



## **Explaining the May 9<sup>th</sup> Regime Change in Malaysia: Ethnic Boundary, Social Differentiation, National Ethos and Political Changes**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Malaysia is a product of a post-colonial plural society. However, under the influences of development, migration and technological changes, the plural society characters of the nation have undergone social transformation from one of a compartmentalized society by language, culture, religion and economic vocation into a diverse society. However, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the tradition of Furnivall's plural society may not be able to explain the fluidity and dynamism of contemporary Malaysia. Ethnic and religious dimensions may define the ethnicised society but to argue that such a society is a plural society may not do justice to explain the shift from ethno-religious concerned are being embedded with civic spaces of justice, inclusivity and participative democracy of the Malaysian diverse society. This article grapples with the constraints of the Furnivall tradition by introducing the conceptual framework of ethnic boundary in the tradition of Barth and the theoretical framework of the sociology of modernization and development in understanding and explaining the social changes taking place in Malaysia. Ethnic identity still prevails but it has thinned as an influence on social action. Studies show that social cohesion dominates the relationship of the diverse ethnic groups that shared a common norm, showing greater similarities rather than differences and under such social differentiation in the society, they relate to one another horizontally and least vertically.

### **KEYWORDS**

Plural Society, Ethnic Boundary, Social Differentiation, Nation.

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of nations must be understood by contextualizing it within the larger phenomenon of ethnicity which shaped them. Once formed they tend to be very durable despite factors such as changes in history like migration, invasions, or inter-marriages. Thus, nation has an ethnic origin, an ethno-nationalism and an ethno-symbolism with a *longue dureé* existence. It thus, can even persist over many generations and centuries. (Malesevic 2018). As development generates commercialized and industrialised, middle classes and cosmopolitan life, Malaysians were exposed to a culture of modernity in which the ethnic origin of the nation has saw a growing embeddedness with a civic dimension in the society. These civic values of the culture of modernity could be observed in the emergence of a social movement in the 1990s that cut across ethnic, religious, NGO and opposition political party that the government of the day. This study focuses on May 9, 2018 as the election results, since independence of 1957, saw a regime change from UMNO-dominated Barisan Nasional to Pakatan Harapan Government. Modern forces transform them but never obliterate. This means, ethnic identities change very slowly. However, no group maintains itself. The birth of the Reformasi movement after the detention of Anwar Ibrahim in 1998 in the midst of the Asian Crisis is the precursor to this political change but it also showed that Malaysia lagged behind 20 years of Indonesia in bringing a regime change. In Malaysia, political change does come later than development gained as the issues are not solely ethnic but also the concerned for nationalism and nation. Failures to understand and to explain the political underpinning of a nation may contribute to a continuous contestation of the nation and its political instability that would impede progress.

## ETHNIC BOUNDARY, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Malaysia is a host nation in which indigeneity, Malays, natives of Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak, are recognised and accepted and stipulated in the Federal Constitution. Being a post-colonial nation, development and migration have created a plural society in which each ethnic group lives in their own compartment, separated and isolated from one another. National elections in the 1960s are reflective of such society as ethnic voters voted for their own ethnic leaders and such national elections are portrayed as 'ethnic census'.

But with development, migration and technological advances triggered by New Economic Policy brought social changes and social transformation in the society. Social changes transformed Malaysia into a commercialised-industrial, middle classes and cosmopolitan nation as the decade of 1990s ended. With such structural changes, the Malaysians, may take pride in their ethnicity, but the cultures of modernity have developed universalistic values and social actions

that are civic and in nature. In their daily life, ethno-religious parameter is secondary as a motivation of social action but concern for human rights, freedom of speech, social justice, inclusivity, good governance and democracy. With such cultures of modernity, they share not only universalistic norms but greater similarities of public opinions rather than differences. Their relationship is not vertical by concerned of ethnic and religious interests, but a cross-cutting social ties motivated by universalistic and relationship are horizontal in nature. The sharing of universalistic norms, sharing of public opinions and horizontal relationship dominates the socially differentiated Malaysian society (Mansor 2012).

