

SPATIAL DIVISION AND ETHNIC EXCLUSION: A STUDY OF ETHNIC RELATIONS IN MALAYSIA

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摘要

这份报告是从空间与历史的视角出发去讨论马来西亚里的族群关系。它主要是探索殖民与后殖民时代的发展政策与不同的族群社会之间的链接关系。叙述了在马来西亚的三个历史发展时期期间所采用的主要发展政策, 为不同的族群之间的空间隔离带来了影响。这些在殖民统治期间、传统与当代时期的政策对马来人社会与外来移民, 特别是华人社会的冲击与含义, 在这里都作了一番探讨。

Introduction

Malaysia as a modern nation-state traces its formative stage to the beginning of British colonial rule, starting from Penang island in 1786 and extending completely throughout the peninsula by 1914. In the process of the penetration of British influence, the peninsula itself was fragmented into three political units comprising the Straits Settlements, Federated Malay States (FMS), and Unfederated Malay

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States. In its current form, Malaysia came into existence in 1963 with the merger between the Federation of Malaya and the states of Sabah and Sarawak. The pattern of the past was such that Malaysia acquired an ethnic diversity that is rather unique in that the major ethnic groups are more finely-balanced in number than in most other multi-ethnic countries. From the perspective of history, the process of "nation building" is very much tied up with the management of ethnic relations particularly between the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Ethnic relations may be examined by means of different approaches and perspectives. An early perspective relevant to the Malaysian situation was the theory of "plural society" advanced by Furnivall (1948) to describe colonial societies in which different groups could be living side by side but without mingling. All societies involve some kind of general agreement over values but also involve conflict (Giddens 1997). Hence studies pertaining to ethnic issues in Malaysia tend to adopt the theoretical approach of conflict or that of consensus. In his study of "the roots of race relations in Malaysia", Abraham (1997) argued that colonial rule had resulted in racial tension and conflict. This had largely been due to the "distributional aspects of this (economic) growth" as accruing differentially to different ethnic groups. To Nash (1989), the Malaysian situation in which major ethnic groups are in near parity seems to indicate possibilities for ethnic conflict.

The "consensus" approach is based on the concept of consociation in which leaders of ethnic groups would work towards consent on various differences so as to ensure political stability. Shamsul (1994), in adopting this approach, was careful to avoid the "booby trap" of accepting an "ethnic position" in his discussion by focusing on the interrelationships of crucial factors pertaining to the "military", "ethnic bargaining", and "development planning" to demonstrate how the Malaysian "success story" has been achieved in the post-war period.

Several studies have also been made to examine the role of ethnicity and development. Jesudason (1989) concluded that considerations of short-run ethnic benefits have compromised Malaysia's long-run economic performance. In terms of ethnic relations, he argued that the Malays felt too insecure and weak and, given the competition among Malay elites themselves for political power, it was unlikely that there would be "long-term convergence of interests" between the Malay elites and non-Malay capitalist classes. Jomo (1990) linked the nature of development in the post-independence period to policies of the colonial era. There have also been numerous studies on the ethnicity and development especially with reference to the New Economic Policy (NEP) (see, for example, Horii 1991; Masilamani 1993; Shamsul 1997; Lim 2000).

This study is informed by the assumption that ethnic relations are substantially conditioned by development policies. With the pursuit of "development" as the primary motivation of the colonial and post-colonial Malaysian state, ethnicity has always been central to development policies. By virtue of the past pattern of development initiated by British rule, the role of ethnic relations has thus become inseparable from issues of national development and nation building. Several salient episodes of development have a decisive influence on the economy and society and in turn impact on ethnic relations.

Development is space-specific and intimately tied to the "politics of difference" (between people) arising from the workings of power. But few studies take into special consideration the spatial variable and its role in ethnic relations. During the colonial period up until now, the more significant impacts of development on ethnic relations are the creation and perpetuation of the spatial division of different ethnic groups in specific geographical locations and, arising from this physical "segregation", different ethnic groups adopt exclusionary "markers" to differentiate themselves from others. The purpose of this paper is to examine ethnic relations from the historical perspective of spatial division and ethnic exclusion arising from development policies and to show how manipulations of social and spatial differences by the central authority contribute to the "ethnic approach" to the treatment and management of ethnic relations.

Genesis of Ethnicity

Historically, social relations between the Malays and immigrant groups were "communal in nature and cultural differences (were) extremely marked", and different ethnic groups lived in distinct areas physically separated from each other (Khoo 1974). All these differences were reinforced by and in turn had reinforced spatial separation as well as social exclusion among ethnic groups. The sense of ethnic differentiation arose from both self-identification and externally-imposed categorization, and spatial division among ethnic groups was as much the spontaneous outcome of social and economic behaviour as it was a creation of the hegemonic intentions of the ruling power.

The genesis of Malay ethnicity may be traced to the time of the Malacca sultanate. Nagata (1981) argues that Malay ethnicity is based on both primordial elements of *bangsa* (race) and its notions of a common origin and a shared culture among indigenous groups in the Malay peninsula and the islands of Indonesia. With

the conversion of these groups to Islam, religion took on the force of primordialism as an ethnic charter so much so that to embrace Islam was equated with, and a pre-requisite for, becoming a Malay. On the other hand, immigrant communities such as the Chinese arrived in the Malay peninsula deeply entrenched in ethno-centric ideas about their ancient history and culture and distinguished peoples in surrounding territories by culturally-specific terms. The Malays and Chinese then each saw themselves as members of proud "races" and distinct from one another. Whether meeting face to face or through emerging perceptions of each other, they behaved and saw the "other" with pre-conceived ideas.

