Intellectual Discourse

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Volume 28   Number 1   2020

Intellectual Discourse
Vol. 28, No. 1, 2020

Contents

Imperialism, Colonialism and their Contribution to the Formation of Malay and Chinese Ethnicity: An Historical Analysis

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Abstract: Ethnicity is a complex concept which is easily taken as a primordial notion inherited from previous generations. This primordial understanding of ethnicity continues to dominate post-independence Malaysian authority and everyday actors based on two factors. First, the lack of any critical historical analysis for understanding the present situation. Second, there are social, economic and political needs for maintaining the separation of ethnicities which consequently maintain the imperial and colonial epistemological understanding of 'race' in the present State ethnic bureaucratic system. The main objective of this article is to present a sociological review of the long-term effects of imperialism and colonialism on the formation and development of the two principal Malaysian ethnic groups – Malays and Chinese – through selected major phases in Malaysia's history. The outcomes suggest that the ethnic boundaries of Malaysian Malays and Chinese were gradually built, institutionalized and intensified over time rather than being primordially inherited from their ancestors.

Keywords: historical analysis; ethnicity; group boundaries; Malaysia, post-colonial country

Abstrak: Etnik merupakan suatu konsep rumit yang telah diambil mudah sebagai suatu gagasan *primordial* yang diwarisi dari generasi sebelumnya. Pemahaman berdasarkan idea *primordial* ini berterusan menguasai pihak berkuasa pasca-kemerdekaan Malaysia dan pelaku sosial Malaysia berdasarkan dua faktor. Pertama, kekurangan analisis sejarah secara kritis untuk memahami

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keadaan sekarang. Kedua, terdapat keperluan sosial, ekonomi dan politik untuk mengekalkan pemisahan etnik yang seterusnya mengekalkan pemahaman epistemologi imperial dan penjajah mengenai 'ras' dalam sistem birokrasi pengurusan etnik negara pada masa kini. Objektif utama artikel ini adalah untuk membentangkan suatu pandangan sosiologi terhadap kesan jangka panjang imperialisme dan penjajahan terhadap pembentukan dan pembangunan dua kumpulan etnik Malaysia utama - Melayu dan Cina - melalui fasa utama yang telah dipilih dalam sejarah Malaysia. Hasil perbincangan menunjukkan bahawa sempadan etnik Melayu dan Cina di Malaysia bukan semata-mata warisan *primordial* dari nenek moyang mereka, tetapi telah dibina secara beransur-ansur, dilembagakan dan diperkasakan dari masa ke masa.

Kata Kunci: analisis sejarah; etnik; sempadan kumpulan; Malaysia, negara pasca-kolonial

1 Introduction

Malaysia is a post-colonial country with multi-ethnic diversities (Sin, 2015). Despite the intricacy of its diversities (Hirschman, 1986; Nagaraj, Nai-Peng, Chiu-Wan, Kiong-Hock & Jean, 2015), the post-independence Malaysian official population censuses have simply identified and categorised Malaysians on the basis of two criteria: indigenous status and cultural boundaries. The former criterion divided Malaysians into *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera* categories. *Bumiputera* literally means the 'sons of the soil' and comprises only Malays, the aboriginal people in the peninsula and natives of Sabah and Sarawak. They are politically considered as an indigenous group in comparison with non-*bumiputera* (Chinese, Indians and Others). The second criterion categorised Malaysians on the basis of their cultural components, particularly religion and language. A Malaysian is officially identified as a Malay if he/she is a Muslim who habitually speaks the Malay language and practises Malay customs, as stated in Article 160 of the Malaysian Constitution (Harding, 2012). Chinese Malaysians, on the other hand, are identified on the basis of their scripts and language – although among themselves they speak in different dialects as they migrated from different parts of China. The same applies to Indians, who were identified into one ethnic category despite the different languages and scripts used between their various groupings (Holst, 2012). The post-independence simplification of Malaysia's ethnic diversities into several major and solid categories – with the census and other official identifications as normative and

arbitrary tools – indicates the State tendency to ignore the complexity and hybridity which exist between ethnicities.