## **EXPLAINING MAY 9**

However, the political behaviour and voting patterns may not reflect the everyday experience of the nation. Data indicate that the Chinese have been consistent in voting against BN since 1990. The Indians have been pro-BN but in the National General Election of 2012 and 2018 are shifting their political choices toward Pakatan Harapan. Malays voters are the late political changers, always voting BN but only in National General Election of 2018 they voted the Pakatan Harapan (Nadzri 2018).

On May 9, 2018 PH manages to gain a simple majority to wrestle Parliament from BN with 50.1 per cent, a popular vote of 48 per cent, only 26 percent Malay votes, the rural area and the Quran Belt of Kelantan and Terengganu are not represented by any PH legislator.

The result of the National General Election 2018 shows that ethnic group could maintain the ethnic boundary despite the social differentiation because of a structuring of interaction governing situations of contact that allow for articulation between groups in some sectors or domains of activity as well as insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification. With such a conceptual framework, understanding the underlying process of nation-building where nation is a more self-conscious community than ethnicity; formed from one or more ethnicities and identified with a literature of its own, a claim or right to political community and autonomy as a people, and together controlling a specific territory is utmost importance (Umut 2010). Nation is thus a 'continuation over time of a relatively uniform territorial culture' and primordial in nature.

What Smith and Connor discuss relating to ethnicity, nationalism and nation will be analysed based on the forms of the nation, Malay-indigenous hegemony, historical trajectory of the nation, nation of intent and the guardian of the nation

## FORMS OF NATION

Conceptually, the form of nation of a host country such as Germany, France, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, among others, do recognise and accept indigeneity as the core of the nation. In such a host nation, the local community defined the hegemony. In the form of nation of the settler society, such as USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, the migrant community that control the economy, politics and military would reject and deny the position of the indigeneity (Mansor 2011).

However, the policy of nation building in the two form of nation differ from one another. The settler society espouses slogan of liberty, equality and egalitarian and propagates a multiculturalism policy of nation building but defining the hegemony according to the dominant settler community with Anglo-Celtic and French in Canada, WASP in USA, Anglo-Celtic in Australia and New Zealand and Chinese in Singapore. In the host society, the indigenous group defined the hegemony of nation as its basis of the nation such in England is the British, France the French, Germany the German, Thailand the Thai, Indonesia the Indonesian etc. In these host nations, unity is uniformity and even a diverse population is one. The host nation does not accept diversity while in the settler nation, diverse is recognised though the hegemonic community defined the core of language, culture and religion of the nation.

Malaysia is a host society likes her ASEAN neighbours, but in term of nation building choice taken is not assimilationist in which the diversity of the society is recognised and accepted just as the position of the indigenous population of the nation. The core of nation is the Malays, Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak, Islam as the religion of the Federation, Malay language as the national language and Positions of the Malays, Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak are stipulated in the Constitution as well as the protection of the interests of the other minorities in Article 153 (Abdul Aziz 2001, Shamrahayu 2006, Nazri 2017, Wan Ahmad 2018). The other minorities are unified with the core of the nation on the integration platform in which Malays, Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak and the Chinese, Indians and others are citizens of the nation, Malay language as the language of national unity as the official language and other mother tongues are accepted to be learn and practised, Islam as the official religion of the Federation and other religious can be practised in peace and harmony and the affairs of Bumiputera Sabah and Sarawak be ensured and a continuous socio-economic engineering to ensure societal well-being attainable as well as the other minorities interests be guaranteed by the King. Thus, the Malaysian Federation Constitution is a constitution with a national spirit of integration of her

diverse languages, culture, religions and socio-economic equality be managed. The Federation of Malaya and Malaysia Constitution is a product of the historical choice of not only the multi-ethnic founders of the nation but reflected the political struggles embedded in the society during the pre-independence bargaining and negotiation taking place (Ratnam 1965, Simanjuntak 1969, Mohammed Nordin 2005).