The colonial administration confirmed the reality of ethnicity in their policies and reaffirmed through census classifications by means of criteria that reflected official objectives, the most important of which was the principle of "divide and rule", rather than reality, such as internal differences among individual ethnic groups. The census, together with the map and museum, has been dubbed the "institutions of power" by which the colonial state imagined the people and geography of its dominion, and its own legitimacy (Anderson 1991). Census taking was part of the colonial process of expansion and control (Hirschman 1987). "Ethnic" categories could be changed when circumstances demanded. In censuses before 1911, the Malays in the peninsula together with various groups such as Javanese, Bugis and Boyanese were accepted as "Malay races". The Acehnese were excluded possibly because of their rebellious defiance against Dutch domination (Nagata, 1981). In 1947 and 1957, the term "Malaysian" was used instead, only to be replaced by the term "Malay" after the formation of Malaysia in 1963.

The motivation for differentiation during the colonial period, particularly with reference to ethnicity as a "category of cultural consciousness", was aimed at the continuation of power. With British ingenuity in imperial manipulation, they saw the economic potential of different groups of people and set about assigning to each groups not only an economic role but also their spatial "enclosures".

Development and Spatial Division

Despite the often fluid and shifting criteria in ethnic classification, ethnicity features as a central consideration in developmental and official policies. During the colonial period, the attempt to realize the economic potential of the Malay peninsula was built on the twin needs of capital and labour within the a *laissez-faire* economic framework. The free flow of immigrants from China, India and the Indonesian

archipelago rendered labour abundantly available. As in most colonial territories, the administration's "brute fashioning" to "produce and reproduce difference" among the local inhabitants and the large influx of mainly poor and uneducated immigrants became "a key strategy to create and maintain modes of social and spatial division that are advantageous to its continued empowerment" (Soja and Hooper 1993). Development policies were therefore very much coloured by ethnic considerations and in a display to maintain a balance between the different needs of the major communities. The post-independence rationale is one of "consensual" management of differences in the name of nation building. In time, this "cultural politics of difference" is intensified via policies that perpetuate socio-spatial differentiation. Thus the legacy of colonial rule on ethnic relations continues to leave its imprint on Malaysian life.

From the perspective of the implications on ethnic relations, development may be considered in three broad phases. The first was the introduction of incipient *laissez-faire* capitalism characterized by spontaneous pioneering and the formation of a plural society. The second was development during the transitional period between the end of Japanese Occupation and early post-independence years in which "development" was marked by several major episodes with distinctive implications on ethnic relations. The latest phase that began in the 1980s was fuelled by industrialization and accelerated urbanization.

The Colonial Period

With one of the richest tin resources in the world, tin mining became the earliest agent of economic penetration in Malaya. By 1905, the peninsula was producing more than half the world's tin output and generally more than a third until the Second World War. The industry transformed the socio-economic landscape of the Malay States and enhanced the diversification of the social and economic milieu of colonial society.

The impact of the industry on ethnic relations took three major forms. It gave a powerful boost to Chinese immigration and by 1901 there were 302,000 Chinese in the FMS and 436,000 in 1911 (Pountney 1911; Nathan 1922). As tin mining was primarily a Chinese and later Western enterprise, it also intensified economic specialization according to ethnicity. As the mining industry yielded 35-41 per cent of total revenue in the FMS from 1898 to 1908, before dropping to 26 per cent in 1909-1913 and 12-19 per cent thereafter until 1937 (Li 1982), it was tin revenue that

financed the construction of the railway line, which in turn facilitated economic penetration into the peninsula (Amarjit 1985). Socially, the railways provided, in the early twentieth century, an additional means of social differentiation between the colonial and Asian societies.¹ Finally, a settlement hierarchy (see Leinbach 1971) comprising such large towns as Taiping, Ipoh, and Kuala Lumpur as well as smaller ones such as Kampar, Tapah, Rawang, Sungai Besi and Bentong emerged and populated largely by Chinese.

If mining led to ethnic specialization, agriculture intensified the trend. The cornerstone of colonial strategy was anchored on peopling the countryside through agriculture rather than mining. A two-pronged policy was adopted: to open up the hinterland, namely, to promote Malay paddy farming, and to encourage rubber production by European and immigrant communities.

The colonial administrators found in paddy a perfect medium of enticing permanent bondage of the Malay inhabitants to the land. In 1899 an irrigation enactment decreed that areas designated as "irrigation areas" could only be planted with paddy. In Perak, Krian became the first large irrigation scheme for paddy farming in the 1900s where 12,500ha of land were reclaimed by 1906 (Short, D. 1971; Overton 1994). By the end of the 1930s, paddy cultivation in the FMS and in Kedah and Kelantan had expanded to 285,000ha. A total of 400,000 Malay farmers or half the Malay labour force was drafted into this activity and in the process making them the most "specialized" community in the country.

Colonial justification for this ethnically-inspired policy was the belief in the bondage between Malay culture and subsistence farming, its "good intention" being to turn the Malays into "country gentlemen", to insulate them from the undesirable influence of commercial agriculture and therefore to preserve their cultural "identity". By being "trapped" in this "essential" but low-paying crop, the effective outcome was "the biggest cause of poverty amongst the Malays" (Aziz 1956), and understandably a major factor in post-independence Malaysia economic policy and tensions underlying ethnic relations.