The simplification is established on a relic of imperial and colonial epistemology of 'race' during outsiders' economic and political administration in pre-independence Malaysia which has now become the basis of the State's "bureaucratization of ethnicity" (Siddique, 1990, p. 41) and everyday actor understanding. The top-down approach to managing ethnic categories and the everyday actor understanding of ethnicity have worked in tandem which subsequently creates a reified understanding of ethnicity which could easily evade analytical inquiry. It attempts to support the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' as a simple primordial fact of life waiting for Malaysians to experience it. By maintaining the need to identify and allocate Malaysians into classified categories, Malaysians today could imagine their ethnicity as historically natural, primordial and as having existed from time immemorial. They often remain unaware of the fact that ethnicity has "always been altered, redefined, re-constituted and the boundaries expanded according to specific social-historical circumstances" (Shamsul, 1996, p. 480). Mindful of the State and everyday actors' understanding, I contend that Malaysian ethnicity and its boundaries should not be seen as simple primordial concepts, but rather as multi-dimensional and analytically complex ones which must be unpacked and socio-historically critiqued. This argument is based on two theoretical stands.

First, Weber (1968, p. 389) defined ethnic groups as those who "[…] entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists". The most important concept in this definition is the subjective belief which facilitates group formation, particularly for political purposes. The ethnic concept describes the idea by which people believe that they are actually a group of individuals with something in common because they focus on their similarity in terms of physical appearance, customs or history. These similarities between individuals attach them as group members and help them to achieve their collective demands. The belief is likely to persist even when they have achieved their target(s). The belief subsequently becomes more strongly established and is breakable

only through "drastic differences in the custom, physical type or above all, language exist(ing) among its members" (Weber, 1996, p. 36). It also creates social boundaries between the 'us' and the 'others' in that members of an ethnic group invariably uphold particular features of honour and pride which are absent among non-members (Weber, 1996). Second, according to Barth (1969), culture boundaries (for example language) should not be a definer of an ethnic group but rather should be understood as a consequence of ethnic group organization. The reason for this is because there are no 'ethnic' groups in which all members have exactly the same culture/religion/language and in which no-one else has that culture/religion/language. In other words, the boundaries of a given ethnicity never completely coincide with the characteristics which, it is claimed, define it. Hence, Barth argued, the key issue is not what the boundary contains, but how it gets drawn. In order to crucially examine the process of ethnic group formation and the construction and maintenance of its boundaries, this article focuses on two important questions, which are why and how ethnic identification and categorisation based on cultural elements were socially drawn, institutionalized and heightened throughout Malaysian history.

2 About this study

This research employed a comprehensive historical analysis of selected historical conditions and social forces. By adopting this approach, the author will attempt to explore ethnicity as a social process and its structuring capacity which has persisted over time. Moreover, it is important to have historical analysis in ethnicity studies in order to avoid a reified result which is based on tempo-centric study. Another approach used in this study is comparative analysis between Malays' and Chinese historical events. Ethnic boundaries, especially for group identity, do not occur in a vacuum but between opposing parties through their social encounters and interactions. Based on Evans-Pritchard's and Edmund Leach's studies of the Nuer in Africa and political systems in Highland Burma respectively, the author adopted and adapted a system for understanding the construction, existence and maintenance of Malaysian and Chinese ethnic boundaries. Although there are several varieties of ethnicity in Malaysia, The author has decided to focus only on two: the Malays and the Chinese. The reason for this was their historical domination of politics and the economy respectively.

3 The socio-history of Malays and Chinese in Malaysia

3.1 Colonialism and the identification and categorisation of 'Malay'

The Malaccan period is an important benchmark for the Malays' historical locus in Malaysia (Harding, 2012). Although there was another earlier entrepôt civilization – the Bujang Valley[1] – it was Malacca's populace and cultural diasporas which were significantly important in defining Malays as 'Malay' today. The word 'Malay' originated from the name of a river in Jambi and Palembang[2] (Milner, 2011). When Srivijaya was attacked by Majapahit, its prince – Parameswara – and his subjects fled to the peninsula and eventually to a local fishing village (Saw, 2007) which later was named Malacca.[3]

In the early formation of Malacca, its habitants were not primarily identified as Malays. Instead, they were known as Malaccans (Reid, 2001) – a form of identification which distinguished them from other populations in the archipelago. Only during the early part of the sixteenth century did 'Malay' as a reference to a person or group of people begin to be understood in two contexts: the non-European and the European. In the non-European context, 'Malay' is a self- and other-identification of people residing in the archipelago who were related to the exiled kingship from Srivijaya/Palembang to Malacca, and who practised a trading diaspora retained in their culture, language and commercial practices (Reid, 2001). In other words, it was due to Malacca's global trade and its cultural diaspora that the Malays were identified and categorised as a local population in the area. The formal identification can be seen in the systematic classification of traders and visitors in Malacca which excluded 'Malayos' as outsiders who were originally from Jambi and Palembang.