## **MALAY-INDIGENOUS HEGEMONY**

In the Malaysian case, Malaysia is a failed nationalism (Rustam Sani 1994 and 2008) and did not get a Malay nation. The Federal Constitution of Malaya 1957 and Malaysia 1963 do recognise and accept indigeneity but with the acceptance of the migrant communities of Chinese and Indian as citizens of the nation. The Malay defined the hegemony but of a multi-ethnic nation. Shamsul AB (1996) and Abdul Rahman (2002 and 2006) thinks Malaysia is a state without nation. The development of Malaysian as a state is a success model with a high growth rate and declared by UN that Malaysia will attain the developed nation status that saw the changing nation into modern industrial, cosmopolitan and middle classes society. But the nation is elusive and unfinished project as described by Shamsul AB (1996) as the ethnic groups still contested 'the nation' though gained her independence 61 years old ago. However, to understand the elusiveness of the nation, study of a changing Malaysian nation must be located along *la longue duree* analysis.

The pace of development spurred by global capitalism and globalization being digitalized saw Malaysian society under continuous social change and transformation. Under such a changing social scenario, Malaysia ethnic relations can be observed to have changed from being a 'diverse' society in its pre-colonial days in which the political system was characterized by Malay empires and sultanates, to a 'plural' society. The British who were governing the Malay Peninsula under the pretext of protectorates, treaties and purchase, brought in laborers from India and China to man the economy. Thus, as the nation progressed towards independence from colonial rule, the discourse of a Malay nation in rejecting the Malayan Union Proposal gives way to Malay hegemony in a multi-ethnic society. The political make-up of a Malay hegemony in a multi-ethnic society of the nation was defined with the promulgation of the Federation of Agreement in 1948 and Federation of Malaya in 1957. With the formation of Malaysia in 1963, Malay hegemony in a multi-ethnic society gave way to an indigenous hegemony in a multiethnic society as the natives of Sabah and Sabah are also the of indigeneity of the nation. The changing hegemony of the multi-ethnic nation from a Malay to an indigenous ethno-nation was an authority defined act and done through negotiation and consultation in

arriving at a consensus and the spirit of integration as stipulated in the constitution of Malaysia (Andaya and Andaya 2001).

However, the rapid economic development from mid-1970s to 2000s and the impacts of the social engineering taken have socially transformed the members of society from an ethnically defined nation to embed herself with greater dimensions of a civic nation of justice and inclusivity of a socially differentiated society, irrespective of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious origins. Thus, Malaysian society today is a socially differentiated in which ethno origin of the nation are embedded with the universalistic norms and practices characteristic of civic choices. Under the changing society and hegemonic position of the nation, the process of the country's nation building saw an emerging national ideology of an indigenous civilisational canopy within a diverse society where justice, inclusiveness, freedom and democracy override the concern for ethnic differences in the society is observed (Mansor 2014).

### **HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF THE NATION**

However, at the state level, geo-political cultural that influences the promulgation of the Constitution and governance of the nation show that there are variations and need the understanding of the underlying process in analysing their political behaviours (Kassim 2002). The different historical trajectory and development experienced indicate that Malaysia can be grouped into five (5) political cultural zones, viz., 1. The Quranic Belt, 2. The Culture Belt, 3. The Development Belt, 4. Sabah Belt and 5. Sarawak Belt.

The Quranic Belt from Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu in which they are Malays but the dominant parameter is religion rather than Malay language and culture (Kessler 2012). Even the Chinese community that resides in this zone is valued based in their behaviour preferences. The states in this zone were themselves strong with Islamic governance, was influenced by the Pattani Empire, these states were also vassal states of Siam, then British co-opted through Anglo-Siamese Treaty in 1909 and the Japanese Occupation administered them as a unit during the Second World War. The British also administered these states since 1826 as the Unfederated Malay States and until today, except Perlis, have their own state civil service. Development wise, these states are paddy producer of the nation. Paddy cultivation is often associated with the poverty. These states lag in development, lack industrial activity, export their productive manpower to the other states in the west coast of peninsula and the size of their Gross Domestic Product are relatively smaller compare to the other states (Nungsari 2009). Thus, with such historical trajectory and development gap show that politically these

states are the definer of the position of Islam and morality in public policy, governance and the voting pattern preferred.

