who were known locally as the "*bintang satu*" group (one star group) as opposed to the MCP "*bintang tiga*" group (three star group). However, because of deep ideological differences, they were almost at war with one another even though their common foe was the Japanese.

The MPAJA was formed in March 1942 to fight the invaders and it drew its strength from the Chinese. It had about 4,000 men and women in its ranks by the end of the war.

Although the MCP was both anti-Japanese and anti-British, it was compelled during the war to form an alliance with the British. This, too, was a reflection of the political situation outside Malaya. The MCP was still under the direction of the Soviet communist leaders who had formed an alliance with the Allied Forces to fight against Fascist Germany, an ally of Japan. British officers under the direction of the Southeast Asian Command, headed by Lord Louis Mountbatten, and later through liaison personnel of Force 136, not only helped to train the MPAJA guerrillas but also supplied them with money, weapons, and other equipment.

As for the non-Muslim Indians, their focus of attention was still India and its struggle for independence from British rule. The Japanese exploited this by helping the Indians form the Indian Independence League and its military wing, the Indian National Army (INA) under the leadership of Subash Chandra Bose. Two prominent leaders who lived in Malaya were Pritam Singh, a religious teacher who headed the network of the Indian Independence League in Malaya and Thailand, and Mohan Singh, an Indian officer captured by the Japanese in central Malaya. These two overseas Indian leaders were greeted by Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, a representative of the Japanese government whose assignment was "to contact the Indian independence movement, the overseas Chinese, and the Malay sultans with a view of encouraging friendship and cooperation with Japan".<sup>2</sup> Fujiwara convinced the two Indian leaders that

the time had come to intensify their struggle for the independence of India. These three figures were responsible for the formation of the Indian National Army in December 1941.

When Singapore finally fell to the Japanese, there were approximately 45,000 Indians in the British army. The Indians surrendered to the Japanese. Mohan Singh, with the help of Fujiwara, was allowed to address these Indian prisoners-of-war to persuade them to volunteer for the Indian National Army to free their country from British colonialism. About half of these prisoners volunteered themselves.

The Indian Independence League, encouraged by the Japanese, succeeded in stirring up anti-British feeling among the Indians in Malaya. The leaders of this league were mostly from North India and it was they who later formed the Malayan Indian Congress in 1946, a political party representing Indian interests in Malaya.<sup>3</sup>

During the three and a half years of Japanese rule, Japan played both Malays and the Indians against the Chinese. Since most members of the police force under the Japanese government were Malays and the MPAJA was almost exclusively Chinese, the hostility between the MPAJA and the Japanese government was sometimes conceived as a conflict between the Chinese and Malays. The government's utilization of the Malay police force against the Chinese-dominated MPAJA thus introduced a racial element of Sino-Malay rivalry.<sup>4</sup>

Japanese favouritism towards the Malays and Indians and their discrimination against the Chinese caused racial clashes during the three weeks of MPAJA ascendancy between the time of Japanese surrender and the return of British forces. The MPAJA managed to control some areas and its members took this opportunity to settle old scores against the so-called Malay collaborators. The Malays reacted angrily and this led to the first major outbreak of communal violence in Malaya.

The first major racial clash broke out around Batu Pahat and Muar, about a week after the Japanese surrender. According to the British Military Administration report on the situation, the Malays had been provoked by the harsh treatment they received from MPAJA guerrillas.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by counter-attacks

on the Malays by the Chinese. Other racial clashes broke out in Padang Lebar in Negri Sembilan, around the Sungai Manik area in Lower Perak, around Bekor and the sub-district of Lenggong in Perak, in the Raub district of Pahang, and in some other areas.<sup>6</sup>

These clashes had a negative impact on the relations between the Malays and the Chinese. Firstly, the incidents created distrust among the Malays towards the MCP whose domination of the MPAJA was well known. Secondly, it gave the Malays an everlasting suspicion and fear of Chinese political ascendancy. It was also this similar fear that led to the 13 May 1969 racial riots.

In the post-Second World War situation, Malayan nationalism developed into its mature form. Each racial group formed political parties to represent individual communal interests and to define their relative positions in a country which was to be shared by the three major racial groups. While Malay nationalism was intensified, Chinese and Indian nationalism became locally oriented. It had become clear to the Chinese and Indians that they were here to stay.

### **Malay Nationalist Party**

The first Malay political organization founded at a national level after the Second World War was the Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) or the Malay Nationalist Party, formed in October 1945. A radical left-wing body comparable to KMM and KRIS, PKMM was, in fact, the first political organization to initiate the formation of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) to oppose the Malayan Union proposals. But after three months with UMNO, PKMM left due to disagreement over the colour of the UMNO flag. It is suggested that ideological differences went much deeper and were grounded in the different socio-economic backgrounds of the UMNO and PKMM leadership.<sup>7</sup>

PKMM had a complete and developed party organization. It had a religious wing called Majlis Agama Tertinggi Sa Malaya (MATA) or Pan Malayan Supreme Religious Council, committed



to Islamic reform; a youth wing called Angkatan Pemuda Insaf (API) or Aware Youth Corps; and a women's wing called Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS) or Conscious Women Corps.

The leaders of the party were prominent Malay nationalists such as Dr. Burhanuddin and Ishak Haji Muhammad. Both remained active after independence in opposition politics. The youth wing was headed by Ahmad Boestamam while the women's section was led by Shamsiah Fakeh who went underground after the communist revolt in 1948. The leaders of PKMM were committed to uniting the Malays to become a dominant race in Asia and advocated early independence of Malaya as a socialist republic. Its influence among the Malays was widespread with branches in almost every Malay state. It claimed a membership of between 60,000 and 100,000 in 1947, and this was only slightly less than that of UMNO.<sup>8</sup>

One source has suggested that the PKMM was infiltrated by Malays sympathetic to the communist cause.<sup>9</sup> Among them was Musa Ahmad who headed the Peasants' Bureau or Barisan Tani Sa Malaya (BATAS) of the PKMM and who later became the commander of the Tenth Regiment of the MCP, formed in 1949, and whose members were almost exclusively Malays. In 1955, Musa Ahmad was appointed chairman of the MCP and remained so until his surrender to the Malaysian government in November 1960. Abdullah C.D., who was head of the Labour Bureau of PKMM, became the first commander of the Tenth Regiment with Wahi Anuar as his second-in-command. Kamaruzaman Teh, the head of API in Pahang, was described as a representative of the MCP in the PKMM while Shamsiah Fakeh, the head of AWAS, and Zainab Mahmud, the secretary of AWAS, later became active members of the Tenth Regiment.<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear to us if they were committed to communism. One ex-leader of the PKMM believed that most Malays who went underground after the declaration of the Malayan emergency did so not because they were committed to communist ideology but because they feared arrest by the British government which was purging all leftist organizations and imprisoning many of the PKMM leaders.<sup>11</sup>

As PKMM was not only critical of the British government but

anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist as well, the British government did not give any further opportunity for the party to gain more followers among the Malays. In mid-1947, its youth wing, API, was banned after its leader, Ahmad Boestamam, had written and distributed a pamphlet, "*Testamen Politik*", calling on Malay youths to fight for independence even through bloodshed.<sup>12</sup> In 1950, when there was evidence that the party was infiltrated by the MCP, it was finally banned by the British government. One of its leaders, Ishak Haji Muhammad, was detained in July 1948 under the Emergency Regulations. The death of PKMM gave a better chance to UMNO to consolidate and to champion the Malays in their struggle for independence.

However, it is important to emphasize here that most PKMM members, including its senior party leaders, Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, Ishak Haji Muhammad, and Ahmad Boestamam, were not sympathetic to the communist cause. PKMM regarded the MCP as a Chinese political organization and thought that Malays should keep away from communism. Even the PKMM nationalist movement was opposed to MCP; the PKMM's ultimate aim was early independence and to form the Melayu Raya, a nation state of Malaysia with Indonesia, and to safeguard the special position and privileges of the Malays. Both commitments of the PKMM were unacceptable to the MCP who feared the undesirable position of the Chinese as a community in a united Malaya-Indonesia and felt that the commitment of the MCP for equality of rights of all races in an independent communist republic of Malaya would be in jeopardy.

Thus we see that although PKMM and MCP were left-wing political organizations, they differed both in ideology and commitment. They were both communal organizations in that membership of PKMM was Malay while that of the MCP was almost exclusively Chinese.

### **UMNO and the Malayan Union Protest**

The introduction of the Malayan Union proposal by the British government in early 1946 constituted the greatest force that united the Malays in their nationalist movement. The Malayan

Union's aim to unite all the Malay States and the Straits Settlements under one administration headed by a British governor, implied that Malaya would be turned into a British colony directly under the Secretary of State of the British government in London.

The Malayan Union proposal came to the Malays as a great shock for it contradicted the British pro-Malay policy before the Second World War. The proposal recognized the right of the non-Malays to share in the public affairs of Malaya – opening all branches of the government service to non-Malays – for the proposed citizenship laws would grant equal rights to all persons domiciled in the country.

The proposal, from the Malay viewpoint, denied the status of the Malays as a nation; instead it reduced their status to that of a community. The proposal was contrary to the pre-war British policy which recognized the Malay Sultans as the rulers of the country and the obligation of the British to protect the rulers and their subjects, thus recognizing the Malays as a nation and Malaya as belonging to the Malays.

The main criticism against the Malayan Union, according to one writer, was the granting of equal rights to the non-Malays, causing the disappearance of the special position and privileges of the Malays.<sup>13</sup>

Also, the protest was aimed at the Sultans who they felt had no right to make any treaties without the approval of their subjects. "In Islam", argued Aiyub bin Abdullah, a Malay intellectual, "the Sultans were caliphs whose elections to the thrones had to be approved by their subjects."<sup>14</sup>

Between 1 and 4 March 1946, forty-one Malay associations from various parts of Malaya and Singapore gathered at the Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur to protest against the Malayan Union Constitution. On 11 May 1946, they formally formed the United Malays National Organization (UMNO or *Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu*), a union of Malay associations to fight for Malay rights and consequently to reject the Malayan Union Constitution. Its first president was Dato Onn bin Jaafar, the son of the Chief Minister of Johore.

In March, the Pan-Malayan Malay Congress condemned the

signing of the Agreement by the Malay rulers on the grounds that the people were not consulted.<sup>15</sup> The Congress pointed out some important consequences of the Malayan Union proposal. First was the wiping from existence of the nine Malay states or Sultanates of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, Pahang, Johore, Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis, the existence of which had been recognized by the British government. Second was the wiping from existence of a Malay "nation" together with their rulers in Malaya. Third was the wiping from existence of the several treaties existing between the British government and the Malay Sultans, a violation of the principles of the sanctity of treaties. And finally, there would be the deprivation of the Malays of their birthright, which was a devastating act to those whose loyalty to the British Crown was unquestionable.<sup>16</sup>

In a heated speech at one of the rallies which highlighted Malay nationalist feelings at that time, the leader of the Congress, Dato Onn, declared that:

"The Malay population in this beloved country of theirs, represented by the UMNO, exercising the Malay national will, hereby declare that the Agreement made by Great Britain with the Malay rulers giving full jurisdiction to H.M. the King is null and void, and at the same time do strongly oppose and entirely reject the Malayan Union proposal as set out in the White Paper."<sup>17</sup>

Apart from protests and peaceful demonstrations held throughout the country, UMNO adopted several short term measures to frustrate the Malayan Union. Malay leaders appealed to the Sultans to boycott the installation of the Governor, and a similar appeal was sent to all Malays nominated to sit on the various state councils established under the Malayan Union Constitution. They also called on all Malays to be in a state of "mourning" or *berkabung* for seven days as a sign of protest.<sup>18</sup>

The non-Malays and especially the Chinese, on the other hand, welcomed the Malayan Union proposal as their demand to be recognized as citizens with equal status as the Malays was accepted.

While the Malays were protesting against the Union, the non-Malays were uneasy. This aroused strong racial feelings as the

battle was not just between the Malays and the British government but also between the Malays and the non-Malays, though this was seldom overtly expressed. The non-Malays supported the Union proposal because it was to their advantage.

One eyewitness, a representative in the Pan-Malayan Congress, observed that when local newspapers reported that the Malays rejected the Union, the non-Malays abused the Malays and said that the Malayan Union would come into force.<sup>19</sup> The non-Malays were described as making comments such as: "What can the Malays do? Malays have no face, the Malayan Union will surely succeed, the Malays will later have to address the Chinese as 'Sir', you know? ...." Some Chinese proposed a *hartal*, that is, the closing of all shops to frustrate the Malays. The *hartal* was launched for three days but without much success as some Chinese were observed to be "closing the front door of their shops but opening the back door ...."<sup>20</sup>

This reflected the strong racial feelings between the Malays and the immigrant groups. From another viewpoint the Union was an attempt by the British to re-define the status and position of the Malays and the non-Malays in post-World War Two Malaya. The response was different in each racial group: the non-Malays welcomed the Union while the Malays rejected it totally.

There was another "communal debate" on the name of the country. The non-Malays, including the British, suggested "Malaya" indicating that the country belonged to all races or the "Malayan" people. The Malays, on the other hand, maintained that it should be "Tanah Melayu" or "Land of the Malays".

The Malay pressures and protests were so strong that the British reconsidered the proposal. Malay opinion had the support of British civil servants who had served in Malaya. Prominent figures sympathetic to the Malays were Sir Richard Winstedt, a well-known scholar on Malay society and literature and Sir Frank Swettenham, a well-known British administrator and writer on Malay subjects. The Malayan Union proposal was abandoned and the British resumed its pre-war policy in favour of the Malays. This led to the gradual and steady movement towards independence and the fundamentals of this goal were

laid down in the Federation of Malaya Agreement of 1948.

### The Federation of Malaya Agreement

Realising that the Malayan Union Constitution was unacceptable to the Malays, the British government met representatives of the Malays from UMNO and the Malay rulers to discuss alternative constitutional proposals. A committee was formed in July 1946 comprising representatives of the Malay rulers, UMNO and British officials with the following purpose:

To work out in detail fresh constitutional arrangements in the form of a provisional scheme which would be acceptable to Malay opinion and which would provide a more efficient administration and form the basis of future political and constitutional development.<sup>21</sup>

When the report was published in December 1946, it was accepted by the Malays but not by the Chinese. The Chinese favoured the Malayan Union proposal and were dissatisfied because there were no Chinese representatives on the committee. The British were then persuaded to accept the views of the non-Malays before the new proposals were approved. A consultative committee was set up to hear the views of the non-Malays.