The second understanding of 'Malay' came from the European context and should be understood in regard to two different periods: prior to the nineteenth century and during/after the nineteenth century. Prior

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[1] The Bujang Valley existed from the third to fourteenth century and was located within modern Malaysia's geographical territories (Murphy, 2018).

[2] Jambi and Palembang were part of Srivijaya's polities.

[3] Parameswara had successfully managed to raise Malacca into a great entrepôt centre (Andaya & Andaya, 2001). In the fifteenth century, Malacca in particular was known as an entrepôt and centre of Islam in the archipelago (Alatas, 1977).

to the nineteenth century, 'Malay' primarily referred only to Malaccans. The Portuguese for example categorised Malaccans as '*Malayos*' based on two criteria: in the context of power relations as a person or a group of people subject to the Sultan of Malacca, and as followers of Islam (Reid, 2001). However, the collapse of Malacca in 1511[4] had a significant impact on Malays' identity – as an *ethnie* – in other parts of the archipelago, particularly in the peninsula. As a consequence of the fall, Malacca's heritage was divided into two categories. The first category referred to foreign merchants and traders[5] who had already assimilated with Malaccan culture. When they moved out of Malacca and scattered around the archipelago, they were simply known as Malays (Reid, 2001). The second category refers to the Malaccan royal exile.[6] The royal exile had significantly contributed to a local political reconstruction in the peninsula with the Malaccan Sultanate structure as the main archetype, and led to a cultural diaspora of Malay ethnicity into other local peninsular areas beyond Malacca.

In the nineteenth century, the concept of Malay began to reflect the European concept of 'race'. Sir Stamford Raffles (1781-1826) – a British statesman and diplomat – was the first to introduce the concept of a Malay nation, as well as a Malay 'race' and a Malay territorial geographical area (Shamsul, 2011). His interpretation was founded on two bases: the Malay-Malaccan diaspora, and the 'Great Tradition' of Malacca. He also interpreted the Malay nation as a creation of Islam (Alatas, 1977) by highlighting how the arrival of Islam in Malacca had separated the Malays' "original stock by the admixture of Arabian blood and the introduction of the Arabic language and Moslem religion" (Raffles, 1835, p. 40). Sir Frank Swettenham (a British colonial official)

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[4] Malacca was besieged by the Portuguese in 1511.

[5] This group was mixed in its ethnic origins and included Gujerati, South Indian, Chinese and Ryukyuan communities.

[6] The Portuguese invasion in 1511 forced the royal family, its members and subordinates to flee to Johor, and then to Pahang and to Bentan Island (located in the Riau Archipelago) and later to Perak. After the king's death, his son succeeded to the throne. He then married a royal from Pahang and settled in Pekan Tua (an area in modern Johor). Johor is considered to be a rejuvenation of Malacca in terms of its political and cultural practices. The Malay-Malacca legacy in terms of civilisation and traditions was therefore kept alive in Johor, Pahang and Perak (Bari, 2008).

also described Malays – not in Malacca itself but in the peninsula as
a whole – as Muslim (see Alatas, 1977). Although Islam had already
arrived in the other parts of the peninsula as early as the fourteenth
century (Paterson, 1924), it was Malacca that the others acknowledged
as a relatively significant centre of Islam in the archipelago. In other
words, Malay as an ethnic group – either by self- or other-identification
– seems not readily constructed prior to the sixteenth century, but
"begins rather with the advent of colonial powers in the region" (Holst,
2012, p. 34). It should therefore be considered a relatively novel concept
(Milner, 2011).

3.2 Imperial capitalism and the institutionalisation of 'Malayness'

In 1786, the British successfully interfered in local politics and economic
affairs through their Residential and Advisory system. Throughout
the following years under their divide-and-rule policy, the Malays,
Chinese and Indians[7] were residentially and occupationally segregated
with minimal contact: Malays (traditional agriculture, mainly paddy
planting), Chinese (tin mining) and Indians (rubber plantations). The
British, however, encountered difficulties when Malay peasants were
reported to be disposing of their landholdings to other parties (Bashiran
Begum & Nor Asiah, 2007; Kratoska, 1983, 1985). To prevent further
the lease and sale of the Malay lands to estates, the British Selangor
authority was the first to grant limited ownership of specific lands to
the 'Malayan race' in a scheme which was known as the 1911 Ancestral
Land Scheme (Kratoska, 1983). Under the 1911 Ancestral Land
scheme, identified reserved land should not be transferred to anyone
other than a member of the Malayan race, which was identified and
categorised as "all inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula and archipelago"
(Kratoska, 1983, p. 153). In 1913, the Malay Reservation Enactment
was endorsed with some main features taken from the Ancestral Land
Scheme; first, non-Malays could not get a lease or own land within the
area of the Malay Reservation Lands, and second, only Malays were
allowed to grow rice and rubber on the reserved lands (Kratoska, 1983).
The definition of a Malay was also revised as "a person belonging to
any Malayan 'race' that habitually speaks the Malay language or any

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[7] These terms referred to the China-born Chinese and India-born Indians who
migrated to the peninsula in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively.