The Cultural Belt of the Malays is Johor. Johor is populated by various sub-ethnic Malays from Malay, Javanese, Bugis, Arab, Banjar etc., that gives the cultural richness of the Malays (Kassim 2002). UMNO as the principal Malay political organisation was born in the royal place of Johor that united the Malays nationally. The Johorean are the defender of Malay culture and any transgression, including when Malay Language is not being uphold in public will be criticised and be rejected, if any attempt to place it at par with the other languages.

The Development Belt covers the states of Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca (Khoo 1991). Historically, these states were organised by the British as the Strait Settlement that comprise Malacca and Penang and the Federated Malay States of Perak, Pahang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. Thus, with a modern state structure based on rational, legal and institutional capacity building, these states received exposure to western education, cash-oriented activities as tin mining, rubber plantation, business, trading and industry. Malay language, culture and religion are still the properties that defined them as Malays, but concern for development that bring along good quality of life and social mobility is utmost in their minds. This belt has a head start from the other belts in Malaysia, including Johore, are thus industrial, cosmopolitan middle class of the nation.

The Sabah Belt was once part of the Sulu Sultanate and leased by the Northern Borneo Company (Milne and Ratnam 1974, Ranjit Singh 2000, Mohammad Agus 1992). With a business goal-oriented, displacement of the indigenous group of Kadazan, Dusun, Murut, Bajau, Suluk, Kedayan, Lun Bawang, Orang Sungai, among others, from cash crop economy, business and commercial activities. The British and the Chinese control the economy and reside in the urban areas around the ports. Culturally the British, the Chinese and the indigenous groups, especially that migrated to the urban areas, would benefit from the fruits of development that exposes them to the cultural of modernity. With the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the natives of Sabah shared the indigenous position stipulated in the Federal Constitution with the Malays but found themselves socio-economically displaced in comparison with the peninsular and the Malays. Thus, Sabahan feel that developmentally they are marginalised and their indigeneity position are denied. Politically, such exclusions have generated dissatisfaction with Putrajaya, especially the non-Muslim Bumiputera who tended to be pro-opposition and with their Muslim Bumiputera trigger a move 'Sabah Leave Malaysia Movement'. As the result of the General National Election 2018 shows that issues of



leadership, governance, development and politics of identity saw Sabah fell to the opposition Warisan political party and the demised of UMNO.

The Sarawak Belt was ruled by a Brooke family. Political culture of paternalistic leadership is trusted to lead the state (Steven Runciman 1960). State leadership that manages the welfare of its citizens well will be supported. But nearing the end of Taib Mahmud's Chief Ministership issues of corruption, governance and development failures saw him stepped down to become the Governor of Sarawak. His successor, Adnan Satem, attacked corruption in the state and rode on the growing 'Movement of Sarawak Leave Malaysia'. The problems faced by Sarawak in relations with Putrajaya and Bumiputera position are a replica of the Sabahan; national leadership, governance, development and the politics of identity. In the State Election in 2016, BN won the state assembly but in the General National Election 2018 parliamentary seats were won by the opposition parties of DAP and PKR and that saw BN lost at the Federal level. Thus, Sabah and Sarawak lost their 'fixed deposits' for BN because their failed the Sabahan and the Sarawakian discussed above.

The analysis of the geo-political culture of the five (5) belts above show that development, technology and migration may have produce a socially differentiated society but historical trajectory and development experiences differ from one another, the more conservative belt of Sabah, Sarawak and the Quranic Belt will play the game of primordialism such as mobilising the politics of ethnicity and religion.