An agreement between the Malay rulers and the British government was signed on 21 January 1948 and the Federation of Malaya, consisting of nine Malay states and two Straits Settlements, was born on 1 February 1948. Among the principles adopted were:

1. The restoration of the sovereignty of the Malay rulers as it was before the Second World War. They were, however, under the protection of the British government.
2. Malaya was drawn out of direct colonial status. The indirect rule of the pre-war years was continued.
3. The British government continued to recognize the special position of the Malays as the indigenous people of this country as in the pre-war years.
4. The British government took over the responsibility of defence and Federation of Malaya foreign policy.
5. The principle of *jus soli* with regard to citizenship of the non-

Malays as stipulated in the Malayan Union Constitution was completely dropped. Citizenship laws were, however, introduced for the first time, covering the whole country. It enabled the non-Malays to apply for citizenship of the Federation, though the qualifications required were stricter than that contained in the Malayan Union Constitution.<sup>22</sup>

With the formalization of the Federation of Malaya Agreement, the British government went back to its pre-war pro-Malay policy. It, however, recognized the presence of non-Malays in this country and their increasingly active participation in local politics which indicated that they were here to stay. Both Malays and non-Malays were to be consulted in the governing of the nation from then on.

### Communist Revolt

At this juncture, the activities of the Malayan Communist Party passed through another stage of development. After the Asian Youth Congress in Calcutta in February 1948, the MCP, frustrated by the failure of its constitutional struggle, changed its tactics to struggle by armed revolt and uprising. The communist armed revolt of 1948 was not confined to Malaya alone but took place in other Asian countries as well.

It is suggested that the revolt was planned and directed from Moscow to widen Soviet communist influence in Asia. The revolt began in urban areas with labour strikes, banditry, ambush, and sabotage. Armed struggle started under the banner of the National Liberation Front. The British government declared a state of emergency for the entire Federation of Malaya on 23 June 1948. The MCP and its affiliated associations were banned.

The Emergency, coinciding with the formation of the Federation of Malaya, further deteriorated relations. As the supporters of the MCP were mainly Chinese and the police force and the Malay Regiment almost exclusively Malay, the war appeared to be a racial war between the Malays and Chinese. The Chinese, especially those in New Villages, were assumed to be communist supporters although this was a mistaken generalization. Fighting the communists meant to them fighting the Chinese, even if

there were also Malay members of the MCP, just as there were Chinese who were not sympathetic to the MCP. In fact, members of the Tenth Regiment of the MCP formed in 1949 and headed by Abdullah C.D. with other senior members like Musa Ahmad, Rashid Madin and Shamsiah Fakeh were all Malays.

The situation after the declaration of the state of emergency contributed towards a heightening of racial tension. The war which was supposed to be an ideological conflict between the British government and the MCP, "was reinjected with a communal flavour".<sup>23</sup>

### PAS as the Malay Pressure Group

The Parti Islam Sa Malaya or Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, commonly known as PAS, emerged from the ranks of UMNO in 1951. The original leaders were the "religiously learned" (*alim ulama*) who were the representatives of the State Religious Councils and another Islamic organization known as the All-Malayan Union of the Religiously Learned or Persatuan Ulama-Ulama Sa-Malaya. Some PAS ideas were similar to those advocated by the Islamic reformist movements and the PKMM.

It is suggested that the direct predecessor of PAS was the Majlis Agama Tertinggi Sa Malaya (MATA) or Pan-Malayan Supreme Religious Council, an Islamic wing of the PKMM.<sup>24</sup> In 1948, MATA gave rise to the first Islamic reformist political party, Hizbul Muslimin or Islamic Party. When PAS came into being some of its leaders were found to be ex-office bearers of MATA and Hizbul Muslimin.

The main reason for their breaking away from the main body was to struggle for the unity of the Islamic administration in the Malay States; they also disagreed with the UMNO leaders' compromising attitude towards the non-Malays, and UMNO's decision to sponsor a lottery.<sup>25</sup> Later, they felt bitter with UMNO for failing to introduce Malay nationality and for giving citizenship to vast numbers of non-Malays who were not required to prove allegiance to the country.<sup>26</sup>

PAS's original concept of a Malay nation was similar to the idea earlier popularized by Ibrahim Yaacob, the leader of KMM.



The concept was expressed by its first president, Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy who argued that this Malay nation had its existence long before the coming of Western powers. He put forward some anthropological and ethnographical arguments supporting the position of the Malays as a distinct race.

What was considered by Dr. Burhanuddin as a Malay nation was the Malayo-Polynesian sub-geographical area or the former "Malay Cultural World" which makes up contemporary Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaya, Borneo, as well as the four Malay provinces of Southern Thailand. This nation, he argued, had its origins in the ancient Sumatran-based Malay Kingdom of Srivijaya (600–1300 A.D.). It had diplomatic relations with countries such as Thailand, China and India. This showed that for centuries, the Malays were a nation in the international community.

Dr. Burhanuddin further argued that the British agreement to protect the Malay States constituted a recognition that a Malay nation already existed. Therefore, UMNO's generous concession of citizenship to the non-Malays after the Federation of Malaya Agreement was signed, deviated from its original protest against the Malayan Union.

Since its foundation, PAS has become the most popular Malay political party to oppose UMNO. It has also commanded wide support from peasant Malays, especially those in the less developed states of Kedah and Kelantan. And it remains as a strong Malay pressure group to safeguard Malay interests. In later years, it has pledged to establish an Islamic state based on the holy book, Al-Quran.

### **Non-Malay Political Parties and the Alliance Formula**

We have seen that the main Chinese political organizations in pre-independence Malaya were the Kuomintang and the MCP, the latter being popular among the Chinese during World War Two as it championed the Chinese against Japanese fascism. The success of the communist revolution in China in 1949 heightened the morale of overseas communists and of communists in Malaya in particular, as if the tide was in their favour.

But it must be emphasized that the majority of the Chinese in Malaya did not subscribe to the communist ideology. Some of them supported the Kuomintang and others were Straits Chinese. The split between the Kuomintang and the MCP in Malaya was permanent; in post-war years they competed for Chinese support.

In early 1949, the Malayan Chinese Association was formed by some members of the Kuomintang and its sympathisers to provide an alternative political organization to the MCP. The MCA, unlike the MCP, pledged to work with the British government and later found that it was better for them, as representatives of Chinese interests, to form an alliance with UMNO. Many Chinese, especially those who made fortunes in Malaya, responded without hesitation to the MCA call to become members. These Chinese preferred to live in peace with other races and to be loyal to the ruling government.

In 1951 Dato Onn left UMNO because of disagreement over membership. Dato Onn wanted to open UMNO to all citizens of Malaya and to change it to a multiracial party. Failing to change UMNO, Dato Onn formed the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), a multiracial party with membership open to Malayan citizens. This was the first attempt to establish a non-communal political party after the Second World War. But the party did not manage to get the support it had hoped for. The idea of a multiracial party was far too advanced for Dato Onn's time.

Fearing that Dato Onn might get the support of both the Malays and the Chinese into IMP Tunku Abdul Rahman, the new leader of UMNO, decided to form an alliance with the MCA. This brilliant idea of a man who later became the first Prime Minister, materialized when the UMNO-MCA alliance took part in the Municipal Elections in February 1952. The Alliance had a sweeping victory which was disastrous to Dato Onn and his IMP. Realizing that the IMP had no future in Malaya, Dato Onn abandoned it and formed a communal Malay party called Parti Negara. But by this time, Dato Onn's popularity had declined and UMNO as a Malay political party was acceptable not only to the Malays but also to the British government, more so when non-Malay political party leaders were willing

to cooperate with the Tunku and UMNO and to fight for early independence.

The success of the UMNO-MCA alliance attracted another communal political party, the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) which then decided to join the Alliance. The MIC represented the Indians in Malaya. It initially came into the picture when it joined the All-Malaya Council of Joint Action (AMCJA), a loose union of non-Malay political organizations formed on 22 December 1946 to oppose the Malayan Union under the chairmanship of Tan Cheng Lock. The Tunku accepted the application by the MIC to join the Alliance. Parti Perikatan or Alliance Party consisting of UMNO, MCA and MIC was born shortly before the July 1955 general elections. In the general elections in 1955, the Alliance won all but one of the 52 seats at stake. It then went ahead to press for its manifesto promise of independence by 1960.

Finally, special mention must be made of the "compromise" between the three races represented by UMNO, MCA and MIC. This bargain pertains to the relative position of each racial group in the Merdeka Constitution from independence onwards and set the political framework within which the racial groups were to operate.

The most important was the introduction of the principle of *jus soli* and a more liberal provision for citizenship. In return the non-Malays would accept certain rights of the Malays as the indigenous people of this country. This was Article 153 which stipulated that the Yang Di Pertuan Agong shall safeguard the special position of the Malays and other indigenous people and protect the legitimate interests of the non-Malay communities.

The Yang Di Pertuan Agong may reserve for Malays such propositions as he may think reasonable, of:

- (i) positions in the public service of the Federation.
- (ii) scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government, and
- (iii) permits or licences required by federal law for the operation of any trade or business.<sup>27</sup>

Another important stipulation in the Constitution was that

the Malay language was to be the national language of the country. This was to be achieved through the implementation of the national education policy within ten years of independence.

These rights of the Malays were not new; they were policies already in force after the Pangkor Treaty of 1874 was signed. In the pre-independence days, most non-Malays were not citizens. They were either British subjects or citizens of China and India. The non-Malays were to accept and respect those elements associated with Malay traditions. This was agreed upon by the Alliance Party which represented the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

### Towards a Malaysian Nation

Nationalism in a modernizing society is considered a strong force of integration for it is an ideology that unites the community. In Malaysia from the early 20th century until independent Malaya, Malay nationalism was the main force in uniting and integrating the Malays who belong to several ethnic groups such as the indigenous Peninsular Malays, the Sumatrans, the Javanese and the Patani Malays. This also includes Malays of Chinese, Indian, and Arabic origin who were already fully assimilated into the so-called Malay society of Malaya. These people, notwithstanding the Peninsular Malays, migrated to Malaya from Sumatra, the Celebes, Java, lesser Sunda, and even from China, India and the Middle East before the coming of the British. In this process of assimilation, the common identity that they had was Islam which had become the foundation of the Malay culture. Besides Islam, there was the Malay language which had become the *lingua franca* and the language of the people during that time. It was these two strong cultural elements that identified them and made them conscious of being part of a Malay nation.

Malay nationalism had another effect on other recently migrated communities in Malaya. Like nationalism in other plural societies, the pre-independence nationalist movement in Malaya set the various racial groups apart. It made each racial group

conscious of its own identity and its position in the country in relation to the others. It aggravated racial cleavages, setting one group against another.

However, one can further argue that the divisions and conflicts created bridges between the major racial groups in Malaya. As Cynthia Enloe puts it, "bridges of mutual hostility and mutual distrusts are, nevertheless, bridges".<sup>28</sup> It is through cleavages and conflicts that the different racial groups will try to find a basis for common understanding and agreement to live in peace and harmony. This is what Lewis Coser considers the function of conflict, a mechanism for the adjustment of norms adequate to new conditions.<sup>29</sup>

In Malaya, it is through cleavages and conflicts that the barriers that set the racial groups apart are being slowly removed. The leaders of the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians, representing UMNO, MCA and MIC respectively, agreed on some fundamental issues. This resulted in the formation of a coalition, the Alliance, under the competent leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman and it helped achieve independence on 31 August 1957, through a smooth transfer of power.

We also saw that in the pre-independence period, what existed was not a single Malayan nationalism but three streams of nationalism — for the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Elements of negative nationalism dominated nationalist movements in the pre-war period. But after the Japanese Occupation, the dominant element seemed to be positive nationalism that gave rise to racial tension and divisions. However, the negative aspect of nationalism was not totally absent. It was this that compelled UMNO, MCA and MIC to form an alliance and obtain independence from the British.

It is often argued that Malayan nationalism since independence should have Malay nationalism as its nucleus. This is reflected by the government's emphasis that Malayan culture must be indigenously based. Malayan nationalism, according to Wang Gungwu, consists of two component parts, "a nucleus of Malay nationalism enclosed by the idea of Malay-Chinese-Indian partnership".<sup>30</sup> This is in line with the Alliance formula of political cooperation of the UMNO, MCA and MIC, with UMNO

as the big brother. It differs slightly from the original Malay nationalist view in that it accepts the non-Malays as citizens of Malaya, and now Malaysia. This stresses the loyalty of all racial groups to a single nation-state, Malaysia.

From this concept of Malaysian nationalism, the model of a Malaysian nation could be characterized and formulated. What ought to be a Malaysian nation is the original Malay nation that existed in the pre-independence period, modified to suit the changed circumstances. The Chinese and Indian citizens of the country are accommodated as members of the nation and their rights protected.

It was only after the May 1969 riots that the basic characteristics of the nation were clearly defined. It emphasized the Malay culture as the foundation of the national culture; Malay rulers as the symbols of sovereignty; the Malay language as the national language and the sole official language (with English as the second language); and Islam as the state religion.

In the development of this new Malaysian nation, tensions and conflicts are inevitable. Indeed, they are common of every society changing from a plural society into a heterogeneous but integrated one. In Malaysia, as in other transitional societies, conflicts and tensions have their bases in several dimensions. The following two chapters will consider some of the problems which originate from four broad dimensions: the demographic, economic, socio-cultural, and the political dimensions.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on Malay resistance against Japanese rule, see Wan Hashim, "Force 136 - Pejuang Melayu Menentang Jepun", in *Utusan Malaysia*, 9-12 March 1981.

<sup>2</sup> J. Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia* (1977) p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, "Survey of Early Malaysian Politics", in *Solidarity*, Vol. VI (1971) p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Zainal Abidin Wahid, "The Japanese Occupation and Nationalism", in *Glimpses of Malaysian History*, ed. Zainal Abidin Wahid (1970) p. 97.