Malayan language and professes the Moslem religion" (Kratoska, 1983, p. 154).

In the British census of 1911, the Malay 'race' in the Federated Malay States (FMS)[8] was identified as Malays (the locals), Javanese, Sakai, Bajarese, Boyanese, Mendeling, Krinchi, Jambi, Achinese and Bugis (Hirschman, 1987). The 'local Malays' in this context referred to the native people who had resided in the FMS since at least the Malaccan civilisation, whilst the rest were tribes originating from the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). They were 'racially' and culturally considered to be the same group based on an assumed similarity of their 'phenotypical' characteristics and cultural beliefs with the Malays in the peninsula. The official definition of Malays in the enactment and the categorization of Malays in the British censuses made immigrants from the Dutch East Indies, such as Javanese and Bugis, eligible for the land rights in the peninsula (Kratoska, 1983).

It was in this enactment that the term 'Malays' was defined and 'Malay-ness' was officially identified in the FMS. However, the definition of Malays in the Unfederated Malay States (UMS)[9] was different and varied depending on the state. Someone of Arab descent, for example, was a Malay in Kedah but not in other states (Sathian & Yeok, 2014; Shamsul, 2001). Religion and language nevertheless remained the core of Malay-ness. During this period, the Malays never saw the Chinese or the Indians as a threat to them because of the temporary nature of their stay in the area (Alatas, 1977; Hirschman, 1975; Png, 1961). The *Malayness* – which was based on cultural elements – was nonetheless institutionalized only for colonial economic activities (that is, tin and rubber) and administration. The system, however, consequently produced an ethnic identification and categorization which was bound up with the processes of capital accumulation and class formation which could still be seen in the early years of independence.

There are two separate explanations for the formulation of the Malay Reservation Enactment. The first explanation is based on the British assumed-patriarchal responsibility to protect the Malays – the local inhabitants in British Malaya – as opposed to other immigrants

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[8] The FMS consisted of Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang.
[9] The UMS consisted of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Johor.

who were slowly becoming rich in Malaya under the colonial economy. The Malay Reservation Enactment would hence prohibit the Malays from transferring their 'birth-right' land to the non-Malays and secure the land for the Malays. The second explanation for the enactment was because the Malay practice of disposing and leasing their land to non-Malays could potentially jeopardize the British economic and political dominance in Malaya by losing it to immigrants especially the Chinese. Based on the structural oppositional theory, the enhancement of the cultural boundaries of the ethnic group happened during a confrontation with the opposite group. In the Malays' case, the definition of 'Malays' and their right to selected lands stated in the enactment significantly served as a political ace to enhance the Malay status as the native people as opposed to non-Malays after independence. In other words, this formal identification and categorisation of Malays later served as important boundaries to exclude 'them' from 'us' in the related macro-context: politics and the economy.

3.3 The diversities within Chinese ethnicity

From the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, a huge wave of Chinese migrated from China to the peninsula. Their migration was pulled by the open migration policy of the British who required an abundance of labour power for their colonial economic activities. At the same time, the Chinese were pushed out of China by several rebellions and revolutions against the oppressive government there, such as the 1851 Taiping Rebellion, the 1891 North-East China Riots and the 1900 Boxer Rebellion (Ee, 1961) and by poverty in China (Andaya & Andaya, 2001). Within the earlier population censuses conducted by the British (1871 to 1957), the Chinese were mainly categorised on the basis of their original provinces in China and their dialects of conversation: *Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka (Kheh), Teochiu, Hainan (Hailam), Kwongsai, Hokchiu, Hokchia* and *Henghwa*. In terms of belief, they mainly practised Chinese beliefs and religion. Since their numbers were larger, they were basically identified as the mainstream Chinese in Malaysia as opposed to other minority groups of Chinese who had assimilated and acculturated with Malay culture: the *Baba Nyonya* and *Cina Peranakan*.