## **NATION OF INTENT**

The Constitution concluded reflect the contestation of nation of intent among the Malays, the British, the Chinese and Indians. The nation of intent of the Malays were split into a nationalist that was supported by the Sultan, aristocrats, and bureaucrats that formed UMNO, the religious scholars desired an Islamic State formed PAS and a third group with a socialist ideology that planned an independence Malaya with Indonesia formed a Socialist Party of Malaya (SPM) (Gullick 1964). The contestations of the three nations of intent among the Malays can be observed to prevail until today. PAS political discourse is still an Islamic state, UMNO is the Malay nationalist party and the Socialist Party (SP) changed into Socialist People Party of Malaya (SPRM), then merging with PKR. While, the Chinese and Indians were more concerned with independence in their own country. But the Committee Liaison Community brought the Malay, Chinese and Indian elite to bargain and negotiate among themselves that saw a Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) were formed and contested in the first pre-independence GNE of 1955. With the Formation of Malaysia



1963, the People Action Party of Singapore entered Malaysian political scene and brings a slogan of 'Malaysian Malaysia'. In 1965 Singapore was expelled from Malaysia and PAP political ideology was continued by Democratic Action Plan (Mohammed Nordin 2005).

## **GUARDIAN OF THE NATION**

With such geo-political perspective of the nation, the guardianship of the nation based on a national ideology of an indigenous civilisational canopy within a diverse society will determine the voting patterns of the Malaysians. The guardianship of the nation is a Malay leader that are identified as competence, integrity, moderate and acceptable to all the ethnic group. Thus, the opposition political parties have been contesting against BN as an individual party up to 1995 and these parties did not dent the two-third majority Parliamentary seats of BN. With a limited number of Parliamentary seats, the opposition cannot influence the direction of Parliament under the control of BN. With a guardian of nation yet to emerge from 2000 onward, without a change of regime, therefore, whatever weaknesses of BN, UMNO, governance and development identified remain unresolved.

The guardianship of the nation to the Malay is characterised by 'can the Malays interests and Islam be protected'. Malays found trusting the Chinese and Indians to be the guardianship of nation as an ethno-religious risk as they are a not Muslim and being stereotyped as a reluctant Malaysia for questioning the core of the nation. Malays are also fearful of a Malay who work with DAP but turns out is 'a horse to be ridden by DAP'. The search for the guardianship of the nation among the Malay leaders were an unfinished business with Anwar is in jailed, Muhyiddin was suggested as an alternative but not acceptable to the Chinese. He was rejected by the Chinese as they saw him as the person that did not the United Examination Certificate to be accepted for admission to Malaysian public higher institution learning while he was the Deputy Prime Minister under BN. Wan Azizah and Mukhriz were also mooted, but considered 'weak leaders', and the Malays reject them fearing that they could be a horse ridden by DAP. With no potential leader to be the guardianship of the nation acceptable to all, PH leadership has agreed to Tun Mahathir, despite his age and the scandal baggage during his previous Prime Ministership, to be the President of PH and the Prime Minister in-waiting if they were to win GNE 14. This search for the guardianship of nation must be a Malay who is competence to ensure Malays and protect Islam. To the Chinese and Indians, he too should be a competence Malay but a moderate that bring along development and good governance to ensure progress and societal well-being with social justice and inclusive to all.

Initially, Tun Mahathir was not well received by his critics, among the scholars and Chinese business community, who were critical of his New Economic Policy, affirmative action public policy implemented and strengthening the position of Islam during his previous Prime Ministership (Jomo 1990, Jomo and Gomez 1999, Jesudason 1989, Funston 1980). However, the masses, especially the Chinese and Indians, have thrown their towel to support Tun Mahathir and been attending his political campaigns across the country as they saw cost of living, GST and, especially, the corruption scandal of 1MDB declared by Department of Justice, USA, as a worst form of kleptocracy; stealing the wealth of the nation. Najib popularity as a Prime Minister has been on the decline, as studies prior to the General National Election 13 and 14 show that his popularity touched rock bottom (Mansor 2014). Research of General National Election 2008 has shown that Malay voters who are middle class and cosmopolitan have been embracing democratic, human rights and universalistic norms have been deciding to vote against BN and UMNO just to teach the leader' (Johan Saravanamuttu 1992 and 2016). They were observed to be involved in NGO and reformation movement as well as opposition politics (Weiss and Saliha 2003).