- <sup>5</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, *The Masked Comrades* (1979) p. 17.
- <sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, for details.
- <sup>7</sup> J. Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia* (1980) p. 39.
- <sup>8</sup> J. Funston, *ibid.*, p. 40.
- <sup>9</sup> Soria Dharma, "Penglibatan Melayu dalam Parti Komunis", *Utusan Malaysia*, 12 January 1981, p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> Soria Dharma, *ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> This is the view of Ishak Haji Muhammad, a close associate of Musa Ahmad before the latter went underground, interviewed by Siti Maryam and published in *Watan*, 16 January 1981, p. 7.
- <sup>12</sup> Cheah Boon Kheng, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
- <sup>13</sup> Ishak bin Tadin, "Dato Onn and Malay Nationalism 1940-51", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. I, 1960, p. 60.
- <sup>14</sup> Ishak bin Tadin, *ibid.*, p. 60.
- <sup>15</sup> See *UMNO Sepuluh Tahun* (not dated).
- <sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 25-26 for details.
- <sup>17</sup> Mohd. Yunus Hamidi, *Sejarah Pergerakan Politik Melayu Semenanjung* (1961).
- <sup>18</sup> Zainal Abidin Wahid, "The Malayan Union; its Abolition", in *op. cit.*, ed. Zainal Abidin Wahid, p. 105.
- <sup>19</sup> M. Yunus Hamidi, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.
- <sup>20</sup> M. Yunus Hamidi, *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in Zainal Abidin Wahid, "Malayan Union; its Abolition", *op. cit.*, ed. Zainal Abidin Wahid, p. 107.
- <sup>22</sup> See Zainal Abidin Wahid, *ibid.*, pp. 111-112.
- <sup>23</sup> Zainal Abidin Wahid, "The Emergency and its Consequences", in *ibid.*, ed. Zainal Abidin Wahid, p. 114.
- <sup>24</sup> J. Funston, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
- <sup>25</sup> J. Funston, *ibid.*, p. 93.
- <sup>26</sup> J. Funston, "Malay Political Parties and the Concept of Malay Nationalism", seminar paper, *Malaysia in Perspective* (Monash University, August 1971).
- <sup>27</sup> R.S. Milne and D.K. Mauzy, *Politics and Government in Malaysia* (1978) p. 39.
- <sup>28</sup> C. Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics - The Case of Malaysia* (1970).
- <sup>29</sup> L. Coser, *The Function of Conflict* (1956).
- <sup>30</sup> Wang Gungwu, "Malayan Nationalism", in *Royal Central Asian Journal*, Vol. XLIX (1962) p. 321.

## FIVE

# The Dimensions of the Problem—I

The quest for national integration and unity in a new nation has never been easy, the difficulties depending on the internal structure of the society, the composition of the population, and the characteristics of the communal groups.

For Malaysia, the road to national integration was relatively more bumpy than in other nations mainly because Malaysia is unique, especially in its population, where the number of indigenous Malays almost equals that of the immigrant Chinese and Indians put together.<sup>1</sup> Each racial group is different in many respects: religion, language, culture and custom. And these differences over the years have exacerbated and politicized, and eventually polarized these groups.

In the colonial setting, the Malayan society was plural; the three racial groups were compartmentalized, with a clear division of labour on racial lines. This represented important forces of disunity and impediments to integration and are now manifested in the post-independence years.

We shall discuss this problem under four broad headings: demographic distribution, economic, socio-cultural and political dimensions. The problems that arise here are often the forces of disunity and impediments to the smooth progress towards nation-building. The discussion here is an extension of the analysis of the structure of the Malaysian society in the colonial epoch (Chapter 3).

### The Demographic Dimension

Migration to Malaysia goes back to as early as the second half of the 15th century. The history of Malaya centred around Malacca, one of the most flourishing ports at that time. This



period saw the coming of traders from the Middle East, India, Sumatra, Java and even China. But the immigrants were few and those who decided to settle and make Malaya their permanent home were freely assimilated into the dominant Malay society.

They lived in peace and harmony and in constant cooperation with one another and many rose to important positions.<sup>2</sup>

These people spoke the same Malay language, adopted similar customs, and those who adhered to the same religion – Islam – became Malay, especially through marriage with the local Malay population. Due to the process of acculturation and syncretization, the foreign cultures they brought with them were adapted to the local environment and culture. Thus, Malayan society in the pre-colonial period was homogeneous culturally although it comprised different racial and ethnic groups.

It was the influx of the immigrant Chinese and Indians during the colonial period that altered the balance, changing Malaya from a homogeneous into a plural society; this was accentuated by the colonial policy of divide and rule.

The population of Malaya in 1931 was 3,787,758 – 1,575,448 Malays, 1,281,611 Chinese, and 572,613 Indians.<sup>3</sup> Within 40 years the population had more than doubled; the population in 1979 was 8,810,348 of which 4,685,838 or 52% were Malays, 3,122,350 or 35.4% Chinese and 923,629 or 10.6% Indians.<sup>4</sup> The rate of increase was 3.1%, among the highest in the world. Since each racial group was fairly large in number, it was possible to maintain its original customs, habits and cultures, with the circle of interaction being restricted to the members of their own racial group.

This is further accentuated by the nature of the distribution of population, with each racial group concentrated in particular regions and areas. The Malays, for example, are mainly in the economically less developed states of Pahang (61.2%), Perlis (79.4%), Kedah (70.7%), Kelantan (92.8%) and Trengganu (93.9%). The Chinese are concentrated in the urban centres of Penang (56.1%), Perak (42.5%) and Selangor (46.3%), while the Indians are mainly in Selangor (18.3%), Perak (14.2%) and

Negri Sembilan (16.1%).<sup>5</sup>

The rural-urban distribution of population shows that there are more Malays in the rural than in urban areas. The percentage of urban Malays is 14.9%, Chinese 47.4% and Indians 34.7%, while the percentage of rural Malays is 85.1%, Chinese 52.6% and Indians 65.3%. Another important feature of the demographic distribution in Malaysia is that when racial groups are located in rural or urban areas, they tend to form their own settlements and housing areas, separating themselves from the other groups. The Malays live in their *kampungs*; the Chinese in squatter settlements on and near mines and plantations; while the Indians are in labour lines.

There are some socio-legal factors that accounted for this residential segregation and occupational specialization which has serious implications in the political, economic, cultural and social spheres in Malaysian society. First was the Malay Land Restriction laws which put up a protective wall of land reservation around the indigenous rural Malay population.<sup>6</sup> Outside this wall developed the plantations, the urban and the commercial economy of the west coast. Second was the system of labour contracts in the early twentieth century which compelled the estates to keep their Indian, Chinese and Malay labour forces separate; to deal with them separately, pay them in different ways and provide different local living conditions.<sup>7</sup> And the third factor was the Emergency imposed in 1948 and which lasted till 1960 as a military strategy to weed out the communists in Malaya. The Emergency made it necessary for the resettlement and re-grouping of about one million rural dwellers, most of them Chinese, to cut off food supplies and other support that might have been given to the communist terrorists.<sup>8</sup> Six hundred New Villages were created, becoming permanent Chinese settlements and segregated from other ethnic groups.

The effects of this population distribution can be summarized as follows:

- (a) in the socio-cultural aspect, physical separation led to a minimal and superficial interaction which often took place only during business hours and in market places;

- (b) in the economic aspect, it perpetuated the colonial division of labour on racial lines. Since there was an imbalance in development between the rural and the urban areas, it was the urban settlers who benefited most. The rural settlers, mainly the indigenous Malays, were handicapped by poor educational facilities, poor medical and other social services which were better provided in the urban areas.

The sociological significance of this is that if cultural and social assimilation is a policy, then demography would be one of the impediments to assimilation, for there seems to be a lack of deep, intensive social relationships between the races. However, a more important communal problem that causes tension and conflict is the problem which arises from the economic dimension which will now be analyzed.

### The Economic Dimension

Before the formation of Malaysia in 1963, there was no formal economic planning by the government. The economy was a *laissez faire* or free enterprise capitalist system, a mere extension of the economy introduced by the British and based on the exploitation of tin and the production of rubber and other primary commodities for export, and with rice grown for domestic consumption. Both large scale rubber plantations and the tin mines were almost wholly foreign owned by Europeans.

The colonial economy formed a specialization of economic activities along racial lines. Most Malays lived in rural areas as *padi* planters, fishermen and rubber smallholders. The Chinese, concentrated in urban and semi-urban centres, were engaged in trade and commerce or as workers in the tin mines. The Indians, on the other hand, worked in rubber estates or in the Public Works Department, although some were teachers, clerks, lawyers and doctors. One can see that in Malaysia, a racial group is often identified with an economic function.

Formal planning of the economy was only instituted from 1965, with the First Malaysia Plan (1966-1970). It was the first to consider the country as a whole in economic develop-

ment. The plan provided for rapid economic growth with the hope that redistribution could be achieved with a minimal straining of ethnic relations.

### *Problems of the Economy*

The problems of the Malaysian economy include the uneven distribution of income between rural and town dwellers and between racial groups; the high rate of unemployment and underemployment; and foreign control of the Malaysian economy.

An examination of the distribution of household income between urban and rural areas shows that about 90% of the households in Malaysia with monthly incomes below \$100, and 76.2% of the households with incomes between \$100 and \$200 were in the rural areas.<sup>9</sup> This meant that 82.6% of the households in Peninsular Malaysia earning below \$200 were found in rural areas.<sup>10</sup> The figures show clearly a marked disparity in income between the rural and urban settlers.

Secondly, there is the socio-economic imbalance which originated from the concentration of various ethnic groups in different sectors of the economy. A comparison on the mean monthly income in 1970 shows \$179 for Malay households, \$387 for Chinese and \$310 for Indian households.<sup>11</sup> Of the three ethnic groups, Malay households received the lowest income.

Another problem is unemployment. During the pre-1970 period, the labour force expanded by about 2.9% per annum while jobs grew by 2.6% per annum. Unemployment rose from 6% in 1960 to 8% in 1970.<sup>12</sup> This may be attributed to the importation of capital intensive foreign technology or to the slow expansion of development in the rural sector which led to rising unemployment and underemployment, especially in the rural areas.

Finally, there is the problem of foreign domination of the Malaysian economy. Figures on the ownership of investment in the private sector show that 62% is in foreign hands. Rather than re-invest the profits and surplus in Malaysia, they are expropriated to generate further development and growth in the

metropolitan countries. This is parallel to J. Puthuchery's dictum of "opening the door of a bird cage in the expectation that more birds will fly in than out".<sup>13</sup>

### *Racial Inequality*

The bases of power of the two major communities in Malaysia are often simplified by the traditional notion that the Malays hold political power while the Chinese hold economic power. Related to this is the simple conclusion that since the Chinese control the economy, it is they who are the wealthier group while the Malays are poorer. This is derived from the nature of the demographic distribution, with the Malays being mainly in the rural areas and the Chinese being mostly in the semi-urban and urban areas. Since the urban areas are more developed than the rural areas, it is the Malays who are poorer than the Chinese.

This traditional division of power along communal lines has ceased to be relevant now. The Chinese, by having unrestricted citizenship granted to them in the 1950s, are politically more powerful than before and this is backed by their strength in the economy. Hitherto, they have been both an influential partner in the Alliance coalition as well as representing the most powerful opposition groups in Malaysian politics.

The Malays, on the other hand, are becoming uncomfortable with their economic position. Although they may still acknowledge the notion of Chinese control of the economy, they often perceive their own economic backwardness as intolerable. It is obvious to them that the Chinese are increasing their political power without reducing their strong control of the economy, while the Malays find their small share of the cake not increasing, and their strength in politics being relatively eroded. This perception of each racial group of itself in relation to the others, has created fear, mistrust and antagonism.

Of the two groups, it is the Chinese who are economically better off. Recent statistics on investment in the private sector show that 90.5% comes from the Chinese, 5.9% from the Malays with 3.6% from the Indians.<sup>14</sup> But these figures lead one to conclude that since the Chinese are the wealthiest group it is they who exploit the Malays and the Indians. This is true in

certain areas, if exploitation is used in the idiom of Marxism. For example, one observer has remarked that it is the Chinese who are the exploiters of the Malays in the northeast coast of Malaya.<sup>15</sup> But the Chinese landlords and middlemen also exploit the poor Chinese while the Malay absentee landlords and middlemen exploit the poor Malays in the rural areas. These are some of the obscure facts often ignored by those who consider the economy as one of the problems of race relations in Malaysia. It thus indicates that if capitalism, in the sense of economic exploitation, is under attack there exists both inter-racial as well as intraracial exploitation.

### *Malay Economic Backwardness*

On the assumption that the Malays are economically more backward than the Chinese, attempts have been made to explain the causes of such backwardness. This could be conveniently classified under two opposing views: the Value System vs. the Structural Argument. The main exponent of the former is Brian Parkinson who put forward some arguments on the "Non-Economic Factors in the Economic Retardation of Rural Malays".<sup>16</sup> Parkinson's views are supported and in fact popularized by some Malay intellectuals who without any reliable scientific research, go to the extent of arguing that Malays are genetically inferior to the Chinese because they prefer cousin-marriages, and that the so-called national character of the Malays is mostly negative when compared to the Chinese.<sup>17</sup>

Some propositions put forward by Parkinson are: the Malays' economic stagnation is caused by their attitude towards economic development; their resistance to change such as opposition to the government's appeals for the planting of more than one rice crop per year; opposition to cooperatives; the fear of the unfamiliar and the liking for the familiar; and the Malays' dislike for full-time specialization in any one occupation.

Today these arguments can be considered out-dated for the Malays are as responsive as any other race to economic development; they are successfully growing double-crops of rice; they have formed effective cooperatives; they venture into less familiar environment when opportunities are opened to them;

and most of them favour and prefer full-time specialization in almost any occupation.

The writers in *Revolusi Mental* also stressed the attitude of the Malays towards economic development, similar to that put forward by Parkinson. Among others, they listed 14 negative cultural traits which might impede their economic development.

The value-system approach is rather unsatisfactory in explaining economic backwardness for it considers values and beliefs as constant variables which they are not. Most human factors, whether psychological, cultural or emotional, are determined by the environment in which they are in rather than otherwise. And human factors cannot be changed by a "mental revolution" (as suggested in *Revolusi Mental*) and for that matter, values cannot be changed overnight.