To facilitate development, the colonial state erected an institutional framework and infrastructure to create a conducive environment for the investment of capital and labour on a long-term basis. Proof of rubber cultivation as a viable commercial crop had a profound impact on economic and ethnic relations. The rubber industry that became the backbone of the economy was aided by incentives under a system of spontaneous pioneering based on the "commodification" of land as private property. Landownership at once gave rise to a dual economy comprising European capital-intensive plantations and mines on the one hand, and Asian smallholdings

and peasant farming on the other. As an "exchange" item, land made possible the switch from communal use to private use, and from subsistence to commercial production.

Commercial agriculture from the early twentieth century not only transformed the economy but radically altered the ethnic mix of the population. Widespread participation of the Chinese in rubber production widened the economic divide between ethnic groups. By 1916, rubber had replaced tin as the principal export (Li 1982) and maintained this role until the 1960s. The plantations became a new economic unit of production but, as labour made up 40 per cent of production cost, Western plantations could only compete by utilizing very cheap labour. This labour was found in abundance in India, a poor but British-ruled territory. From the late nineteenth century, the annual importation of South Indian labour added another ethnic component to the evolving colonial society. By 1940, there were 218,000 Indians in the plantations or 62 per cent of total estate labour force (Ramasamy, 1994). That most Malays were unwilling to labour under the rigid work regiment of the plantations, but considered by Western capitalists as proof of "indolence" (see Syed Hussein Alatas 1977), ensured minimal interaction with other ethnic groups.

Property rights were a powerful stimulus to capitalist investment but were accompanied by moneylending and indebtedness, land transfers and speculation, and competition between ethnic groups and loss of landownership. The rubber "boom" of 1910 prompted an unhealthy competition for land, and the dispossession of Malay peasants and smallholders. To prevent settled Malay communities from being dislodged from the land, an ethnic-oriented policy was adopted in 1913 in the form of the Malay Reservation Enactment.

The reasons for the creation of these reservations that were spelt out in a memorandum reflected unmistakably the paternalistic attitude towards the Malays. Firstly, the Malays were chided for being "entranced by the visions of lethean (oblivious) pleasures" by "periodically and improvidently divesting himself of his birth-right and inheritance", and thus "surrendering and sacrificing the happiness of a life time". The next was to fault the Indian moneylenders who "now bleed the people" and sending large sums of money back to India. Finally, by setting aside specific areas for the Malays, the colonial power would fulfill its role to "preserve and enrich the Malay population" (*SSF* 3013/1912). The actual cause of land dispossession of the Malays, primarily through the large-scale purchases of land by plantations, was left unmentioned.

This law has since effectively insulated Malay farmers from economic competition and from encroachment by non-Malays. The long-term implications

were less sanguine. The practical outcome of colonial development policy was spatially and historically uneven development resulting from policy bias in locational emphasis. In effect, most Reservations were dispersed in less favourably-endowed and often inaccessible areas. Thus assured of their share of the land, the Malay rural community remained largely divorced from urban and commercial activities and stagnated economically (see Voon, 1976 and 1977).

At the same time, the emerging urban-based economy, primarily the outcome of modern capitalist development that was facilitated by colonial administration and participated by the Chinese, was largely devoid of a Malay presence. The Malays opted to remain scattered in the rural *kampung* (village) out of choice as well as necessity. Firstly, urban living was new and few Malays could find a niche in commercial activities. Secondly, the predominance of ethnically and culturally unfamiliar "others" in the towns was itself a barrier into which the Malays would feel psychologically insecure to enter. Social and economic exclusion was partly enforced by colonial policy (through disincentives in participation in urban-based activities) and by personal preference of Malays to pursue a rural-based way of life.

The result was that urban centres in the west coast states became overwhelmingly non-Malay in character. The colonial government confirmed this by keeping urban Malay Reservations to a minimum. Hence, in the major urban areas, "token" Malay presence was preserved by means of similarly "enclosed" urban reserves. In Kuala Lumpur, two Malay settlements (Kampung Baharu and Kampung Dato Kramat) together form an "urban" village occupying less than 200ha of land in a city covering 93 sq km. Within the enlarged Federal Territory are found four other Malay Reservations located at the fringe of the city. In all, these six areas cover 1,245ha or 5.1 per cent of the federal capital. Similarly in the town that tin built, Ipoh, Malay Reservations occupy 103ha of land or 3.4 per cent of the city council area (Mohd. Azmi 2000).

The Transitional Period

The post-war years up to the 1970s constituted a transitional period in Malaysian development during which several "development" programmes were implemented that served to entrench the spatial division between the Malays and Chinese. Two of these dealt with problems left by the colonial and war periods and another was aimed at laying the foundation for future change. The first two were concerned with rural-based problems, namely, the creation of the New Villages in

the late 1940s and early 1950s and the establishment of land schemes from the mid-1950s. The third episode was the introduction of the NEP in 1970 to redress ethnic disparities through the restructuring of society as well as the launching of a plan to create an industrial economy. These episodes brought about significant re-distributions of ethnic communities which in turn aggravated the physical and social division among them.

After the Japanese Occupation and during the uncertainties of the immediate post-war years, the restored British authority was challenged by a communist armed struggle. The intense standoff between the opposing forces was one of winning the "hearts and minds" of the people (see Clutterbuck 1966; Short, A. 1975; Stubbs, 1989). The situation presented the colonial administrators with a valid reason to isolate the rural populace, but notably the Chinese, from infiltration by and collaboration with the outlawed Malayan Communist Party (MCP). This was accomplished through a massive and hasty operation to concentrate widely scattered rural Chinese settlers and squatters into compact settlements called "New Villages".