The acceptance of a guardianship of the nation in the person of Tun Mahathir and a referendum of Najib vis-à-vis Tun Mahathir saw people tsunami flow toward voting PH and the downfall of BN and UMNO. However, failures to gain votes from the Malays, the rural areas and the Quranic Belt mean PH capability to bring about comprehensive change would be limited during its governance of the nation.

The analysis of the people tsunami saw PH to be the new ruling government indicates that Malaysians may be socially differentiated and a thinned ethnic boundary, but PH did not manage a clear-cut popularity vote, the ethnic votes obtain from the pattern PH managed to obtain the biggest votes from the Chinese and Indians and the least from the Malays. Thus, the election results show the voting patterns observed are socially differentiated but the significance of ethno-religious among the Malays is still ethnically differentiated. This means the new government must manage the ethnic distrust and risks prevail among the Malay population for not voting PH and the other ethnic groups too as the reasons for voting PH to ensure good ethnic relations do not spiral-downward the stairs.

The election results indicate that social differentiation and the thinning of the ethnic boundary may define the social landscape of the nation, but voting preferences are not decided solely on good governance, development, justice and inclusivity. With rural-urban disparities by income, poverty and employment opportunity are getting bigger in the rural areas of Perak, Pahang,

Kelantan, Kedah, Terengganu and Perlis inhabited by the Malays put the new PH government in quandary. While the historical trajectory of the Quran Belt that includes Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu will further being compounded by their religious conservatism with bad governance and development failures still exist will dominate electoral behaviour of these states. PAS garnered Malay votes to retain Kelantan, retook Terengganu from BN and a substantial state seats in Kedah and Perak to become a second force in that states indicate that the voters belong to a moral constituency. The voters are the definer of the moral compass of the nation. Obviously, the Development Belt from Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca are voters who are concerned with the cultural of modernity and would be at ease with PH government who are taking actions against corruption and abused of political power. While Sabah and Sarawak point their finger to failure of development, marginalization by the federal government and the sidelined by the Malay-based politics that did not do justice to them as the sons of the soil as stipulated in the Federal Constitution.

### **The Formula for Managing Social Cohesion and Nation Building**

Connor (1972, 1994 and 2004) argues the nation state demands our understanding of i. human nature and ii. legitimation. Human nature relates to ethnic, religious and extended kinship as well as defined the expression of ethno-nationalism and immortality of the nation. While the state must ensure social justice, inclusivity and democracy in managing governance and development of the country.

The Malay world never knew the application of a racialised ideology based on blood. Social exclusion is often politically motivated based on ethnic and religious origins as they compete to avail themselves to societal resources and social prestige. Thus, ethnic and religion come to prevail because the rich and powerful mobilise these parameters to guarantee their material and status (Mansor 2012). Meanwhile the poor and powerless mobilise these parameters to gain attention and action from the powers that be to solve their precarious life situations. Thus, the manipulations of the ethno-religious dimension lead to the politicisation of social life, divide groups and the nation.

Since ethnicity is employed as a resource in the context of competition for access to scarce resources, there will prevail in the society polarisation along the axes of ethnicity, religion, rural-urban residence, education, development, income group, gender, generation, human rights, political affiliation, governance and national ethos that need to be regularly studied.

Thus, in Malaysia good governance and development vis-à-vis nation building are given priority by the founders of the nation. National unity is a product of managing development and good governance justly and inclusively. The proven formula for ensuring development and good governance that needs to be practised at the national level and supported by a political culture of negotiation, bargaining, dialogue and mediation is to ensure that the concern for giving preference to ethnicity and ethnic exclusion be managed, relative to other sociological categories and universalistic norms, in motivating social action and managing the nation (Faadland, Parkinson and Rais Saniman 1990, Leete 2007).

Nation building will always be an unfinished project in Malaysia, as its maritime peninsular location and ethnic composition that is not totally clear-cut along numerical advantage, especially by economic and political control, thus, assimilation as the basis of nation-building is not an option.