Mahathir's argument in *The Malay Dilemma*, among others, stresses the importance of heredity as the cause of Malay economic backwardness. However, he does indicate that the major factor in explaining these differences is the cultural experience which each group has undergone. Syed Hussein Alatas in his book, *Siapa yang Salah — sekitar Revolusi Mental dan Peribadi Melayu*, has refuted most of the arguments put forward by the writers of *Revolusi Mental* and *The Malay Dilemma* and suggests other alternative explanations for the economic backwardness of the Malays.<sup>18</sup>

The alternative model to the above is the school that emphasizes the economic and structural impediments and the historical evolution of the economic exploitation of the rural Malays. One of the main reasons for the backwardness of the Malays, argued Alatas, is that for centuries the Malays have been economically exploited by their rulers. This retarded the growth of the "spirit of capitalism" among the Malays in the Malay Peninsula. For example, in the 19th century the rural Malays were always loath to accumulate too much wealth because it invited confiscation by either the Sultans or the local chiefs.<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, the "spirit of capitalism" is present among the Chinese and other minority groups. This is also true among the Arab Muslims, Indian Muslims, Bengali Muslims, and others.

However, another important factor that explains the "spirit of capitalism" among minorities is their powerful incentive to migrate for reasons such as poverty which forced them to acquire the habits of drive and hard work. For the Chinese, to struggle under conditions of hardship to acquire wealth, is a condition of their survival and security in the new environment. Failure meant a return over the seas to the dead-end-street of the society they had fled. The Malays, on the other hand, lived in the security of their homeland. They have not been nourished in a struggling alien environment as the Chinese and other immigrants had.

The Minangkabau Malays, according to Swift, are special not only for their powerful incentive to migrate but also because their reformist Islam plays an ideological role in economic activity comparable to that claimed for Protestant ethics.<sup>20</sup> Alatas puts forward a similar view to that of Swift although he extends it by including the Arab Muslims, Indian Muslims and the Bengali Muslims.<sup>21</sup>

Another important finding on Malay economic backwardness is that the poor Malays have been exploited by other Malays and by Chinese middlemen. This is the opinion of Dr. Tan Chee Khoo who says that the Malay peasants are exploited by absentee landlords many of whom are Malay government servants and members of the State and Federal Assembly.<sup>22</sup> Swift in his article, "Economic Concentration and Malay Peasant Society", points out that among the Malay peasants there is a high concentration of ownership of wealth, especially of landholdings.<sup>23</sup> This implies that among the peasants there is a subtle change from a fairly equal distribution of wealth to one where this wealth becomes concentrated in the hands of a small minority. This gap between the latter and the peasant masses becomes wider with time.

The problem of economic concentration can be further extended to include the urban sector. Quite apart from the concentration of wealth in the hands of the Chinese millionaires and owners of big enterprises, there is also economic concentration among the Malays from the political and bureaucratic elite who hold one or two dozen directorships in government-owned



companies, statutory bodies or private firms. The rationale behind this is that there are not enough Malays of comparable calibre to hold the positions in order to be on equal terms with the Chinese. However, one can argue that there is no shortage of high calibre Malays, only a shortage of opportunities, and that many of these posts are held by privileged Malays.

The claim that Malaysia is among the most economically developed countries in Asia, after Japan, is true if gross national product and per capita income are used as indices to measure development. But social justice and equitable income distribution has become an increasingly important problem which is ignored. In the new nations it is often the maldistribution of income, the urban-biased economic development and the unequal sharing of wealth that are the causes of peasant unrest and urban tension. This suggests that the economic problem of Malaysia is not just a racial but a class problem as well.

The preceding discussion has pointed out that there exists an inequality in the sharing of the country's wealth between the Malays and the Chinese in favour of the latter. There also exists an "economic concentration", that is, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few Chinese and Malays, both in the rural and the urban sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples, see (a) F. Golay *et. al.*, *Underdevelopment and Economic Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (1969).

(b) R. Milne, *Government and Politics in Malaysia* (1967).

(c) I. Morrison, "Aspects of the Racial Problem in Malaya", in *Pacific Affairs* (1949).

<sup>2</sup> Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, *Nation-Building and Crisis of Values in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Penerangan, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> I. Morrison, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

- <sup>4</sup> *Banci Penduduk dan Perumahan Malaysia 1970*, p. 9. Note that these figures of Malaysia's population include the states of Sabah and Sarawak.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> See S. Gordon, "Social Implications .....", in *Intisari*, Vol. III, No. 2 (1968).
- <sup>7</sup> T. Silcock, "The Effects of Industrialization on Race Relations in Malaya", in Tumin, *Comparative Perspectives on Race Relations* (1967).
- <sup>8</sup> K. Sandhu, "Emergency Resettlement in Malaya", in *Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 18 (1964).
- <sup>9</sup> *Mid-Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan* (The Government Press, 1973) p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>12</sup> *Third Malaysia Plan* (The Government Press, 1976).
- <sup>13</sup> J. Puthuchery, *Ownership and Control in the Malay Economy* (Donald Moore, 1960).
- <sup>14</sup> *Second Malaysia Plan: 1971-75* (1971).
- <sup>15</sup> R. Milne, *Government and Politics in Malaysia* (1967) p. 229.
- <sup>16</sup> B. Parkinson, "Non-Economic Factors in the Economic Retardation of the Rural Malays", in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 1 (1967) pp. 31-46.
- <sup>17</sup> See (a) Mahathir b. Muhamad, *The Malay Dilemma* (1970).  
(b) *Revolusi Mental*, ed. Senu Abdul Rahman (1971).
- <sup>18</sup> S.H. Alatas, *Siapa Yang Salah ...* (1972).
- <sup>19</sup> S.H. Alatas, "Religion and Modernization in S.E. Asia (1973)", *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie* (1970).
- <sup>20</sup> M.G. Swift, "Minangkabau and Modernization" in *Anthropology in Oceania*, ed. Hiatt and Jayawardena (1971) pp. 255-267.
- <sup>21</sup> S.H. Alatas, *ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> C.K. Tan, "Communal Relations in the Socio-Economic Structure of Malaysia", in *Intisari*, Vol. III, No. 2, (1968).
- <sup>23</sup> M. Swift, "Economic Concentration and Malay Peasant Society", in *Social Organisation*, ed. M. Freedman (1967) pp. 241-269.

## The Dimensions of the Problem—II

One important feature that makes Malaysia unique among new nations is that the communal divisions coincide with language and religious lines as well as customs, values and beliefs. These constitute strong centrifugal forces and barriers to unity and national integration. Sometimes, this plurality of culture is exacerbated by politicians who exploit cultural differences, making them a communal issue. This only creates fertile ground for ethnocentrism and prejudice that keep the communal groups away from each other. Two other aspects of the problem will be discussed. These are closely related to the two dimensions previously covered.

### The Socio-Cultural Dimension

Each of the three races in Malaysia has a great cultural tradition. The Chinese are proud of their Chinese heritage, the Indians of the heritage of the Hindu-Buddhist cultural tradition of continental India, and the Malays of their culture which is a blending of the indigenous Malay culture with waves of cultural influence from the Middle East, India, and to a lesser extent, Europe. The effect of this is not only the accentuation of the differences in the cultural traits in the post-independence period but also the strengthening of the psychological barriers between the groups.

Culture itself is a source of group identification. Individuals will look to their own cultural group for security and affection and thus the basis of unity and solidarity is communal or primordial rather than national.

Some cultural elements can be a strong centrifugal force while others can be a strong centripetal force. The former could be a barrier to unity while the latter may help promote unity

and national integration. In Malaysia, one barrier to assimilation between the Malays on the one hand and the non-Malays on the other is religion.

Islam to the Malays is a powerful unifying force for it serves to unite the Malays of various ethnic origins. Islam also serves to keep the non-Malays, who are not Muslims, outside the group. It becomes a barrier to intermarriage between Malays and non-Malays and thus an impediment to total assimilation of non-Malays unless the latter adopt Islam. Fortunately, this has seldom been heavily politicized and so has not become a disintegrative factor.

Another element predominant in Malaysian politics is language, particularly the national language issue and the national education system. In Malaysia, as in most other countries, a common language is the most important cultural element by which diverse cultural groups can come together. It can form the base for a national identity. A common language serves as a focal point for racial integration as well as help in the formation of a national culture for a new nation.

The language issue and particularly the national education system were discussed during the period before independence. The two reports submitted are the Razak Report and the Rahman Talib Report. The educational policy of Malaya, according to the Education Ordinance of 1957 was:

To establish a national system of education acceptable to the people as a whole which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, with the intention of making the Malay language the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the language and culture of the people other than Malays living in the country.<sup>1</sup>

The 1956 Razak Report declared that:

The ultimate objective of education policy in this country must be to bring together the children of all races under a national education system in which the national language is the main medium of instruction ....<sup>2</sup>

These aims were accepted by the Alliance partners (UMNO, MCA, MIC) and incorporated into the Malaysian Constitution of 1957 – Article 152.

The acceptance of these reports implied that the attempt to build a Malaysian nation would be through the use of the Malay language as an instrument of unification. In other words, Malaysia would be a unilingual nation emphasizing language, that is, Malay or Bahasa Malaysia, as an important symbol of unity. It further reflected that the Malay culture would be the basis of a Malaysian culture with the Malay language as the main cultural element. However, the reports also recognized that the progress towards this goal could not be rushed and would have to be gradual.<sup>3</sup>

There was also an underlying economic motive in choosing Malay as the national language. The aim was stated by the Barnes Committee's Malay Education Recommendation of 1951 which wanted to encourage and enable the Malay community to occupy its rightful place in the mixed society of Malaya.<sup>4</sup> This meant that the Malay language would be given economic backing to replace English and to enable Malays who were educated through the Malay medium to take up better employment than be just teachers, clerks, peons, typists, or the lower ranks of the police and armed forces.

However, the implementation of this policy was not satisfactory because the Alliance government was indecisive. This failure of the government to make Malay the medium of instruction in 1967, that is, within ten years of independence, is:

Essentially due to its fear of being accused of (being) communal ... despite the fact that the three component parts of the Alliance had agreed to this policy .... The failure could also be attributed to the bad planning in the Ministry of Education, particularly the teacher training division ....<sup>5</sup>

Related to this is the continuous insistence of non-Malays for cultural pluralism as opposed to their assimilation into the dominant Malay culture. Non-Malays are willing to become Malaysians politically; culturally they are determined to remain

Chinese or Indians.<sup>6</sup> The Malays feel that this desire of the non-Malays to preserve cultural differences is the cause of the continuing division of the Malaysian political society into communal compartments. This demand for a Malaysian-Malaysia is similar to that of the Malayan Union proposal of 1946. Thus no Malay, however moderate, is willing to give ground to their demands for the acceptance of Malay as the national language of Malaysia was the precondition to the granting of citizenship in the 1950s. This demand contradicts the compromise which the non-Malays and the Malays agreed upon prior to independence.

The Malaysian-Malaysia proposal was rejected and the government continued with its original policy of making Malay the national language and finally the sole official language of Malaysia. But this could not be implemented by 1967 and only came into force after the 13 May racial riots. And from then on all schools started using Malay as the medium of instruction, with English as the second language starting from Standard One and then moving on to Standard Two and so on in the following years.

Another factor responsible for the slow acceptance of Malay as the national language is that it did not have economic backing. Between 1957 and 1969, in almost all employment in the public and private sectors, except for manual work, preference was given to those who could speak English. This put the Malay students from the Malay medium stream in an unfavourable position:

Having passed our Malaysian Certificate of Education we feel entitled to a job. But where is that job? In fact there is no job as there is yet no economic power behind the Malay, or National Language. Thus, by our constitution, we are building schools in the National Language, the graduates of which are largely unemployable because they don't know Chinese, they don't command English, neither of which are national languages.<sup>7</sup>

In the private sectors of commerce, trade and industry the Chinese would only employ those who spoke Chinese and preferably those who spoke English as well. Employment in the private sector was thus almost totally closed to the Malays

educated in Malay medium schools. What was left to them was employment in the government sector and even here they had to face competition from those educated in the English schools.

Most parents, therefore, preferred to send their children to English rather than Malay schools. Even among some Malay teachers and the elite themselves, there seems to be such a belief in English that they thought it as impossible for Malay to replace English in education. Syed Nasir once remarked that one serious disadvantage faced in propagating Malay was the absence of a right attitude and spirit among the Malay teachers who had too much belief in English.<sup>8</sup> This was one important reason why the implementation of Malay as the medium of instruction in all schools was delayed by the then Minister of Education.

The indecisiveness of the Alliance government to implement the language and education policy was its fear of losing support from the non-Malay voters in the 1969 general elections. However, this only made the Malay masses more disturbed and frustrated and thus they lost hope in the UMNO leadership.

It is argued that this was one of the major factors contributing to the defeat of many UMNO candidates in the 1969 elections and to the racial riots.<sup>9</sup> It is unfortunate that this national issue, which should be divorced from politics, is so much intermingled with the latter. This was mainly due to the weakness and the inadequacy of a democratic form of government in a new nation like Malaysia, and we will discuss it now.

### The Political Dimension

Malaysia is regarded as one of the few countries in Asia and Africa where democracy seems to work. One writer remarked that "it is perhaps a miracle that Malaya and Malaysia have managed to survive so far".<sup>10</sup> With the outbreak of the 13 May 1969 racial riots, the belief that "democracy works in Malaysia" became an exploded myth. It was then that Malaysian leaders realized that parliamentary democracy of the Westminster type was not suitable for the country.

A banned document entitled *The Struggle of the Non-Malays: Our Stand*, circulated during the 1969 riots, overtly urged that

the extra-parliamentary government instituted upon the declaration of a state of emergency be perpetuated and democracy forsaken.<sup>11</sup> The writer of the leaflet advised the government to draw inspiration from Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, Kenya and other countries which had had to face the fact that democracy was not workable in developing countries.

Rupert Emerson has strongly asserted that the fragile mechanism of representative democracy which new nations adopted proved quickly to be unfit for the needs and capabilities of most of them.<sup>12</sup> And Ian Morrison has pointed out that one essential prerequisite to the smooth and successful working of democracy, among others, is a high degree of racial homogeneity.<sup>13</sup>

However, despite the tremendous centrifugal tendencies of the various communal groups in Malaysia, democracy seemed to work during the first twelve years of independence. This is attributed to a number of factors and situations facing Malaysia during that time. In the 1955 general elections, the three major races came together in unity to oppose alien control. The common theme was the struggle for a Malaya independent of British rule and this helped to bind the three groups together.