For strategic reasons, most of the villages were sited close to district capitals or towns. Among the largest are those found around Kuala Lumpur. In all, half a million rural Chinese were uprooted from their pre-war dwellings and began a new way of life in more than 500 New Villages distributed throughout Peninsular Malaysia (Dobby 1952/53; Sandhu 1964; Nyce 1973; Voon and Khoo 1986).

From the early 1950s, a rural development programme was launched to replant aging rubber holdings, to provide irrigation to paddy areas, to start rural industries, and to open virgin land for settlement (see Snodgrass 1980). All except the last took place *in situ* and contributed to income improvement but left social life very much intact. While the resettlement of rural Chinese inhabitants was effectively a large-scale shifting of population within districts, the land schemes entailed inter-district and inter-state movements involving rural Malay farmers from densely-settled to relatively empty lands.

Land development schemes were undertaken both as a social and economic necessity - to overcome landlessness among Malay peasants, to promote economic development, and to create employment in the face of limited job opportunities after independence. The policy of granting land on a competitive basis was replaced by a form of state control in keeping with rising expectations among the Malays. This led to plantation-type development under official planning and management. The new format of development became institutionalized through federal and state agencies of which the largest is the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) set up in 1956 (see Shamsul Bahrin and Perera 1977).

In contrast to colonial practice, the basic aim of land schemes is to bring the indigenous community into the world of commercial production. This objective became accentuated in a policy switch from the development of individual land schemes in the 1950s and 1960s to regional development projects in a new "resource frontier" in the forested areas of the east coast states of Peninsular Malaysia. Each land development region is implemented according to a plan comprising towns and villages linked by a network of roads (see Johari 1983; Shamsul and Lee 1988; Voon 1992). A class of commercial farmers working its own land and benefiting from a form of central management in the purchase of inputs and marketing of produce symbolizes a new type of Malay-dominated agriculture hitherto unknown in the country. Each land scheme contains a nucleated village to which selected settlers from different districts were shifted. In 1992, FELDA had opened up about 500 land schemes, covering a total area of 900,000ha and producing a quarter of the nation's palm oil and 13 per cent of the rubber (FELDA 1992). Settled in 300 of these schemes are 100,000 families or roughly half a million people.

After the communal clashes of 1969 (see Comber 1983), a watershed new economic policy was introduced in 1970 as a direct answer to the management of inter-ethnic rivalry. The NEP was specifically aimed at uplifting the socio-economic well-being of the Malays and other native communities in a novel development format in which the government would play the role as the trustee of the interest of the indigenous or Bumiputra population. The stated objectives were to achieve national integration and unity through a dual-purpose strategy to eradicate poverty and to restructure society as a direct means to foster an environment of peace and stability.

Development inspired by the NEP has energized Bumiputra mobility both economically and spatially. In terms of long-term significance, the most important change was the shift of educated Bumiputra to urban centres, especially to Kuala Lumpur, brought about by appointments in the higher echelons of the civil service and statutory bodies and the entry of Bumiputra into "non-traditional" employment and professions in industry, finance, commerce and trade (see Onozawa 1991; Lim 2000). Another stream of movement, also urban-biased, was through greatly increased enrollment in public universities to fill places reserved under a "quota" system to remove competition based on academic merit. A third stream of movement, also the largest in number, was into industries. Of the 2.4 million people who migrated internally in the 1970s alone, 64.5 per cent were Malays and half of these were females. Of this volume, 40 per cent of all movements were towards urban and industrial areas, and the rest moved to land schemes or rural industrial

estates (Mehmat 1986).

Urban-industrial Development

The current phase of development from the 1980s is driven by a policy of industrial and urban-biased development and is part of "late industrialization" that began in East Asia from the 1960s. Industrial development had begun in the late 1950s with emphasis on nurturing and protecting import-substitution industries in industrial estates. The 1970s saw the addition of export-oriented industries in free trade zones. The widening of the industrial base through heavy and high-technology industries in the 1980s have since intensified the path of Malaysian industrial progress (Jomo 1990; Anuwar 1992; Jomo and Edwards 1993).

Spatially, the repercussions of this process are seen in the demand for supporting infrastructure, urban growth through suburban expansion, and the inducement of population movements. At the social level, urbanization is associated with the emergence of a "middle class" showing many outward signs of a "westernized" lifestyle. State-aided mobility has effectively accelerated the urbanization of the indigenous and to raise the proportion of the indigenous population in large urban centres. From 27 per cent of the population in urban areas with 10,000 persons or more in Peninsular Malaysia in 1970, the Malay component rose to 38 per cent in 1980 (Department of Statistics Malaysia 1983). By the year 2000, this figure had reached 44 per cent, and was substantially higher than the 34 per cent comprising the Chinese (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2001). In sharp contrast to the situation in the colonial era, there is now a substantial Malay urban middle-class (Crouch 1994; Abdul Rahman 1996). The effect is to intensify ethnic competition and put ethnic interests into sharper focus than before and involving the younger, in-migrant generation, all committed to seeking employment and improved income in urban areas.

A development of potential ethnic tension is the infusion of large streams of both legal and illegal foreign labour from the poorer neighbouring countries. The predominance of such foreign labour from Muslim countries especially Indonesia, has heightened ethnic awareness among the Chinese. On a more urgent note, the relatively rapid decline in the proportion of Chinese in the total population, dropping from 34 per cent in 1970 to 25 per cent in 2000, has been a cause of concern and timely responses have been made to induce more births through financial incentives.