The *Baba Nyonya* basically settled in Malacca and Singapore. Malacca, for example, had an international relationship with China as

early as the fifteenth century (Purcell, 1951). The Chinese there were mainly traders who were later culturally exposed to and assimilated with Malaccan local culture and customs, particularly in their language, dress and cuisine (Tan, 1984). They were considered as local aristocracy (Purcell, 1951) and had good relationships with the Malay ruling class (Andaya & Andaya, 2001). They were sometimes identified as Straits-born Chinese and usually were not considered to be 'pure' Chinese by the China-born Chinese migrants during the British administration (Purcell, 1951). The *Cina Peranakan*, on the other hand, resided mainly in Kelantan and Terengganu – states with Malays as the main homogenous population. According to Pue (2018), there are two possible explanations for the Chinese arrival in Kelantan. First, they (*Hakkas*) had migrated directly from China because of the gold and tin mining attraction in Kelantan. Second, a smaller group of Chinese in Thailand (*Hokkien*) migrated to Kelantan during a political conflict between Pattani and Siam. Both of these *Cina Peranakan* groups in Kelantan arrived earlier than the China-born Chinese migration in the eighteenth century. The presence of Chinese Peranakan in Terengganu on the other hand can be traced back to the eighteenth century, if not earlier. Similar to the *Baba Nyonyas*, the *Cina Peranakan* adopted and adapted several Malay cultural attributes as their own but to a different extent. Unlike the *Baba Nyonyas*, the *Peranakan* in Kelantan and Terengganu were culturally acculturated rather than assimilated with local culture. The difference was in how the Peranakan maintained their Chinese main culture while adapting to Malay culture. On the other hand, the *Baba Nyonya* assimilated with Malay culture by minimizing their Chinese culture and were consequently independent from the host culture, which led to the creation of their own culture: the *Baba Nyonya* culture (Tan, 1984). Additionally in Terengganu, there was another distinctive Chinese group which was identified as Chinese Yunnan. Although the Chinese Yunnan were acculturated to Malay culture, they were different from the *Baba Nyonyas* and *Cina Peranakan* because of their religion. They followed their forefathers as Muslim migrants from China. Reflecting on the early history of the Chinese in Malaysia, it is obvious that they were heterogeneous – in terms of their history, dialect, customs and external interlocutors – but were not as simply identified and categorised as homogenous by the State in its ethnic bureaucratic affairs.

4 Social interaction and the intensifying of the ethnic boundaries

Despite the facts explained above that 'Malay' is a relatively novel concept developed after the arrival of a colonial and imperial power and that the Chinese are diverse in practice, the understanding that both ethnicities are primordial with an homogenous culture is likely to continue to be the principal understanding of the State and of Malaysian actors. The outcome is related to the Malaysian Malays'-Chinese historical economic and political conditions and social forces within their long-term encounters and interactions.

4.1 The Great Depression (1929 -1932), the Japanese Occupation and Communism in post-independence Peninsular Malaysia

An ethnic group is constructed by the collective actions of its members' reciprocal relationship with others in macro-contexts, particularly in the political sphere (Weber, 1968). In the early twentieth century, the Malays' and Chinese political interest was mainly internal to their group affairs. For example, the Malay political activities and newspaper presses revolved around ideological conflicts between the *Kaum Tua* (Malay traditionalists) and *Kaum Muda* (Malay modernists). Meanwhile, the Chinese political interest was for the Chinese people's ideological clashes between the Manchu government and communism. However, the political concerns of both groups changed with the onset of the Great Depression. At that time, the Malays' political interest shifted from intra- to inter-ethnic awareness, focused on their economic conditions in relation to non-Malays' achievement (particularly Europeans and Chinese) in Malaya.

It was not necessarily anything to do with the influx of immigrants, but the fact that the arriving immigrants began to see Malaya as their home and thus demanded recognition and a place in Malaya through a series of events: "the 'Sons of Malay' debate (1931-34); Chinese and Indian demands for the opening up of the Malayan Civil Service, which had previously been the purview of the local Malay elite; the 1932 Retrenchment Commission proposals; the 1933 Aliens Ordinance and the proposal to turn paddy production over to the Chinese" (Emmanuel, 2010, p. 4). The Malays may have begun to feel insecure with their position in the 1930s colonial economy, especially when they were economically weak compared with the European and Chinese immigrants, educationally disadvantaged, and politically null

in the Malayan political administration. The success of immigrants, particularly Chinese, "sharpened the sense of common experience among local community – of an 'us' and 'them' attitude" (Milner, 2011, p. 121). The importance of 'Malay' ethnicity might also have been accelerated under the pressure of Chinese identity transformation and unification from "dialect-group and clan identities to a cultural and political identity as Chinese" (Yen, 2000, p. 12).