In the 1964 elections, another issue gave a similar "blessing" to Malaysia. This was the Indonesian confrontation of Malaysia. While a few Malaysians supported this confrontation, most Malaysians were strongly united together against foreign aggression. Thus the latent primordialism existing among the racial groups was successfully undermined.

However, with the end of the Indonesian confrontation, these elements of "negative nationalism" were missing. Political behaviour became an internally oriented activity while primordial and other issues became predominant in the election campaign. This only exacerbated communal tensions and rifts among the three Alliance partners (UMNO, MCA, MIC). The 10 May 1969 general elections saw not only the decline in popularity of the Alliance but also the erosion of parliamentary democracy of the Westminster type in Malaysia, one of the last countries among new nations to follow it.

Themes that sever communal relationships and cause dis-



affection between the Malays and the non-Malays are many, of which the important ones are those concerned with culture, the economy, and some clauses in the constitution. The cultural issue, already discussed earlier was concerned with language and education policies: "the battle over a policy of permissive-multilingualism versus Malay as the sole language".<sup>14</sup> This language-education issue is often the focal point for polarization of hardline communal positions in a zero-sum game pattern of *bumiputra* versus non-*bumiputra* politics. The *bumiputra* is represented by the UMNO radical elite and the PMIP leaders while the non-*bumiputra* is represented by the leaders of the Chinese-Indian-supported Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The latter urged multi-lingualism within a framework of a Malaysian-Malaysia, giving full support for all four languages (Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil) at all levels of educational institutions similar to the vernacular school system introduced by the British.

Meanwhile, another non-communal party, the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan) or the Malaysian People's Movement, was formed in 1968. Some writers considered this party as a revived attempt at a multiracial political party almost similar to that of Dato Onn's Independence of Malaya Party (IMP) of the early fifties. Since most leaders of the Gerakan were Chinese of immense political influence (including Dr. Tan Chee Khoo and Dr. Lim Chong Eu), the party drifted to become a pro-Chinese (or at least an anti-Malay) political party. Although they supported Malay as the national language and ultimately the sole official language, they also demanded the eradication of Malay rights and thus the granting of equal rights to all races in Malaysia.<sup>15</sup>

The PMIP represents the right-wing "Malay extremists" and continues to play its original role as a strong Malay pressure group on the UMNO leadership. It continues to insist on the establishment and preservation of Malay rights *ad infinitum*. To give equal rights to all citizens of the country without assimilating them into the dominant Malay society, they argued, would be to turn Malaysia into another Palestine. And if this took place, they predicted, Malays would be driven out of the cities and towns into the countryside – or the *kampungs* – to become

guerrillas similar to the Palestinians in the Middle East today. The PMIP, therefore, keeps a self-appointed check on the UMNO to prevent it from giving in too much to the non-Malays.

Another issue is the so-called *bumiputra*-biased government's economic development planning which to the non-Malays implies a status of second-class citizens. The schemes obviously favouring the Malays are the Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA) which in 1964 was renamed Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), and the Federal Land Development Authority (FLDA). These programmes to uplift the Malays to the same level as the non-Malays, especially the Chinese, were considered unfair by the non-Malays and a discriminatory policy of the government.

In addition, other issues have been magnified and exaggerated by the non-Malay politicians especially those concerning Article 153 of the Federal Constitution, the Malay Special Privileges. The Malay rights fall in four main areas of public policy:

- (a) the system of Malay reservations, reserving certain lands for Malays only;
- (b) the operation of quotas within the public services reserving a certain portion for Malays;
- (c) the operation of quotas for licences and permits for certain businesses, chiefly those related to road transport;
- (d) and special quotas for public scholarships and educational grants.

These were some of the conspicuous communal issues that dominated the 1969 general election campaigns, and the politicization of these sensitive issues polarized the races, placing the Alliance coalition in a dilemma for fear of losing support from among the Malays and the non-Malays. The drift of votes towards the opposition political parties with their narrow communal interests was, therefore, understandable. Malaysian politics, like those in most new nations organized on communal line and communal and primordial interests take precedence, undermining national interests.

When the election results were announced, the Chinese saw their political power ascending while not losing their dominance of the Malaysian economy. The Malays, conversely, saw that

their security was shattered with the ascending political power of the Chinese:

They foresaw a Malaysia in which they, without economic strength and deprived of political superiority, would forever be under the thumb of the immigrant Chinese and Indians. They foresaw their position rapidly deteriorating and the whole nation losing its basic Malay character. They foresaw Malay leaders bowing and scraping in order to gain the favour of Chinese superiors. The whole picture was frightening to them .....<sup>16</sup>

This situation was worsened by the victory celebration of the non-Malays on 11 May 1969 which made the Malays in Kuala Lumpur feel more insecure than ever before in their homeland.

They felt outraged that they, the natives of the soil, should have been asked to withdraw from Kuala Lumpur, the capital of *Tanah Melayu* (the Land of the Malays) into Red-Indian-style reservations so that the immigrant communities could gain domination over it.<sup>17</sup>

This was mainly due to the slogans carried by the non-Malays and catch-calls which were thrown at the Malays during the victory celebration, like "... Malays have fallen (*Melayu sudah jatuh*); Malays now no longer have power (*Melayu sekarang tak ada kuasa*); Kuala Lumpur now belongs to the Chinese (*Kuala Lumpur sekarang Cina punya*); Malays may return to their villages (*Melayu sekarang boleh balik kampung*)";<sup>18</sup> and abuse such as "Malays get out, why do you remain here? (*Melayu keluar, apa lagi duduk di sini?*); We'll thrash you, we are now powerful (*Kita hentam lu, sekarang kita besar*); This country does not belong to the Malays, we want to chase out all Malays (*Ini negeri bukan Melayu punya, kita mahu halau semua Melayu*)", etc.<sup>19</sup>

With such mixed feelings of insecurity, frustration, bitterness, humiliation and anger, the Malays had no choice but to take the law into their own hands. They showed their fangs, ran amok and exploded into violence, destroying the fragile mechanism of representative democracy in Malaysia until it was revived twenty-one months later as a new brand called "Limited Democracy"

The relevant issue of political behaviour in a developing nation is not so much on what types of political parties there are, communal or non-communal, but rather the type of political system the nation is adhering to. Primordialism and communalism are inherent and ubiquitous in most new nations and this is more so where the society is plural as in Malaysia. No one should be blamed if he is parochial, chauvinistic or racist. But what should be blamed is the system that allows such sentiments to be exploited and politicized to serve the interests of the politicians. After all, communalism does not arise merely by virtue of the presence of different communities in a country but only when these communities are regarded as being different and when the fact that their being different assumes a political relevance.<sup>20</sup>

The democratic form of government itself is a legacy of colonialism. It is inherited from the colonial fathers by the Western-educated elites whose motive seems to have been psychological – the belief of the nationalist elites that only by working a constitutional democracy would their claim to equal status with the former rulers be recognized, and that democracy too is often equated with political modernization.<sup>21</sup>

In newly independent nations, the middle-class of Western-educated elites are the only group familiar with the working of democratic systems of government. To the peasantry, however, both the idea and the institutions of democracy of a modern type are alien for their contact with the government has been limited to the district official. For this reason, it is argued that the fragile mechanism of representative democracy is unfit for the needs and capabilities of most of them.

Ironically, this system of government was originally welcomed by the leaders as well as by the people of the new nations. The reason is that the word democracy itself symbolizes freedom, liberty, independence and equality. With these slogans inculcated in the minds of people, the advent of independence is paralleled with the establishment of a democratic form of government.

But historical experience has indicated that in most new nations democracy has failed. The elaborate framework of

constitutional democracy has been dismantled in many Asian and African countries which have adopted some form of authoritarian rule or a military dictatorship.

Rupert Emerson has likewise indicated that the real success of democracy has been confined to some of the peoples living in or stemming from Western Europe, such as the British, the Irish, the Belgians and Dutch, the Scandinavians, the Swiss, the French, and overseas, the people of the United States, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>22</sup> With these central exceptions, he argues, each of the successive waves of democratic experimentation has ended in overall failure.

An important feature of democracy in new nations is that it encourages divisions and disunity rather than discourages them. People with dissimilar cultural traits are divided further. Increasing politicization will further polarize the population into more distinct cultural groups. Democracy in new nations encourages dissident groups whose main interest is to oppose the ruling elites and to struggle for power through the ballot box.

The people of Malaysia are less concerned with the political system they have than with whether they are moving towards a better life. It is true that democracy implies far-reaching freedom of expression and freedom of opposition. But the basic requirement is not opposition but national consolidation of all forces and talents.<sup>23</sup>

Coherent national unity, integration and solidarity should be the first goal since it is an indispensable condition for internal order and security. The premature allowance of unlimited freedom and of the rights of the opposition to oppose will do less to lay the foundation of a strong united nation. This will directly affect economic, social development and other programmes.

The European experience has clearly shown that it advanced towards democracy slowly and gradually and included long periods of rule by absolute monarchs and despots. The Japanese experience shows that transformation into successful industrialization and economic development was not under the banner of parliamentary democracy of the Westminster type. So too with such countries as Russia, Germany, China and others. And

the case of Thailand shows that the successful assimilation of the minorities required a strong authoritarian rule rather than a democratic form of government.

The definition of a political organization is, after all:

That part of the total organization which is concerned with the maintenance or establishment of social order within a territorial framework, by the organized exercise of coercive authority, through the use, or the possibility of use, of physical force.<sup>24</sup>

Democracy in Malaysia has thus to be adapted and modified to suit the local environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Educational Review Committee, 1960; quoted by Zainal Abidin Wahid, "Education in Malaysia". A study of an aspect of policy and implementation, seminar paper *Malaysia in Perspective* (1971) p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Razak Report, p. 3. quoted by Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaya* (1965).

<sup>4</sup> *Federation of Malaya: Report of the Committee on Malay Education*, in Ratnam, *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Zainal Abidin Wahid, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> K. Ratnam, *op. cit.* (1965) p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> S. Gordon, *Some Implications of Communalism* (1968) p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Straits Times*, 22 April 1969, in Ratnam, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> Zainal Abidin Wahid, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> R. Milne, *Government and Politics ...* (1967) p. 229.

<sup>11</sup> C.T. Goh, *The May Thirteenth Incident* (1971) p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> R. Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (1962) p. 272.

<sup>13</sup> I. Morrison, "Aspects of Racial Problem in Malaysia", in *Pacific Affairs*, (1949) p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> See N. Snider, "Race Leitmotiv of the Malayan Election Drama", in *Asian Survey*, Vol. X (Dec. 1970) p. 1080.

- <sup>15</sup> See C.K. Tan, "Communal Relations in the Socio-Economic Structure of Malaysia", in *Intisari*, Vol. III, No. 2 (1968).
- <sup>16</sup> Mahathir Mohamad, "Problems of Democratic Nation-Building in Malaysia", in *Solidarity*, Vol. VI (1971) p. 14.
- <sup>17</sup> Quoted from C.T. Goh, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- <sup>18</sup> C.T. Goh, *ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *The May Thirteenth Tragedy - A Report* (NOC: 1969).
- <sup>20</sup> K. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process* .... p. 3.
- <sup>21</sup> See *Comparative Politics*, ed. Eckstein and Apter (1963) pp. 623-626.
- <sup>22</sup> R. Emerson, *op. cit.* (1962) pp. 272-279.
- <sup>23</sup> R. Emerson, *op. cit.* p. 290.
- <sup>24</sup> A.R. Radcliffe Brown, "Preface", in *African Political Systems*, ed. M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) p. xiv. This definition is intended to apply to all societies whether they are primitive and non-literate societies or modern industrialized societies.

## SEVEN

# The Integrative Revolution and National Unity

The period preceding the 13 May 1969 racial riots was a period of disintegration and of polarization of the three major racial groups in Malaysia. It indicated clearly that consensus among the latter was low while primordialism and communal disaffection were high. Rising communal tensions were caused by politicians questioning communal aspects of social life during election campaigns, particularly those which had strong centrifugal tendencies. Communal tensions were further exacerbated with the election results on 10 and 11 May. Tension was unmanageable and the situation became anomic, resulting in the total breakdown of social order.

With the declaration of a state of emergency, representative government was suspended and Malaysia was ruled by the National Operations Council (NOC) headed by Tun Abdul Razak who was then Deputy Prime Minister and who shortly succeeded Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister.

The period of NOC rule was one of consolidation and reorganization where "the administration of things" as well as "the government of persons" were both undertaken,<sup>1</sup> the latter having been absent in the pre-1969 years. In "the government of persons", there was the establishment of a National Consultative Council (NCC) whereby anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and others were consulted to look into the problem of communal relations in the country. In "the administration of things" especially in matters pertaining to socio-economic development, the governments sought the aid of economists and planners more extensively than it had done in the past.



It was within this short period that some planned effective measures to promote integration and national unity were introduced and these policies affected the total domain of life: economic, political, social and cultural. This period can be considered, to borrow Clifford Geertz's terminology, as the period of "integrative revolution" with the ultimate goal of attaining integration and unity in the country.<sup>2</sup> It is "the process of searching for ways and means to integrate societies, or to create a more perfect union between the disparate parts of the society".<sup>3</sup> The approach to the problem of communalism is described as "domesticating primordialism" rather than denying its existence by sweeping it under the carpet, and as "modernizing ethnocentrism" rather than doing away with it completely.

National integration and unity cannot be achieved just by *ad hoc* experiments but through careful planning and direct government intervention in the various aspects of social life of society. The goal is to create a national identity and overarching loyalties to the nation that transcend communal loyalties. The policy is thus the antithesis of the colonial *divide et impera*, emphasizing the horizontal dimension of integration although to a certain extent, it also indirectly helps the process of vertical or elite-mass integration.

### The New Economic Policy

As already discussed in Chapter Five, one of the bases of communal tension and thus the impediment to unity was economic. Despite continued economic growth in the post-independence period, unemployment seemed to rise and the economic imbalance between ethnic communities continued. The structure of the colonial economy had been extended to the post-independence period with little or no reorganization.