Ethnic Exclusion

During the colonial period ethnic groups existed independently of each other as components of an emerging capitalist system. Ethno-centric development policies gave rise to separate ethnic societies with cultural and economic predilections but without shared commonalities (see Freedman 1960; Snodgrass 1980). The repercussions were reflected in divergent paths of social transformation and relations that made for greater tendency towards ethnic exclusion.

At the apex were the European elites wielding control through the bureaucrats, planters, miners, and merchants running the agency houses. In keeping with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "scientific" theory of race derived from social Darwinism, Europeans looked upon themselves as the most advanced race on earth, and duty-bound to lead and rule peoples who were less advanced. As a social category, "European" was a status marker that needed separation from the Asian population (Hirschman 1987). Living in "sanitized" conditions and shut off from and shunned open social contact with the "less cultured" Asians, they led a privileged lifestyle replete with the symbols of domination and fully conscious of the need to maintain this imagined superiority, especially vis-a-vis their Asian subjects (see Butcher 1979).

The Malay community was a heterogeneous group sharing a common origin in the Malay world and considered the backbone of permanent population dispersed in traditional "kampung" (Zaharah 1970; Kratoska 1975). The kampung, like the Malay Reservations which are the direct outcome of unequal ethnic relations in economic matters, are bastions of Malay settlements and socio-spatial representations of social exclusion. These spatially "enclosed" Malay land thus become part of the "politics of difference" that separates the Malays from other ethnic groups. They are deliberately dispersed in rural areas to maintain the rural character of the Malay race. The "village economy" was based on simple needs of subsistence farming and social life was centred around the mosque as the spiritual anchor to rural life (see Gullick 1987). The socio-cultural space of the kampung was planned to create a peaceful and idyllic life. Major components of the kampung would be the mosque, a firewood reserve, grazing ground, and burial ground (see Voon 1987).

As the kampung was non-revenue yielding, few received revenue-consuming services such as piped water, telephone or telegraphic services, or good roads. The absence of modern infrastructure and stagnation perpetuated Malay poverty and ethnic inequality in income. This disparity in turn fed on the sense of deprivation

and the perception of exploitation by "others", at the expense of better understanding of and good-will for "others".

The Chinese were also a diverse group divided by dialects and village of origin in China. As migrants, they were sensitive to economic opportunities and gravitated to the towns which soon became the economic and cultural centres of this community. To compete in the new environment, they organized themselves into clan, dialect or occupational associations as the central component of social organization to promote their interests (see Yen 1986).

The Indians too had their exclusive social spaces and occupations in the plantations. As labourers, they had a low social standing serving their European employer-masters. Indian workers were "a factor of production" and an adjunct to the capitalist plantation economy. They never formed vibrant communities nor enjoyed any social mobility. As a "factor of production" with little bargaining power, Indian workers were subjected to sudden layoff at times of depressed rubber prices or readily replenished at times of high demand (Stenson 1980). Outside the plantation economy, however, a small but important caste known as the Chettiars played a leading role as moneylenders and financiers during the early development of the rubber smallholding industry but often earned themselves the image of "loan sharks".

Hence within the colonial setting, ethnicity was a major factor in determining economic functions and social status. Intra- rather than inter-ethnic relations were of greater relevance to daily life. Relations between the Europeans and Asians were twofold and differentiated again with reference to the indigenous and other Asian communities. The social stratification of colonial society was simple and was polarized into the colonial ruling class and the under-privileged Asian communities with an absence of a middle class.

The Asian communities had minimal contact with the colonial class except through limited official or commercial transactions. The Malays served as petty officials and transmitters of official directives and regulations and Chinese traders provided the interface with the European agency houses. The relationship between the colonial administrators and the Malay community was based on paternalism. While the objective of colonial policy was to protect the indigenous community and to make decisions on its behalf, it was often at the expense of the latter's economic interests. As Malay society was introduced to the monetized economy and exposed to the harsh reality of economic forces increasingly linked to the world market, the community was placed in a position of weakness to fend for itself in economic matters. The outcome was persistent economic inferiority, poverty, insulation from

the modern economy for the prize of cultural integrity.

Among the Asian populace, the indigenous and the immigrant Chinese and Indian communities were distinct entities with markedly different cultural backgrounds and economic specializations. There was little interaction and practically no integration between these groups. The minimal direct contact between the indigenous and non-indigenous was confined to petty economic exchange. Official dealings with the Chinese in the early period of colonial rule were conducted largely through the institution of the "Kapitan" or headman system (see Yen 1986). Colonial policy also created a fertile ground for the conduct of petty trade, moneylending and pawnbroking, through which the non-indigenous middlemen extended their dealings among themselves as well as with the Malay community.

These separate communities found themselves situated within a pluralistic setting in which each performed its own economic functions and protected its own cultural and religious identity. This pluralism served the purpose of colonial control in keeping with the principle of "divide and rule". Continuity of this separate existence received firm confirmation with the founding of the New Villages and land schemes.

The New Villages are a creation without precedence in the history of the country or region. In the social sense, the forced re-location of the rural Chinese, many of whom were landless "squatters" living under conditions devoid of basic amenities such as water or electricity supplies, turned out to be a precursor to the "modernization" of the Chinese community. Resettlement provided the conditions to induce new communities enjoying improved security of tenure to their houses and access to basic amenities such as electricity and water supplies for the first time. While retaining their rural character, some residents found work in the towns, and their children received basic education in the village school and later in the towns. These and better conditions were catalysts to change and social transformation of the Chinese community. Location at the urban fringe also accelerated the pace of assimilation into the urban society and the emergence of new social and economic patterns, networks and organizations. Consequently, Chinese participation in mainstream economic activities took place to a much greater extent than would have been possible without resettlement. In fact, many New Villages in major urban centres are now convenient sites for many types of small-scale industries as well as retail business.