Of concerned also in the governance of Malaysia that has not only different ethnic origins but also religious differences that must be tread justly (Mansor 2005). Islam is the religion of the Federation and at the state level, the Sultans is the head of Islam. Prior to colonial penetration of the Malay world, religion is a way of life and comprehensively practiced. The British entered the Malay peninsula through treaties with the Malay Sultans separates politics from religion. Mahathir reintegrates Islam from politics in governing the nation that saw the practice, the infrastructure and institutional building of Islam was completed during his premiership (Mahathir and Hashim 2000, Schottmann 2018). The role of religion in national development and national-building proofs positive as Obama identify Malaysia as a progressive moderate Islam nation.

The approach Malaysia takes is unlike the western experience nor the Iranian model (Mansor 2005). Religion is central to managing Malaysia but the country is not a secular state that reject religion in public space nor a theocratic state that gives religion as the final arbiter of the decision made by the legislative. In Malaysia, the bureaucratic approach of religious matters practiced by Malaysia government neutralizes the controversial interpretation of Islam in real life. In Malaysia, the richness of ethnic and religious differences has been recognized and regarded as assets of the nation. Just as the government has been managing Islam, other religions should also be administratively managed in ensuring that these religions could be practiced in harmony and peace.

As good ethnic relations need to be constantly managed, various programmes implemented and instruments developed to measure the 'health' of ethnic relations of the nation. Only

through an evidence-based reading of the patterns and intensity of ethnic relations in the society can one ensure that appropriate policy, strategies and programmes be developed in strengthening harmony, peace, stability and the progress of the nation. Good ethnic relations must be nurtured.

## CONCLUSION

Malaysia as a society and a nation as Smith argues have an ethnic origin (Smith 1971). Nation-building of Malaysia has her ethnic root in the Malay Archipelago, the Malacca Empire, the Malay Sultans and in the post-war British's Malayan Proposal that was rejected by the Malay as the ethnic origin and nation of intent aspired by the Malays is a Malay nation. Post-war historical development placed Malays relationship, especially with Chinese, on a conflictual path. A political culture of bargaining and negotiation among the ethnic elite was nurtured through the Committee Liaison Community that saw political development in the nation produces a political power-sharing and consociational politics until today (Lijphart, 1997 and 1999, Nurshuhada, 2015 and 2018).

With development, migration and technological changes, the diverse society of Malaysia experienced social changes and transformation that saw industrial, cosmopolitan and middle classes life produced similarity of culture and a socially differentiated society. Ethnic boundary of Malaysians is thinned and ethnicity as a group determinant of behaviour is secondary. This social transformation of the society indicates that Malaysia that begins as an ethno-nation but with good governance and development delivered saw the increasing embeddedness of civic dimensions such as democratic principle, human right, justice, equality and social inclusivity in the public space (Qudsia 2020).

Malaysia is a host nation that has a core-element of indigeneity but integrated her diverse population as reflected in the Federal Constitution that upholds integration rather than assimilation in her approach to nation-building (Ray 2020). Development and social equality are the basis in ensuring the moderation and social cohesion of the diverse society as they grapple to attain national unity. It's not nation-building that being given the priority but good governance and development in ensuring social cohesion, moderation, national unity and national integration to prevail.

Though the process of political change begins since 2000, the General National Election 2018 in which development failures, bad governance and corrupt leaders saw BN and UMNO was dethroned from power to be replaced by PH, proof that this ethno-nation embedded herself

with civic dimensions that characterised Malaysian society has embraced a culture of a matured, democratic and developed world.

The above analysis indicate though, Malaysia is a host nation with an ethno-origin, social transformation taking in the society triggers by development and good governance has embedded itself with greater civic dimensions and embracing a plurality of cultures to ensure the country is socially cohesive stable and progress. Future studies on electoral behaviour and political change would have to take into account the above national and nationalism discourses apart from the fluidity of ethnicity and the interaction with modernity and civic spaces in ensuring Malaysia will be peaceful and progressive.

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