Meanwhile Malay socio-economic frustrations had mounted and catalyzed by the growing fear of a possible Chinese challenge to their political hegemony. Since Malay grievances against the government were mainly economic, it was often asserted that if Malay economic demands were satisfied, economic progress for the Malays would remove these grievances.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that economic grievances also arose among the poor non-Malays (Chinese, Indians). They saw that the so-called Malay-biased economic programmes like the MARA or the FLDA schemes only benefited the Malays and would do nothing to raise their standard of living. It was with these problems in mind that the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced. Its aims, as stipulated in the Second Malaysia Plan 1971–1975, were two-fold:

- (a) To reduce and eventually eradicate poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race;
- (b) To accelerate the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function.<sup>5</sup>

The Plan further stated its intention of incubating a Malay commercial and industrial community in all categories and at all levels of operation so that Malays and other indigenous people would become full partners in all aspects of the economic life of the nation. It was hoped that the Plan would help to correct racial economic imbalance, especially between the Malays and the Chinese as it was conceived that the latter monopolized the economy of Malaysia.<sup>6</sup>

The Plan also states its goal whereby within twenty years it is hoped that 30% of the total commercial and industrial activities will have participation by Malays and other indigenous people in terms of ownership and management.<sup>7</sup> "The objectives, priorities and strategies of the Plan," said Tun Razak, then Prime Minister, "have all been shaped by the overriding need to promote national unity."<sup>8</sup>

Although the Plan stresses in its aims the eradication of poverty irrespective of race, it also emphasizes its priority to raise income in rural areas where Malays and other indigenous people predominate. The success of the aim, it further argues, will serve to correct racial economic imbalance. It is only through the attainment of equity and balance among the races in their participation in the development of the country's economy and the benefits of economic growth that national unity will be

achieved.

Clearly, the New Economic Policy is a reflection of economic nationalism in Malaysia.<sup>9</sup> The programme requires direct government intervention in the economic, business and commercial sectors to help further economic development rather than allow the *laissez faire* capitalist economic system to operate without hindrance.

However, this economic nationalism is presently the nationalism of the Malay community rather than of the Malaysian community in general and it would be more appropriate to refer to it as economic 'indigenism' (indigenous = Malays) rather than economic nationalism. The main effort is to correct the uneasy equilibrium in which the political dominance of the Malay community is offset by the economic dominance of the Chinese; the latter by the application of *jus solis* in the provision for citizenship have also increased their political power through their votes.

Malay economic nationalism has shown some success. The role played by Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) in providing young Malays with training facilities and financial grants to acquire technical skills as well as knowledge of science and technology has helped bring about this. The Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) has also been successful in creating a new indigenous marketing system for agricultural produce. In 1966 a government-owned commercial bank, called Bank Bumiputra Malaysia Limited, was opened for business with an authorized capital of MS20 million. In the Federal Land Development Authority (FLDA) schemes, the Malays comprised 90% of the settlers in January 1967. And the Malaysian National Corporation (PERNAS) would play a major role in the export/import business which would be handled solely by the Malays. These programmes run parallel to the government's aim of creating a Malay commercial and industrial community which will manage and control at least 30% of the means of production within twenty years as stipulated in the Second Malaysia Plan into which was incorporated the New Economic Policy.

Despite these promising programmes most critics of the New Economic Policy are pessimistic about its ultimate success.

Marvin Rogers, for example, has indicated that even if the specific goals of the NEP can be attained, it will not dramatically raise the Malays' standard of living nor will it significantly reduce the income disparity between communal groups.<sup>10</sup> Lim Chong Yah stresses the major role of the private sector which because it works on profit maximization, will employ people who will give the firm the highest rate of return, irrespective of race.<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Mahdzan Yub shows his scepticism of open competition which will do little to make the goal of the NEP successful and urges increased government intervention in the business and industrial sector<sup>12</sup> while Syed Hussein Alatas criticizes the government's capitalistic approach to solve the economic problem of the Malays, especially the government's role of incubating a Malay capitalist class which will ultimately become the exploiters of their fellow Malays.<sup>13</sup>

Generally, the criticisms are directed not against the aim of the NEP but rather its approach, which according to the critics, cannot be attained under the free enterprise system. The present system, they argue, will do little to close the gap between the rich and the poor and may, in fact, create further economic concentration among a small group of capitalists. A more plausible approach to the NEP, as suggested by the critics, would be to apply some socialistic measures to the problem, i.e. increase government participation in business and industry rather than leaving it to private enterprise whose aim is profit maximization rather than national unity. It can be concluded that the NEP has aroused much hope and expectations among the Malays and if the government fails to meet them within twenty years, it can generate more frustrations among the Malays.

### **National Identity and the Malaysian National Culture**

The creation of a Malaysian national culture will probably be less of a problem than meeting the targets of the New Economic Policy. One can be optimistic of the government's efforts to achieve this although it cannot be denied that there will be disagreement in defining the concept and to determine the com-

ponents of the so-called national culture. While the Malays would make sure that the national culture would be indigenous-based, the non-Malays would insist that Chinese and Indian cultures be included among the components of the national culture. This was overtly expressed in the battle for a Malaysian-Malaysia as opposed to a Malay-Malaysia during the pre-1969 period.

However, the characteristics of the national culture had been defined by Tun Razak in his opening speech to the Congress of National Culture held in Kuala Lumpur between 16 and 20 August 1971. As he stressed:

*Corak dan bentuknya hendaklah berlandaskan kepada kebudayaan rakyat asli rantau ini.*<sup>14</sup>

It implies that national culture must be based on the traditional culture of the indigenous people of this part of the world, that is, the *Melayu-Indonesian* cultural area.

The emphasis on Malay culture as the national culture was also expressed by a sociologist, Shirle Gordon, who argued that since Malaysia is in the geographical area of the Malayo-Polynesian world, the major determinants of the national culture would be within the context of our existence, that is, the "Land of the Malays".<sup>15</sup> This means that the indigenous culture of the area, specifically the Malay culture, will be the national culture of Malaysia.

The history of Malay culture goes back to the beginning of the 15th century, when the so-called Malay culture was already developed. The pre-colonial Malay culture was a synthesis resulting from interaction and friction between the indigenous Malay culture and diverse foreign influences. Among them were elements from the Middle East (the Arab-Muslim culture), the Indian continent (Hindu-Buddhist culture) and to a limited extent from China (traditional Chinese culture) and later from Europe. All these elements were perfectly integrated into the native-based Malay culture. This means that before the coming of the British and later the Chinese and Indian immigrants, there was already a highly developed Malay culture that was accepted by all communities living in the Malay Peninsula.

With the coming of the British, "a cultural disorder took

place . . . there was a withering away of the common language in the commercial and business circles of Malaya, to ultimately be identified as the language only of the peasants".<sup>16</sup> The influx of Chinese and Indians during this period led to cultural pluralism, enhanced by the compartmentalization of communal groups following the British policy of divide and rule. The formerly dominant Malay culture gradually receded into the background while some elements of foreign culture, particularly the English language, became predominantly useful in the economic, social and political life of the middle-class elites of the Malayan community. Not only did the Malay language cease to be the official language in the Malay Peninsula, but other elements of the Malay culture also depreciated and were temporarily submerged. There was no single and dominant culture that could serve as the national identity of the Malayan people, and a Malayan nation in its fullest sense was not in existence.

During the twelve years that followed independence, there was little attempt to revive Malay culture to its former status as the dominant culture of Malaysia and to serve as the national identity of the Malaysian nation. The only cultural element regularly stressed to provide the basis for a common identity is the Malay language, whose use was fully enforced only during the rule of the National Operations Council (NOC).

However, the post-1969 period saw a sudden realization that Malay culture needed to be rejuvenated, clearly defined and put in its proper and respectable position to represent the national culture of Malaysia. Since its components comprise traditional Malay cultural elements, this culture is to be "modernized" to adapt itself in the changing situation of modern Malaysia. The culture will be modified so that it will function well in the world of science and technology and as a national identity of the new Malaysian nation.

The most important cultural element in the new Malaysian culture is language, particularly Bahasa Malaysia (as the Malay language came to be officially known), and which is now the medium of instruction at all levels of education as well as being the *lingua franca* of the people of Malaysia. Cynthia Enloe has noted that the ability of all Malaysians to speak a common

tongue will be the cornerstone of this new culture.<sup>17</sup> Rupert Emerson stressed that language (common language), among others, is the *sine qua non* to the formation of a nation.<sup>18</sup> Giving economic backing to the Malay language will ensure that it be ultimately more acceptable to all communities and will be one way of integrating the various communities in Malaysia.

### The Rukun Negara as a Political Religion

The announcement that Malaysia will have a national ideology was made by Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie in July 1969, two months after the May 1969 riots. This was another approach by the government to tackle the communal disaffection in Malaysia. It was also a new pragmatism aimed at integration and national unity as well as to strengthen the *status quo* and legitimize authority.

The five principles of the *Rukun Negara* are:

- \*Belief in God (*Kepercayaan Kepada Tuhan*);
- \*Loyalty to King and Country (*Kesetiaan Kepada Raja dan Negara*);
- \*Upholding the Constitution (*Keluhuran Perlembagaan*);
- \*Rule of Law (*Kedaulatan Undang-Undang*);
- \*Good Behaviour and Morality (*Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan*).

And parallel with it was a declaration of the Malaysian nation being dedicated:

- \*to achieving a greater unity of all her people;
- \*to maintaining a democratic way of life;
- \*to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation should be equally shared;
- \*to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions;
- \*to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology.

The introduction of the *Rukun Negara* was one of the long-term measures announced to restore law and order. This is described as a task to help the government in "galvanizing the country and guiding it towards national unity".<sup>19</sup> It was hoped that the *Rukun Negara* would help in blunting the edges of

conflict among the different races.

The formulation of the *Rukun Negara* is paralleled to the creation of a new Department of National Unity. The Department has two divisions: a research division which makes use of data on race relations from elsewhere, and an operational division which would provide policy guidelines for the various ministries in formulating programmes on nation-building and would advise and guide the information of the media. Later on, the Department became the Ministry of National Unity headed by a Federal Minister, Tun V.T. Sambanthan.

Ideology as defined by the dictionary is "a systematic scheme or co-ordinated body of ideas about human life or culture", and this definition, according to Paul Sigmund, seems to equate ideology with philosophy or social theory.<sup>20</sup> Some additional connotations on ideology are of commitment, both emotional and intellectual, and action-orientation such as maintaining the *status quo*.

David Apter conceives ideology as having two functions: the social, which binds the community together, and the individual, which organizes the role of the maturing individual.<sup>21</sup>

Apter's concept of ideology is concerned with an application of particular moral prescriptions to collectivities and the ideology. In short, ideology helps to support an elite and to justify the exercise of power. This is what he sometimes termed as "political religion" which can be summarized as "assisting politics to define the aims and establish their priorities while allowing political leaders to remain exempt from ordinary criticisms and errors".<sup>22</sup>

It is on the basis of political religion as ideology of the elites that authority becomes legitimized for the ideology claims superior planning and rationality and it provides moral bases for social manipulation for development purposes. As Apter concludes, in the new developing areas where consensus is low and primordial loyalties high, ideologies bind the disparate communities.<sup>23</sup>

Ideologies in the new nations are often used to advent a political consensus and to legitimize authority and thus to strengthen the *status quo*. This is also true in the case of the



*Rukun Negara*. The intended aim, although not often expressed, is to promote authority and to strengthen the power of the ruling Alliance, (since transformed into the National Front government).

Some principles of the *Rukun Negara* are based on the constitution. This represents a spelling out of the principles on which the constitution is based but which had not been explicitly stated when it was drawn up. The acceptance of the *Rukun Negara* means that young non-Malays would recognize the legitimacy of the regime and therefore prevent them from questioning provisions in the constitution that were questioned in the years before 1969.<sup>24</sup>

Many non-Malays, in the opinion of Marvin Rogers, will not embrace the five principles since they imply not only the acceptance of the legitimacy of the regime but also support for the Malay rulers, the Malay special rights and the validity of Malay as the national language.<sup>25</sup> However, the ideology may foster polite communal relations though it may do less to promote integration and national unity except in the long run. The latter requires intensive indoctrination and political socialization among the younger generation. The ideology, to a certain extent, may also contribute to the preservation of law and order; it may help in minimizing communal disaffection and in "domesticating primordialism" for it is the constitution that has often been the basis of hostility and antagonism between the Malays and the non-Malays.

### **Sedition Act and the Reconvening of "Limited" Parliamentary Democracy**

Before the reconvening of Parliament in 1971, the National Operations Council (NOC) had identified some provisions in the constitution considered more basic than others and therefore needed to be entrenched. The provisions represent a binding arrangement between the Malays, Chinese and Indians preceding independence. It is argued that if these entrenched provisions are in any way eroded or weakened, the entire constitutional structure would be endangered, thus threatening the nation it-

self. It is to prevent the weakening of these constitutional provisions that some kind of government measure is required.

It will be necessary for the government to enact laws which will *inter alia* make it an offence for any person to utter, print or publish words or statements or do any act which questions any matter, right, status, position, privilege, sovereignty, or prerogative established or protected in the entrenched provisions of the Federal Constitution, or which has the tendency to promote feelings of ill will and hostility between the various races.<sup>26</sup>

The Sedition Act was thus introduced, representing one of the two amendments to the constitution which permit legislation prohibiting public or parliamentary questioning on four sensitive items in the Constitution, namely:

- \*The Special Position of the Malays and other indigenous groups;
- \*Malay as the official language;
- \*The sovereignty of the Malay Sultans and the Yang Di Pertuan Agong;
- \*The citizenship rights of the immigrant communities.

This amendment implies, *inter alia*, restriction of the democratic process and indirectly assures continued Malay political control. The amendment also indicates clearly that the Westminster type of democracy, though not totally discarded, had to be modified to suit the local conditions. This was expressed by the then Minister of Special Functions and Minister of Information, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, in his speech at the Dewan Negara in March 1971:

I think that one of our major miscalculations at the time of Merdeka was to welcome uncritically the concepts and precepts of Westminster-type democracy. During the heady days of Merdeka we thought that the Westminster model was a perfection in itself. We did not realize how irrelevant it was to our society as it was then, as it exists today.<sup>27</sup>

Elsewhere he remarks:

All that is being asked is not a total curtailing of our freedom of speech; it is only a restriction relating to those sensitive race issues affecting the programmes for the restructuring of society and this

is a small price to pay. Even that is not an absolute restriction since the Prime Minister has announced the formation of the National Unity Council in which the problems of national unity may be discussed behind closed doors.<sup>28</sup>

The ban on questioning the provisions may do much to undermine manifest disaffection between the races. It also implies a modification of the conventional Westminster-type democracy to suit the plural society of Malaysia. It thus marks a shift from liberal to limited democracy, albeit *cum grano salis* Parliamentary Democracy.