Without resettlement, the illegal occupation of land would have persisted and would have constituted a serious handicap to post-independence development

efforts. Under normal circumstances, the resettlement of thousands of legal as well as illegal occupants of land belonging to a single ethnic community would have been a massive social and economic undertaking and almost certainly a highly sensitive and controversial issue. The dispersed pattern of rural Chinese would also have hampered the provision of amenities and economic stagnation and poverty would have persisted. Socially, the continued and often illegal occupation of agricultural land would have impeded the replanting of rubber or conversion of land into alternative and more competitive uses.

By themselves, the New Villages were significant for their economic and social repercussions on ethnic relations. Besides the urban centres, these villages represent a bastion of social exclusion and are clearly perceived to be so by other ethnic groups. Hence they are firmly identified as "Chinese" New Villages and are ethnic social spaces access to which other ethnic groups would not normally seek. In the process of staking exclusion space to the Chinese and allowing a new pattern of life in entirely new social situations, New Villages contribute to spatial polarization as a counterpart of the Malay *kampung* and land schemes.

The land schemes to the Malay community are analogous to the New Villages for the Chinese. Both are similar in terms of number and population size and were policy measures to resolve socio-economic and political problems. This superficial similarity aside, the New Villages and land schemes were born out of different methods of conception. The former was created out of political exigencies as a strategic pawn in the battle against communist ideology while the latter was the child of economic planning conceived to achieve specific development objectives. While the New Villages were left very much to themselves in the conduct of their socio-economic affairs, the land schemes were subjected to the most meticulous development planning that the country has witnessed. A paternalist approach to management was adopted and settlers acted more as workers rather than decision makers (see Shamsul Bahrin and Lee 1988).

From the perspective of landownership and property rights, land schemes are more than Malay settlements like the traditional *kampung*, but function as a modern version of Malay Reservations. Theoretically open to all, the preponderance of Malay settlers is overwhelming. Except for the rare land scheme in which settlers from major ethnic groups have been deliberately recruited, each scheme is an enclave of Malay settlement and cultural space.² The land schemes preceded the NEP as an early form of "development in trusteeship" and subsequently nurtured by it. In theory, settlers may transfer their ownership upon completion of loan repaying. In practice, such transfers are rare and would not cross ethnic boundaries, making

the vast majority of land schemes the bulwark of Malay landownership. In regional development schemes, planned new towns are mono-ethnic in character and large parts of the peninsula are therefore "enclosed" to minimize non-Bumiputra participation.

While the NEP is a bold attempt to re-arrange the economic role of the indigenous communities, its "social engineering" intentions have not necessarily been accompanied by inter-ethnic understanding. The implementation of NEP necessitated the construction of a new ethnic category in order to differentiate those who are eligible for special treatment from those specifically excluded. A composite category known as "Bumiputra" thus came about and has acquired legal and ethnic significance and a central issue in the post-1970 development ideology. Superficially, the NEP was meant to "disintegrate the colonial economic structure" and to deal with ethnic disparities in employment and wealth in what has been termed a "second social contract". In effect it was a policy of "development by trusteeship" to assert "Malay economic nationalism" in an attempt in social engineering to attain stated objectives within a time-span of 20 years (Mehmet 1986; Horii 1991; Zainal Aznam 1994; Shamsul 1997). Indeed, more so than during the colonial era, the NEP institutionalizes ethnicity as a dominant variable in national development.

The NEP objective to restructure society was to raise the economic status of the indigenous community to own at least 30 per cent of the commercial and industrial wealth of the country. A quota system to reflect the relative strength of Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra populations was adopted in the allocation of opportunities in state-run higher education establishments and employment in both the public and private sectors in order to advance Bumiputra participation in the civil service, commerce, industry, education and training. Consequently, the ethnic mix of student populations in public universities is to reflect the national one. Attempts to promote a class of Bumiputra businessmen have prompted government programmes to create separate commercial sectors in most towns and generous subsidies to allow Bumiputras to start businesses.

Recent developments spearheaded by urban-industrial expansion have accelerated unidirectional population flows from the kampung and New Villages to urban centres. Kuala Lumpur in particular, but also Penang, Johor Bahru, Malacca and many other major towns, are accommodating rural out-migrants with industrial and other non-agricultural employment. This phenomenon is associated with the birth of a middle class of urban dwellers. Among the Malays, entry into the middle class is also inseparable from the operation of the NEP through the expansion of the

public sector and enhanced mobility to urban areas (Abdul Rahman 1996; Chin 1998).

Out-migration from the kampung and New Villages are depleting these settlements of economically active inhabitants. Despite the convergence of the young from the kampung and New Villages in urban centres, there is little evidence that the diminution of physical distance between ethnic groups in the new suburban setting is accompanied by a similar reduction in social distance. What is obvious is the replication of a similar pattern of spatial concentration in different housing areas and the perpetuation of the absence of spontaneous inter-ethnic interaction. Adding to the complexity of the urban-industrial society is the proliferation of squatter settlements of less successful in-migrants and foreign workers. These squatter dwellers may well constitute a discontented underclass that has been "rejected" by industrialization.

Ethnic Relations

In the handling of ethnic relations, one may detect a basic continuity in the official position from the colonial period onwards. During the colonial era, spatial division was justified by political ideology and the strategy of "divide and rule". The colonial structure that divided ethnic groups had not been dismantled after independence. Instead, pre-existing administrative arrangements of ethnic separation have intensified. Despite the ability of information technology to transcend physical space, the reality of social space separating ethnic groups is as valid as ever.