The Malay and Chinese relationship was later challenged by the Japanese occupation of Malaya (1941-1945). They were both terrorised by the Japanese, but at different levels and stages depending on their social class and status. In comparison with the Chinese, the Malays in general received good treatment in the early months of the Japanese occupation. Some Malays were given positions as lower-level administrative workers in the Japanese civil administration. The *Kesatuan Melayu Muda*'s (KMM) leaders[10] were also released from prison (Kratoska, 1997). Some Malays under the KMM leaders were recruited as *Jookidam* (Japanese soldiers). They were sent into action on behalf of the Japanese in the war between the Japanese and the communist guerrilla factions (Cheah, 1981, 1983; Tong, 2010). The Malays' resistance towards the Japanese started to show later for several reasons: Japanese misconduct towards Islam, the maintenance of earlier European policy, bad treatment of the Sultan[s]; in some states the rulers were no longer held to be sovereign (Stockwell, 1979), and the overwhelmingly negative consequences for Malays in their economic and social conditions (Allen, 1968; Kratoska, 1997). On the other hand, the Japanese treatment of the Malayan Chinese depended on the Chinese's political views. Those who were identified as having supported the nationalist resistance during the Japanese invasion of China were killed (Allen, 1968). The MCP (Malayan Communist Party) – a Chinese dominated party – retreated to the jungle and formed the MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army) (Kratoska, 1997). After the Japanese retreat, the relationship between the Malays and the Chinese was once again challenged. Although the MPAJA was forced to disband, the MCP continued as a political party seeking to build a communist regime in Malaya (Allen, 1968). The socio-political situation in Malaya got worse when the MCP started to strike and the British

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[10] The KMM was an anti-British party.

sent troops – mainly Malays – to deal with the situation, which gave appearance of a war between these two ethnicities. The food shortage, MCP raids and ethnic tension later triggered the demand for immediate political restoration, which contributed to the Malay group and political awareness in Malaya.

4.2 The Malayan Union, the communist insurgency and the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement

The Malayan Union proposed three major changes to Malaya: politically and socially. First, the nine Malay states, Penang and Malacca would be combined into a unitary administration. Second, Malay Royal Sovereignty would be transferred to the (British) Crown, except for religious matters. Third, equal citizenship would be offered to Malays and immigrant communities (Cheah, 2009; Harding, 2012). The proposal for Malayan citizenship in particular could radically break the previous preservation of Malay political rights in Malaya and create an opening for such rights for the non-Malay population (Lau, 1989). According to Tan (2000), there were fears and concerns among Malays at the time that the proposal might change the political, economic and social character of Malaya. Moreover, the equal distribution of special rights between Malays and non-Malays would give the Malays disadvantages, particularly in economic activities (Harding, 2012). These concerns triggered an anti-Malayan Union movement. This stimulated Malay nationalism – in both sentiment and movement (Gellner, 1983) – and led to the formation of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), a new Malay political party (Harding, 2012). Despite strong rejection by many Malays, the MU was officially established on the 1st of April, 1946. Following the endorsement, the Malays showed their mourning through a protest at which the cry of *Hidup Melayu* ('Long live the Malays') was constantly heard more than *Daulat Tuanku* ('Long live the King') (Milner, 2011; Reid, 2001). It was in this event that the interests of the Sultan (king) were "subordinated to the demands of *Malayism*" (Omar, 1993). This understanding was different from the previous *Kerajaan* (Malay traditional system) in which the Sultan was the centre for religion and customs. This showed a transition of religion and customs from being *Raja-centred* (monarchy-centred) to *Bangsa-centred* (ethnic-centred).

Due to the strong opposition from so many Malays, something which had never been shown before, together with support from a few retired British officers, the Malayan Union was revised and changed to the Federation of Malaya in January 1948 (Andaya & Andaya, 2001) with a few alterations. First, the Malay monarchy system was preserved and the Sultans maintained their position as the leaders of Islam and for Malay customs; second, Malays' rights as indigenous people were officially declared and acknowledged; third, citizenship should only be granted to those who were born in Malaya or had resided in Malaya for eight years; and finally, for the first nine years, Malay representatives in the Legislative Council should hold a majority of the seats, and therefore more than the non-Malay representatives (Harding, 2012). The most important clauses in the 1948 Federation of Malaya agreement were the position of the Sultans (Malays) as having jurisdiction over the Muslim religion and Malay customs, and the establishment of a Confederation of Rulers, which made the Sultans part of, and indeed the apex of, the Federation (Siddique, 1981).