Shortly after the outbreak of the 13 May racial riots, the government took a more positive step in attempting to integrate the three racial groups in Malaysia. Every new policy introduced has both manifest and latent aims. Some of the policies may not attain both aims but at least they might help to achieve one of the two.

The New Economic Policy, aiming at decompartmentalization of society and eradication of poverty irrespective of race, will require more direct government intervention than has been planned. To attain the goal, some socialistic measures are necessary. This is also true of the government's effort to uplift the Malays and to encourage them to participate in business and industry. A more equitable distribution of wealth among the racial groups, if this can be achieved, may reduce communal agitation and bring about gradual integration.

In the socio-cultural aspect there are integration pressures through the national education policy. The revival of Malay culture which aims to create a national identity will not only raise the social status of the Malays as a politically dominant race but bring about a closer relationship and narrow the gap between the elite and the masses. This would directly establish Malay culture as the dominant culture of Malaysia and gradually assimilate the non-Malays into the "dominant" Malay society.

The *Rukun Negara* would contribute to the legitimizing of the regime, strengthening the *status quo* and establish Malay political hegemony. It may also be functional to the maintaining of law and order and the setting up of a government which emphasizes more consensus and less disagreement and opposition.

Effective government is necessary to a stable society before moves can be made to integrate the races.

In the political dimension, the measures taken to transform liberal democracy into limited democracy may reduce the communal disaffection which arose from the freedom of "bargaining" and opposition during the pre-1969 period. It is hoped that politics would become an arena of co-operation rather than competition.

With the implementation of all the above policies, Malaysia can look to a future with some optimism although it could be postulated that the road to national integration is still far away. However, the integrative revolution already discussed, to a certain extent would contribute to the effect of "domesticating primordialism" and "modernizing ethnocentrism" and this would do much to reduce racial divisions and conflicts.

Generally, the rule by the National Operations Council saw attempts at finding the bases of a new consensus through constraint. National integration in this case involves consensus on the limits of the political community and on the nature of the political regime.

The integrative revolution is latently a movement by the ruling elite to re-establish Malay political hegemony as well as to strengthen the *status quo* and thus legitimize the present regime. Concurrently, it also aims at uplifting the economic positions of the Malays through government participation in the economic and industrial sectors and through cultural means, especially by giving economic backing to the Malay language.

To the non-Malays the "revolution" aims at making the new policies acceptable to them through coercion so that in the long run, consensus could be created among the young generation by means of political socialization and the indoctrination of ideology through education and the mass media.

The government policy explicitly represents an important aspect of integration in a nation-state: the integration of national economy and the national society with the effort of bringing them into congruency. The acceptable congruence of the economy and society will be among the important *sine qua non* of nationhood.

- <sup>1</sup> F. Engels, "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific (1914)", quoted by H.S. Leng, "Political Development in the Plural Society", *Malaysia in Perspective* (Monash University, 1971).
- <sup>2</sup> See C. Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (1963) pp. 105-157.
- <sup>3</sup> C. Geertz, *ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> See T.H. Silcock, "The Effects of Industrialisation on Race Relations in Malaya", in Tumin, *Comparative Perspectives on Race Relations* (1969) p. 160; also Mahathir Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore, 1970).
- <sup>5</sup> *Second Malaysia Plan* (1971) p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> The ownership of share capital of Limited Companies in 1969 by race was Malays 5.9%, Chinese 90.5%, Indians 3.6%. However, of the total \$4,678 million share capital, 62.1% was accounted for by foreign interests compared to 22.8% by Chinese, 1.5% by Malays and 0.9% by Indians.
- <sup>7</sup> *Second Malaysia Plan*, p. 158.
- <sup>8</sup> *Second Malaysia Plan*, p. v.
- <sup>9</sup> Golay defines Economic Nationalism as a system of policies and institutions created to promote national economic development and, by so doing, to ensure that progress towards goals of material welfare, power, and sovereignty takes place. See F. Golay *et. al.*, *Economic Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (1969).
- <sup>10</sup> M. Rogers, "Malaysia and Singapore: 1971 Developments", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (Feb. 1972).
- <sup>11</sup> C.Y. Lim, "Economic Trends" (The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1971).
- <sup>12</sup> Ahmad Mahdzan Yub, (a) "20 Tahun Akan Datang", in *Dewan Masyarakat*, February '73 and (b) "Ekonomi Bumiputra", in *D.M.*, May '73.
- <sup>13</sup> S.H. Alatas, *The Second Malaysia Plan 1971-1975, A Critique* (Singapore: The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1972).
- <sup>14</sup> Part of the speech was published in *Mastika*, August '71. Also see (a) "Kebudayaan Asli Teras Kebudayaan Kebangsaan", *Mastika*, Sept. '71 and (b) Baharuddin Musa, "Kebudayaan Harus Sesuai Kehendak Zaman", in *D. Masyarakat*, May '72, and "The Search for a National Culture", translated and published in *D. Masyarakat*, Feb. '73.
- <sup>15</sup> S. Gordon, "Social Implications .....", *Intisari* (1968) Vol. III.
- <sup>16</sup> Ghazali Shafie, *Nation-Building and the Crisis of Values in Malaysia* (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 1970).
- <sup>17</sup> C. Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics* (1970).
- <sup>18</sup> R. Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (1962).
- <sup>19</sup> R. Milne, "National Ideology and Nation Building in Malaysia", in *Asian Survey*, Vol. X. p. 556, July 1970.

- <sup>20</sup> Quoted by P. Sigmund, *The Ideologies of the Developing Nations* (1969).
- <sup>21</sup> D. Apter, "Ideology and Discontent", in *Some Conceptual Approaches to the Study of Modernization* (1968) p. 237.
- <sup>22</sup> D. Apter, *ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> D. Apter, *ibid.*, p. 20.
- <sup>24</sup> The articles often challenged by the non-Malays are Article 152 on the Malay language and Article 153 on the special position of the Malays.
- <sup>25</sup> M. Rogers, *op. cit.*
- <sup>26</sup> *The May 13th Tragedy*, NOC Report (1969) p. 86.
- <sup>27</sup> Ghazali Shafie, *Democracy, the Realities Malaysia Must Face* (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia: 1971) p. 7.
- <sup>28</sup> Ghazali Shafie, *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

## EIGHT

# Competitive Communalism, Social Order, and the Stages of the Integrative Process

### Competitive Communalism and the Process of Social Mobilization

Modernization has reinforced communalism and exacerbated racial conflicts. This is an antithesis to the assertion of some scholars who argue that modernization would ultimately lead to the decline of communal conflict, and that new kinds of socio-economic roles and organizational identities would undercut the bases upon which communal politics rests.<sup>1</sup>

Malaysia's growth rate, 6.1% per annum in 1970, is higher than the 5% target set for developing countries during the United Nations Development Decade. This growth and development was accompanied by high social mobilization. But success in economic and social development was not matched in the political sphere. In other words, while there were increasing changes in the first two, it was not so in the third.

Related to this was rapid politicization of the masses which was not matched by an improvement of the nation's ability for compromise and conflict resolution. The old formula had become outdated and the *ad hoc* arrangement or understanding had become a myth and had therefore ceased to be relevant in recent years.

The increased social mobilization too generates new kinds of social competition and new kinds of scarcity which underlie contemporary communal antagonism.<sup>2</sup> There was an increasing perception of political inequality among the non-Malays and of economic inequality among the Malays, even if these perceptions may be inaccurate. Originally the Malays had high power status

but low economic status. The situation was just the reverse among the Chinese. The Malays expected an increase in economic power whilst maintaining their political status. The Chinese, on the other hand, wanted to increase their political power while retaining their economic position. This brought about a struggle towards "status crystallization" or more specifically towards political and economic power.

The result of the struggle towards status crystallization can be analyzed as follows: assuming that the pie is constant, this competition would turn out to be a form of zero-sum game whereby one group's failure is attributable to another group's success. The Malays perceived that the Chinese were increasing their political power through increased voting strength while retaining their dominance of the economy. Conversely, they perceived their political hegemony as eroding while their economic power did not increase. The Chinese, on the other hand, perceived the Malays as increasing their economic power while maintaining their political hegemony.

There is thus an expectation-reality gap between both the Malays and the Chinese. From the revolution of rising expectations, it turned out to be the revolution of rising frustrations. Accompanying this is an increase in the areas of possible conflict. Yet the techniques of compromise and conflict resolution were not perfected. The former politics of compromise became the politics of competition and since competition was communal, accentuated by a high degree of primordialism, frustration found its outlet through open violence – the 13 May 1969 racial riots.

Another factor that has encouraged communalism in post-independence Malaysia may be attributed to the attempts made by the government to reduce communal imbalances in wealth, status and power. An environment of social mobilization and communal imbalances, wealth, status and power increase communal tensions; it does not follow that progress towards redressing these imbalances will be accompanied by communal accommodation.<sup>3</sup>

In the post-independence epoch, there is a realization by the government to improve the economic position of the Malays



while retaining their political hegemony. This inter-racial equalization is necessary before cross-cutting socio-economic linkages. In the words of the New Economic Policy "it is the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function."<sup>4</sup>

The government's attempt to improve the economic position of the Malays will only generate more frustrations among the non-Malays. Specifically, to increase Malay participation in business and commercial activities would make the non-Malays, especially the Chinese, feel deprived of their former status and position, and lead to insecurity. The closer the Malays approach equality in the economy, the more deprived and less tolerant the Chinese would feel. This will aggravate communal tension.

Above all, there is a political institution which encourages the participation of the masses in recruiting leaders. This has often increased politicization and intensification of communal conflict.

In the Malaysian political process, political leaders depend immensely on the support of their communities of origin and therefore the process would become communalized. This situation was observed by a foreign sociologist who remarked that:

One belongs to one's skin essentially. This belonging to one's own skin has bedevilled all ideological development in the land. No party has succeeded in crossing ethnic groups in any mass sense of the word. A leader who leads a policy not oriented on his own skin group leads beyond his times and is cut down ....<sup>5</sup>

In Malaysia, participation in politics encourages politicians to appeal to the most easily mobilized communal loyalties, and to define themselves as the representatives of communal interests. Even if this is not explicitly expressed, the followers can see these leaders as representatives of their communal interests. Judging from the Malaysian experience, and this can be applied to situations in other new nations, it would seem that it is communal conflict and not class conflict that undermines liberal democratic institutions.

It can be concluded that communalism is an inherent aspect of modernization and social change in culturally plural societies. Communal formation and conflict, however, are not the reflection of cultural "givens" and "primordial sentiments". The latter only serves to perpetuate communal organization while the root cause of communalism is mainly attributed to the factors we have already discussed. Also, the stability of culturally plural societies is threatened not by communalism *per se*, but by the failure of national institutions to recognize and accommodate existing communal divisions and interests. This the government realized after the outbreak of the May 1969 racial riots. For that matter, the post-1969 period saw some "attempts at further political institutionalization aimed at the new realities",<sup>6</sup> such as the Sedition Act, the National Ideology (*Rukun Negara*), the New Economic Policy and the establishment of some extraordinary new federal and state councils to deal with communalism and race relations. In the long run, these policies should contribute to integration at national level and consequently undermine communalism and racial problems.

### Social Order, Social Integration and System Integration

The word "integration" implies at least a minimum of social order although it does not deny the persistence of conflict. Order becomes a problem in situations where changes are taking place in the major aspects of social systems and their relations. This is more so in societies which are in the process of transformation and which are experiencing rapid social change.

Percy Cohen has explicitly said that the central problem of sociology is the problem of social order.<sup>7</sup> Order in the context of sociological inquiry is often expressed in different terminologies like solidarity, equilibrium, consensus, integration, cohesion, interdependence, reciprocity, congruency, co-operation and others. This problem of social order has been the main interest and the centre of philosophical thinking of the great fathers of sociology and anthropology like Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Pareto, Simmel, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and others. The basic assumption of the science of man and society

is that human behaviour follows a pattern of order similar to the pattern of natural phenomena.<sup>8</sup> This basic pattern of human behaviour is a general law often expressed in the forms of social organization, social relationships, structures, institutions, systems, and others.

There are several sociological theories that explain the persistence of social order.<sup>9</sup> The first is the Coercion Theory which emphasizes the use or threatened use of physical coercion or the use of symbolic and moral coercion. The contention is that order exists in society only or largely as a result of the power which some men have to command compliance from others. Among the new nations, it is the elite which includes military dictatorships that monopolize power and authority. This is because it is always the few, in the name of all, who govern the many.

A second theory is the Interest Theory. This explains social order as a contract between men who find it in their interest to have some social arrangements.<sup>10</sup> It states that men cannot achieve their aims without the co-operation or, at least, the dependability of others. The arrangement made by the representatives of the communal associations – UMNO, MCA and MIC – to form the tripartite Alliance preceding independence represents such an arrangement. It was through mutual interest for independence from the British for the Malays and the granting of citizenship for the non-Malays that the three races came together to make this bargain. The "bargain formula" was effective in maintaining and perpetuating the present system of mutual co-operation. Hitherto, there has been no conceivable alternative to the present system of the Alliance tripartite arrangement in the Malaysian political process.

Another theory is the Value-Consensus Theory. This argues that order is based on some minimal consensus on certain values. Value consensus has generally been low between the Malays and the non-Malays in various aspects of social life. If there is consensus, it is only among the elite and especially the upper and upper-middle classes. The masses do not often share common values due to differences in the socialization process, whether institutional or otherwise. Because of this, there have been

clashes of values between the communal groups when contact increases. But the theory also postulates that these clashes would help in creating new values with characteristics common to both Malays and non-Malays. The emergence of a common value system would also take place through indoctrinating the younger generations with common values through common institutions and the mass media.