Over the years, development policies have given legal and concrete expressions to the harsh reality of social and economic spaces. Historically, ethnic relations have been influenced by three sets of factors pertaining to economic competition, differential political demands, and social-cultural distinctions arising from primordial consciousness.

Economically, in the *laissez-faire* atmosphere of unfettered competition, the Chinese were by far the most successful among the Asian communities. The major towns in the Straits Settlements and FMS were virtually Chinese settlements and the Chinese were almost ubiquitous in commerce and trade. Malays became conscious of their ethnicity in their assessment of situations arising from the economic threat from the Chinese. Some Malays saw their country being "swarmed by foreigners who are affluent and who own all the places and control all industries". Instead, the Malays, the "true sons of the soils" saw themselves languishing in poverty and

working for foreigners (quoted by Khoo 1981). Among the more educated Malays, the prevalent signs of Chinese economic success and dominance aroused fear and self-doubt that gradually crystallized into more critical appraisals of their own economic plight and consciousness of their rights.

The adoption of the NEP and the rationale that drives its implementation may be seen as a watershed in the evolution of ethnic relations. The NEP symbolizes the creation of ethnic "enclosures" in addition to spatial ones. In setting targets and rights of access to economic opportunities and education, the NEP attempts to minimize "unequal" competition between Bumiputra and their stronger rivals. Seen in terms of ethnic relations, the tendency is towards enforced as well as self-imposed social exclusion and polarization. A good example is seen at all levels of education. The existence of schools for different ethnic groups enable parents a choice of medium of instruction and therefore the type of social interaction students would experience. At the tertiary level, the co-existence of the public and private institutions, in which the former uses Malay and the latter uses English in instruction, tends to accentuate ethnic polarization that is evident in the schools. Bumiputra students are averse to joining private colleges and prefer the more familiar environment of studying in the mother tongue. Non-Bumiputra students, on the other hand, may opt to avoid the hurdle of the quota system in admission into public universities, and at the same time to benefit from the freedom and variety of choice of subjects in private colleges and opportunity to earn foreign degrees.

Politically, pre-nineteenth century migration of Chinese into Malaya was largely transient in character and posed no threat to the indigenous people. But later developments were to alter Malay perception. Firstly, the increase in the number of Chinese itself was a source of serious concern. By 1931, the Chinese population in British Malaya had exceeded fractionally that of the Malays (Vlieland 1932: Table 1), a serious enough concern even without considering their domination in many areas of commerce and trade. Furthermore, with the increasing number of local-born Chinese educated in English, the Chinese were making known their disapproval of biased government policies. In the words of Tan Cheng Lock, the doyen of Malayan Chinese leaders before the Japanese Occupation, the "pro-Malay policy" of the colonial government would "create inter-racial disharmony" in the country. Like-minded Chinese leaders were seeking "equal treatment for all" (quoted by Khoo 1981). Lastly, sections of the Chinese community were intimately involved with political events in China and subsequently developed a political consciousness that aimed at challenging colonial authority and indigenous rights. That this challenge was spearheaded by the MCP which led an armed struggle against British

hegemony further exacerbated the already strained ethnic relations of the previous decades (Khoo 1981; Cheah 1981). Finally, the increasing presence of non-indigenous peoples and the heightened consciousness of the pull of "*bangsa*" galvanized the hitherto fragmented Malay communities to think in Pan-Malayan terms and Malay nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s³ (Roff 1967; Khoo 1974).

Despite the fact that from the 1920s to the early 1940s Chinese-Malay relations were becoming increasingly acrimonious, there was no outbreak of violence (Khoo 1981). Political differences came into sharp focus during the Japanese Occupation when Chinese and Malays found themselves in virtually opposite camps. Chinese-dominated anti-Japanese resistance and subsequent anti-British struggle led to Malay fear of Chinese intention of political takeover. But with the end of Japanese Occupation and before the British had firmly re-established their authority, Malay identification of Chinese with the communist movement and Malayan Anti-Japanese Army's ill-treatment of Malay collaborators sparked off widespread and bloody ethnic clashes in 1945 and 1946. These clashes were aggravated by the involvement of groups inspired by Islamic fervour and the ferocity of the clashes inflicted heavy casualties on the Chinese in several localities (see Cheah 1981).

Ethnic solidarity that won independence had led to political co-operation in the government. But dissatisfaction with Malay political hegemony among Chinese opposition parties in the early days of Malaysia and intense Malay reaction were leading causes of ethnic polarization culminating in the communal clashes of 1969. NEP-style development and coalition and "consensus" politics have been practised since then in an attempt to strive for stability under a state of tension (see Shamsul 1994).

Socio-cultural distinctions coupled with primordial sentiments were made more prominent as a result of differences in economic performance and conflicting political agendas among Chinese and Malays. In the pre-war period, Malay intellectuals often came out to rebut Chinese demands for equal treatment as the Malays (as in a memorandum submitted by Tan Cheng Lock to the government in 1932, quoted by Khoo 1981). The Malays resorted to arguments based on primordial markers to assert their claim to special status in Malaya. One of the arguments was that if the local-born Chinese laid claim to indigenous status, they should be studying in Malay rather than Chinese schools. To the Malays, the "rights" of the Malays were derived from the fact that they were "the race that originally ruled the Malay states and the race which first deemed this place their homeland" and not from birth (Khoo 1981).