In 1948, an emergency[11] was declared as a result of the continuous fighting between the British and the communist guerrillas (Hirschman, 1975). To stop further communist influence among the Chinese, the British proposed a resettlement plan. The Chinese were relocated into controlled residential areas which were known as 'new villages' (*Kampung Baru*) (Hirschman, 1975). The plan was criticised by the Malays for two reasons: first, the villages were built on Malay state lands, and second, the villages had better facilities than other Malay villages (Purcell, 1951). A total of 216 new villages were developed into urban areas, which in turn increased the Chinese domination in urban areas (Cheah, 2009). At the same time, the cost of the war – in terms of finance, fatalities and socio-economic hardship – made the British realise that they needed support from the local people. UMNO and two other political parties specifically– the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) – were encouraged by the British to discuss Malayan politics during the emergency (1948-60) and to help the British defeat communism (Stubbs, 1979), which consequently led to the formation of the Alliance Party in 1955.

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[11]   The Emergency ended in 1960.

The early to mid-twentieth century showed the Malays' and Chinese's political transformation interest changing from intra- to inter-ethnic affairs as their main concern in the Federation of Malaya. The Malays' and Chinese ethnic groupness was stimulated during their social encounters in the macro-events of the Great Depression, the Japanese occupation, the MCP strikes, the Malayan emergency and the Malayan Union, which reinforced calls for collective action in a form of group. These historical outcomes contradicted the primordial understanding that ethnic origin served immediately as a group. Ethnic origin indeed emerged only to *facilitate* group formation by focusing on any relevant similarities of collective people – in this case referring to the imagined historical trajectories of residentiality – in defending their political and economic interests. The details of cultural boundaries in everyday life (micro-events) were later to become more significant after independence due to the Malays' and Chinese close and frequent interactions in urban areas.

4.3 Mid-twentieth century Malaysia's Manufacturing Industry, Bumiputraism and the Islamic resurgence

With government encouragement and an influx of foreign investors, the Malaysian manufacturing industry started to bloom in the early 1960s in post-independence Malaysia.[12] This industrial growth consequently led to the emergence of factories. Rural Malays in particular gradually migrated to these manufacturing areas to take advantage of the better economic opportunities. In the urban areas, inevitable close inter-ethnic encounters and interactions happened frequently. On 13 May 1969, the Malaysians faced their first and biggest ethnicity-based conflict after independence. This conflict not only caused several riots, casualties and deaths in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia (Comber, 1983; Kua, 2013), but also led to Malaysia's economic and political restructuring. According to Sundaram (2004) and Shamsul (2008), the government's failure to recognise income disparities between ethnic groups was regarded as the main reason for these tragic events. Following the May 13th event, a few policies were proposed and added, mainly to reduce the inter-ethnic income gap and to maintain and encourage inter-ethnic harmony.

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[12] Malaysia gained independence on 31 August 1957.

The first of these new policies was the Sedition Act (1970). In this Act, any issues related to the Malays' special rights and the power of the Sultans were listed as sensitive subjects and could not be questioned (Andaya & Andaya, 2001; Harding, 2012). The second was a proclamation of the National Ideology (Andaya & Andaya, 2001), and the third was the formation of the National Cultural Policy (NCP). The NCP, however, was ambiguous, both for the Malays and for the Chinese (Tan, 1988). The final and most influential policy introduced was the New Economic Policy (NEP) which comprised two prongs: to eradicate poverty and to restructure Malaysian society. The implementation of the NEP created a new identification and categorization: the *bumiputera*. Within the NEP implementation (1970-1990), several policies favouring the *bumiputera* were implemented. This inevitably opened up several debates between Malay and non-Malay communities. From the non-Malay side, the issues of equality and injustice were frequently stressed in relation to the NEP; from the Malays' perspective, 'injustice' should not exist as the NEP was formulated on the concept of equity. Regardless of the implementation, Malays persistently faced difficulties in finding access to high-level professions and occupations, mainly Chinese enterprises, because of the dissimilarity in the Malay's and the Chinese's history and cultural practices. This consequently influenced the educational choices for the different ethnicities resulting in ethnic occupational segmentation in post-independence Malaysia (Khong & Jomo, 2010, p. 60).