The three theories explain how social order is possible. Both social order and conflict help to promote integration. David Lockwood, however, distinguishes two aspects of integration: social integration and system integration.<sup>11</sup> One focuses attention upon the orderly or conflictive relationships between the actors while the other focuses on the orderly or conflictive relationships between the parts of a social system.<sup>12</sup> Cohen considers system integration as a result of the internal adaptation of parts to one another.

There is a close connection between these two concepts. As Lockwood argues, the only source of social disorder arising from system disorder is that which takes the form of role conflicts stemming from incompatible institutional patterns. It follows that to maintain social order, there must be order in the social system and a compatibility among the institutional patterns. Both social integration and system integration have been the main concern of the Malaysian government since the post-1969 years. Wherever tension occurs in the system, this would be managed by various means so that the system would persist and not break down as on 13 May 1969.

### **Some Micro Studies on Integration**

Much of the preceding analysis on integration is on national integration. An equally important aspect of integration concerns social and cultural integration at the micro level. Little work has been done on this and it is therefore premature to arrive at any generalized conclusion. However, in this section, this aspect of integration will be analyzed briefly.

Alvin Rabushka's two case studies provide some reliable basis for generalization on the degree of cultural integration in urban

Malaya and among undergraduates at the University of Malaya.<sup>13</sup> Rabushka borrows the concept of integration from Jacob and Toscano who both refer to integration as "the process whose outcome is a state of mind, that is, an attitudinal condition, with the process itself consisting of both attitudes and patterns of behaviour".<sup>14</sup> They define integration as "a strong cohesiveness among a social group based on a feeling of identity and self-awareness".<sup>15</sup>

Rabushka found that the three ethnic groups in Kuala Lumpur exhibited higher rates of interaction than their George Town equivalents and concluded that this may be due to the administrative character of the city with its high percentage of government and civil servants. He also found that about two-thirds Chinese in each city were non-mixers compared to one-third for Malays. Malays tended to mix more than the other races.

On measuring integration, he found that the non-mixers were comparatively more ethnocentric (indicating their preference for their own culture) than the mixers, which implies that the latter were more integrated than the former. This is based on the interaction-integration hypothesis that "preference of culture, or ethnocentricity, is inversely related to integration".

The second measurement of integration in the case study is a willingness to enter into relationships with members of other ethnic groups with the hypothesis that "the more willing a person is to enter into relationships with members of other ethnic groups, the higher will be his sense of integration". It was found that there was a higher integrative sense among Malays in both cities, possibly due to their minority status.

In the third aspect of the study on geographical distribution and integration, Rabushka found that the mixers were far more integrated than the non-mixers when the type of residential area was held constant. Where mixing was present, he argued, integration levels increased and where mixing was absent, higher integration levels existed where there was residential segregation of ethnic groups. The implication for social engineering from this discovery is that multi-ethnic housing settlements does not necessarily guarantee more integration unless it is ac-

accompanied by more intermingling.

Two other aspects of integration he studied are the relationships between "Education and Integration" and "Age and Integration". On the whole, Rabushka concluded that under all conditions, except in higher education, higher social interactions produce higher levels of integration. This means that those Malays and Chinese who mix with one another express higher levels of positive effect and social acceptance of cultures other than their own than those who are totally ethnocentric in their behaviour patterns.

Rabushka's study on ethnic attitudes among the Chinese and Malay students at the University of Malaya showed a similar conclusion.<sup>16</sup> Among the Malays and the Chinese, he found that only one-third or less of the respondents were mixers while the majority were clearly communal or ethnically inclined even though the University of Malaya is distinctively a multiracial institution. He also noted that all Indians were strictly mixers and this was again due to their minority position in the campus which limited their opportunities to restrict their social interaction with only Indians.

Aida Khan's study on some aspects of cultural integration among the students of three English medium schools in Johore Bahru found that there was a comparatively high degree of integration among the students.<sup>17</sup> This may be due to their middle-class background where there is some homogeneity in the socio-economic background and also because the respondents were among the most intelligent pupils from the classes selected. An important finding by Aida Khan is that integration tends towards Western rather than national values and norms. For this reason, the attitude and perception of the students generally transcend communal barriers.

On the whole, it can be concluded that there is a low level of cultural integration between the Malays and the Chinese of the urban areas in Malaysia. Of the three races studied, the Indians seem to be more integrated than the Chinese or the Malays. This, as suggested earlier, is mainly due to their minority status which limits their opportunities to restrict their social interaction to only other Indians.

### The Stages of Integrative Process

We will attempt to construct hypothetical stages of the integrative process in Malaysia based on Mazrui's model of national integration.<sup>18</sup> The first stage of integration in Malaysia was the situation before the Second World War. The relationship between different ethnic groups in the country was a bare co-existence which implied that the degree of integration was minimal. Each communal group led a separate way of life and contact was limited to the market place. Even the status of the immigrants was clearly marked — they were British subjects while the indigenous Malays were the subjects of the Malay rulers. In short, the society was plural in its pure form.

The second stage was the period after the Second World War and immediately after independence. This is the relationship of minimal contact with one another. Co-operation and compromise took place in politics and in some business dealings. Where education was concerned, each racial group went to separate (vernacular) schools with no common syllabus and content, with the exception of those who went to government English schools. This stage saw the beginning of periodic conflicts between Malays and non-Malays, and it was through these conflicts that compromises were constructed. This second stage represents a higher degree of integration than the first for some national issues like the choice of national leaders, economic and social development, education and national language policies, and others were issues considered to involve all communal groups rather than being the concern of one group only. Also the leaders of the three groups strongly competed to gain political power.

The third degree of integration involves a relationship of compromise. This stage represents the present. The relationships between communal groups are still in the form of competition as well as peaceful reconciliation. It is at this stage that groups are able to produce a capacity for constant discovery of areas of compatibility.

The fourth stage of national integration or the stage of coalescence is yet to come. This involves the merging of identities where national interest takes priority over communal

interests and there will be a coalescence of identities rather than a merger of interests. As Mazrui argues, the conflict of interests would still continue but it would no longer be a conflict between total identities.

In practice, however, integration is not as smooth as depicted above. There may be areas where the process of integration is still at its first stage especially in the isolated rural areas. On the other hand, there are areas that have already reached the final stage of coalescence. These are among the groups who are dependent on one another, such as the business entrepreneurs who see it to their advantage to co-operate in their undertakings. There are also areas where the group is in the process of establishing contact and in others where integration is a relationship of compromise. But taking Malaysia in general, it is advocated here that the present situation represents the third stage, that is, the relationship of compromise.

Following Mazrui's analysis, the mechanism that produces movement from one stage to another is conflict. In the first stage of the integrative process, conflict is almost nil and this implies that integration is minimal. With contact, conflicts become inevitable and it is through these conflicts that attempts are made to produce solutions. This also involves some compromise to find areas of compatibility among various groups.

It may be that conflict in the country will cause disintegration. But in most cases, it is through conflict that national integration would be possible for it is the resolution of conflict that serves as an essential mechanism for integration. Conflict resolution may not be a sufficient condition for national integration but it is certainly necessary.

Conflict resolution can be pursued in many ways and some of these have been mentioned in Chapter Seven. The process of integrative revolution will gradually reduce communal tensions and divisions, with politics moving towards an area of co-operation and less of competition. This was manifested in 1973 with the formation of the Barisan Nasional or National Front by a coalition of several opposition political parties (PMIP, Gerakan, PPP, etc.) with the ruling Alliance party to form a coalition government.



- <sup>1</sup> R. Melson and H. Wolpe, "Modernization and the Politics of Communalism", *American Political Science Reviews*, LXIV (1970) pp. 1112-1130.
- <sup>2</sup> R. Melson and H. Wolpe, *Nigeria, Modernization and the Politics of Modernization* (1971).
- <sup>3</sup> R. Melson and H. Wolpe, *ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>4</sup> *Second Malaysia Plan*, p. 1.
- <sup>5</sup> S. Gordon, "Social Implications of Communalism", *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- <sup>6</sup> H.S. Leng, "Political Development in the Plural Society", a paper presented at a seminar, *Malaysia in Perspective* (Monash University: Aug. 1971).
- <sup>7</sup> P. Cohen, *Modern Social Theory* (1968) p. 16.
- <sup>8</sup> J. Rex, *Key Problems of Sociological Theory* (1961).
- <sup>9</sup> The following discussion on these theories is based on Percy Cohen's work, *op. cit.*
- <sup>10</sup> E. Durkheim, "The Rules of Sociological Method" (1950) pp. 2-3 in P. Cohen, *op. cit.*
- <sup>11</sup> D. Lockwood, "Social Integration and System Integration", in *Symposium on Sociological Theory*, ed. L. Gross (1959).
- <sup>12</sup> D. Lockwood, *ibid.*, pp. 244-245.
- <sup>13</sup> A. Rabushka, "Integration in Urban Malaya: Ethnic Attitudes among Malays and Chinese", in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. VI No. 2 (April '71); and "Integration in a Multi-Racial Institution: Ethnic Attitudes among Chinese and Malay Students at the University of Malaya", in *Race*, No. 1 (July 1969).
- <sup>14</sup> "The Integrative Process: Guidelines for Analysis of the Bases of Political Community", in *The Integration of Political Communities* ed. Philip E. Jacob and James V. Toscano (1964) pp. 1-45, in Rabushka, "Integration in Urban Malaya ....", *ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Rabushka, *ibid.*, p. 93.
- <sup>16</sup> A. Rabushka, "Integration in a Multi-Racial Institution ....", *op. cit.*
- <sup>17</sup> Aida A. Khan, *Some Aspects of Cultural Integration in West Malaysia*, paper presented at the Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 4 Oct. 1973.
- <sup>18</sup> A. Mazrui, *Pluralism and National Integration*, already discussed in Chapter One.

## NINE

# Conclusion

### Solutions to the Problems of Ethnic Pluralism

One task of the Malaysian government is to find a formula to solve the problem of ethnic pluralism that would directly affect the goal of national integration. The two are in fact complementary.

In general, solutions to ethnic pluralism can be seen along a continuum ranging from complete avoidance at one end to complete assimilation at the other.<sup>1</sup> Avoidance as considered here is ridding the social system of unwanted elements. In its extreme form, it can be racial extermination or genocide, as undertaken by Hitler against six million Jews in Germany during the Second World War. Another form of avoidance is the expulsion of non-citizens from a country, such as the expulsion of some 80,000 Indians, who were British subjects, from Uganda. A milder form of avoidance is deporting unwanted elements to their countries of origin. Such was the case of some Asian migrants sent back to their original countries by Britain, of Chinese to China by the Indonesian government some time ago, and even that of unwanted Chinese elements in pre-war Malaya by the British Government then.

In some cases, minorities are allowed to stay in the social system (i.e. country) but citizenship is not granted. This is the case of some Chinese in the Philippines. In cases where trouble breaks out between the indigenous and the immigrant groups, sending immigrants back to their homeland appears to be an expedient solution.

Next along the continuum is separation because different ethnic groups cannot live together in harmony and must therefore be separated. An example is apartheid in South Africa. Racial and communal groups are divided and separated

in a form of hierarchial status similar to that of the caste system in India. This is enhanced by separate dwelling areas, occupational specialization, and even separate public utilities. But this solution is unpopular considering that the 20% White minority has 67% of the national wealth while the 80% Coloured and Black majority has only 33% of the country's wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Next along the continuum is pluralism. This is again the case in South Africa today and in colonial Malaya. In Malaya, the three races lived in cultural apartheid and no assimilative policy was pursued. Plurality includes separate dwelling areas, geographical separation as well as occupational specialization along racial lines (the Malaysian plural society is now at a depluralizing stage).

Another solution to the problem is what has been termed as accommodation, also sometimes referred to as pluralism. In this case, various communities are left on their own through a *laissez faire* policy. The immigrants are allowed to retain their original identity and to live a separate way of life not conforming to any national norm and values.

At the other end of the continuum is assimilation, the opposite of separation and avoidance. This is often considered the most difficult solution although in the long run it is the most effective and beneficial solution to ethnic pluralism. It is difficult as it places high demands on the individuals and especially on the immigrant groups.

Most studies of the Malaysian case consider a solution to lie between accommodation and assimilation.<sup>3</sup> The policy of accommodation was particularly relevant between 1957 and 1969. There was at that time almost no policy to deal effectively with the problem of ethnic divisiveness although some assimilative policies were drawn up, such as the national language and the national education policies. Perhaps, a period of ten years has to be given to allow time for people to learn and be acquainted with the national language.

However, during integrative revolution a more positive step was taken by the government to define and implement some policies towards a solution of ethnic pluralism. At this juncture, the formula seems to be a policy of partial assimilation, the

policy that falls between continued accommodation and complete assimilation. A policy of continued accommodation is unpopular for it encourages communal divisions and conflicts which often threaten the viability of the Malaysian nation. On the other hand, complete assimilation is almost impossible to attain because of the presence of religion as a major obstacle to intermarriage. Further, the attachment of Chinese and Indians to their own traditions is strong and is enhanced by their desire to preserve their separate identities.<sup>4</sup>

The integrative process at the moment is towards a partial assimilation into a Malay culture which has been defined as the national culture of Malaysia. Partial assimilation requires socialization and indoctrination of common values and the learning and adopting of some basic elements of culture commonly shared by the three major races in Malaysia. This could be done possibly through institutional socialization in schools as well as through the mass media. The process should be started at childhood.

<sup>1</sup> Simpson and Yinger laid down six alternatives which relate to the policy pursued by the dominant group towards a minority:

- |                                      |                           |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (i) Assimilation                     | (iv) Population transfer  |
| (a) Forced                           | (a) Peaceful transfer     |
| (b) Permitted                        | (b) Forced migration      |
| (ii) Pluralism                       | (v) Continued subjugation |
| (iii) Legal protection of minorities | (vi) Extermination        |

— quoted from J. Rex, *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* (1970) p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Van Den Berghe, *Race and Racism in South Africa* (1967).

<sup>3</sup> For examples, see K. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process*; R.S. Milne, *Government and Politics in Malaysia*; C.H. Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics*; etc.

<sup>4</sup> For examples, see Ju-Kang Tien, *The Chinese in Sarawak* (1953); V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Modern Malaya* (1960); and V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (1978 reprint).

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