Primordial loyalties were further accentuated by biased perceptions prevalent

among ethnic groups. One influential Malay writer described the Chinese as a people whose "nose is flat", "their eyes are almond-shaped", a race which "have successfully sucked our blood by their own legitimate means", and "robbers, *samsu* brewers, lottery operators" and as smugglers and tax-evaders (quoted by Khoo 1981). While many Malays lamented the sorry plight of the Malays, few were self-critical enough, like Za'ba, to realize that the Malays could try to emulate the economic success of the Chinese (Khoo 1981). The Chinese, too, had fixed ideas about the Malays and other ethnic groups. To them, the Malays lacked industry and drive, and were too easily contended. Ethnic prejudices die hard and persist, and self-reinforcing.

Conclusion

Ethnicity and development impinge on major areas of concern pertaining to the arena of ethnic contestations, conflicts and resolutions. Ethnic exclusion that leads to encroachments on the distribution of entitlement militates against attempts towards ethnic convergence or integration. In the Malaysian context, as in many other countries, ethnicity is real and cannot be wished away. Indeed, Barth (1969, quoted by Banks 1996) claims that ethnic identity "is imperative, in that it cannot be disregarded and temporarily set aside by other definitions of the situation". Material space has effectively kept apart the ethnic groups and petrified social and economic relations and perceptions. It reinforces social space and perpetuates the *status quo* of the colonial period. Hence, overall, inter-ethnic relations in the country are devoid of "organic" wholeness and each ethnic group lives within its own "world" still separated by erected ethnic divides.

The larger part of Malaysian history has been concerned with "state building", a process that led to the creation of ethnic diversity and occupational and geographical concentrations. Consequently the juxtaposition of three major ethnic groups with their own religious, linguistic, and cultural affiliations renders the task of "nation building" that much more complex and difficult compared with nations with homogenous populations. Nation building here involves the creation of a nation of communities sharing a common national identity and culture, and living in harmony and unity in order to establish a "united Malaysian nation".

The management of ethnic diversity and relations in nation building may be through different paths such as assimilation, creating a new society in a "melting pot", or accepting cultural pluralism. Assimilation through mandatory legal means

would go against the grain of the political platform of the coalition government. The "melting pot" model will not be practical in view of the deeply-entrenched commitment of each ethnic group to its own distinctive identity. In the Malaysian context, the most eminently appropriate model is that of cultural pluralism in which the rights of each ethnic group to remain culturally distinct is recognized.

That the "cultural pluralism" model is the most suitable and pragmatic in the Malaysian context is its tacit endorsement as official policy. Malay and other Bumiputra pre-eminence in almost all except the economic sphere of national life is the received wisdom of the ruling party as well as the indigenous community. But the multi-cultural approach provides a platform for the demand of "equality" based on the distribution of respective rights and access to economic opportunities, and contestations and conflict resolution aimed at maintaining ethnic identity, to be played out.⁴ It acknowledges the role of certain ethnic "sacred cows" that are essential to ethnic identity. Given the fact that ethnicity is imbued with deeply political and cultural significance, and that the crossing of the ethnic boundary, especially by the Chinese, is almost impossible,⁵ the most practical approach to ethnic management, is through political consensus. Multi-culturalism also offers a suitable medium to accommodate ethnic relations on the basis of how each group seeks ways to ensure for itself maximum basic rights and guarantee of its own community interests. On the basis of a shared interest in ethnic harmony and social stability, the enhanced political capacity of each ethnic group in the common management of ethnic diversity will contribute towards bridging the divide between the Bumiputra and others, especially between the Malays and Chinese.

Notes

1. Rich Chinese paid the same fare as Europeans if they opted to travel in the first class but in separate carriages marked "For Chinese" or, later on, in "A" carriages in the first class section of trains, and these were older and less comfortable than those for Europeans. Loke Yew, the prominent Chinese tin-mine pioneer and philanthropist, was personally involved on two occasions in 1904 when he was asked to leave the Europeans only "B" carriage. For a discussion on racial segregation on the railways and tension in European-Asian relations in early twentieth century Malaya, see Butcher (1979).
2. A study of a New Village in 1971/72 revealed that complaints were made by village residents that application forms to join FELDA schemes were withheld from them (Strauch 1983: 227).
3. Pan-Malayan conferences were held by the Malay Associations in 1939 and 1940. "Chauvinist or ethnicist rather than politically nationalist, the Malay Associations professed complete loyalty to the traditional Malay establishments on the basis of the separate state structure, and

- an almost equal enthusiasm for British colonial rule, as the bulwark for the time being of Malay interests against the rapacious demands of Malayan-domiciled aliens" (Roff 1967: 256).
4. The latest episode of political consensus involved the controversy over the government decision to use English to teach mathematics and science in Chinese primary schools. When first proposed in June 2002, there was immediate and widespread opposition by Chinese organizations. The key concern of the Chinese community was that implementation of the proposal would change the "character" of Chinese primary schools as subjects to be taught in Chinese would be reduced, the staff composition or the administration language of Chinese primary schools may change as non-Chinese teaching staff may be transferred to such schools. The settlement was the consensus among the ruling coalition to grant Chinese primary schools certain exceptions, namely, to teach the two subjects in both Chinese and English.
 5. For example, Winzeler (1976: 314) found that in Kelantan long-settled rural Chinese who "have taken on the speech, personality, and social forms which strongly resemble those of these other Kelantan village inhabitants" are nevertheless Chinese and cannot cross the ethnic boundary. Here ethnic integration would have been most likely, yet factors such as religion or dietary habits act as real barriers to greater ethnic integration. For the case of Chinese Muslims, the exclusionary primacy of "*bangsa*" over religion is stressed (Nagata 1981: 108).

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