The inter-ethnic encounters in urban areas in particular affected the Malays' cultural boundaries. An important force which heightened the cultural boundaries was the Islamic resurgence which occurred in the 1970s. According to Muzaffar (1987), 'resurgence' – which literally means 'the act of rising again' – is the most appropriate word for addressing the condition in the 1970s context. It signifies that Islam as a way of life based on the Islamic ethos and social order had once again become important. The resurgence also indicates the existence of a previous Islamic glory in Malaysia which was gradually declining in post-independence Malaysia[13]. The word also suggests that there were

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[13]   During the 1980s, Islamic values and Malays norms as a way of life dramatically declined, which can be seen in the Malays' choice of lifestyles (Muzaffar 1986; Ong, 1990).

challenges faced by not only the Malay revivalists but also the Malays' advocacy of the dominant social system during that period. Despite the challenges, the resurgence brought changes in the Malaysian social structural system and in social actors' everyday life.

Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), for example, was one of the main contributors to the Malaysian Islamic resurgence. One of its activities was the *dakwah* (proselytising) movement. Women in ABIM's *dakwah* movement followed an Islamic dress code by wearing the *telekung* (a long scarf covering the head, hair and chest) and *Baju Kurung* (Malay traditional dress). In some cases, the women would wear socks, gloves and purdah – which were historically unfamiliar to Malay culture (Ong, 1990). The new dress code was different from female Malays' previous traditional style of dress, under which they would freely show their hair in everyday activities and only on particular occasions would use a lace shawl draped loosely around the head and shoulders (Ong, 1990).

After the 1970s, the manifestation of Islamic tenets and culture was formally and progressively introduced and institutionalised in Malaysian structures such as in the economy, politics and education. In the Malaysian national schools, for example, apart from pinafore tunics, *Baju Kurung* and *mini-telekung* (headscarves) could be worn by female pupils as their school uniform depending on their parents' decision. Islamic practices in everyday life could also be observed when Malays started to frequently include several Arabic words in their everyday conversation. There were also growing concerns about Malay dietary rules – not only about avoiding pork or slaughtering animals according to Islamic rules, but also in details such as gelatine usage in cakes or chocolates – and an increasing wariness about eating in the houses of non-Muslim friends.

For Muzaffar (1987), the resurgence was a consequence of Malay alienation in urban areas as a reaction to the urban westernisation of social mores. Shamsul (1994) interpreted the resurgence as the result of a large number of Malay migrations from rural to urban areas which created an identity and cultural vacuum which Islam would fill. Lee (1990), however, explained the resurgence as a defensive ideology of the Malay-*bumiputera* in the form of religious manifestation. From the structural oppositional theory, the reason for the resurgence was related

to the inter-ethnic relationships between Malaysian urban dwellers. The feeling of alienation in urban areas during social interaction between different ethnicities heightened the need for groupness, which subsequently became an economic and political defensive mechanism which later worked in tandem with the *bumiputraism*. Although some of the everyday practices and cultural activities were familiar to the Malays, it was not until the 1970s that an Islamic resurgence – in a form of the religious manifestation of values, ethos and practices on a larger scale – took place resulting from inter-ethnic social encounters and interactions in urban areas.

5 Conclusion

The historical trajectories of Malaysian Malays and Chinese discussed in this paper suggest that ethnic boundaries should not be taken for granted, as they were gradually built, recognised and intensified throughout their inter-ethnic interactions and through government actions. The boundaries were in motion and evolved over a period of time, from pre-colonial to post-independence times. This became important in the twentieth century, particularly in the 1930s, and was accelerated during the Japanese occupation because of Malay-Chinese political and economic needs and interests, and then was strengthened during the communist resurgence (1946-1960). Details of ethnic cultural boundaries only began to be structured and heightened in the 1970s. The need to create cultural boundaries was due to social encounters and interactions in urban space which cause a necessity for the 'us' and 'them' differences. In the Malaysian situation, this was centred on the intensification of Islamic consciousness and practices such as in clothing, food, space, and language. Furthermore, different social and economic needs led to the formation of several ethno-based political parties which relied on the basis of their 'primordial' historical and cultural similarities and differences. The above historical analysis also suggested that a new type of group – in this case referring to the Bumiputra category – could emerge through expansion and adjustment of the boundaries resulting from the groups' needs during their social, political and economic macro- and micro-relationship with opposite groups. The discussion, therefore, offered two points. First, ethnicity is socially constructed, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group even though they might or might not be related by blood or have a shared history. Second, ethnicity does not exist in

isolation: it is not about the boundaries exclusively but the process of the 'boundary-making' (Barth, 1969). As Hirschman (1986, p. 331) suggested, "When these processes are examined, it is often possible to discover how ethnic divisions are socially created, institutionalised and modified". This suggests that history is an important element within the study of ethnicity – at least in the Malaysian context – and needs to be explored in order to avoid any simplification or reification of ethnicity.

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