JOURNAL OF

Islam in Asia

A Refereed International Biannual Arabic – English Journal

Journal of Islam in Asia

Articles submitted for publication in the *Journal of Islam in Asia* are subject to a process of peer review, in accordance with the normal academic practice.

_____

المقالات العربية

English Articles

Rethinking Consociationalism and Coalition Politics in Malaysia

Berfikir Semula tentang Konsosiasionalisme dan Politik Gabungan di Malaysia

Abdul Wahed Jalal Nori∗

Abstract

National unity and integration are among the most critical problems that we have faced and continue to face in Malaysia. The central concern is not the differences that exist in societies per se but the nature of the relationships among people characterised by distinct ethnicities, religions and socioeconomic classes and multiple identities, living within the nation. These relationships range from harmonious and functional to acrimonious and dysfunctional. In general, legal approaches are commonly used in order to regulate the behaviour of groups towards each other. Many countries have constitutional provisions or enact national laws and regulations that provide for equality and non-discrimination or to protect the rights of certain groups. Various other measures are also taken. While necessary, legal approaches are limited in what they can achieve. They define some of the boundaries that may not be crossed but do not remove negative worldviews, attitudes and beliefs that motivate hatred animosity and unfriendly actions among groups. Could it be said that national unity and integration means the creation of a mental state and elimination in which everyone will place "national interest well above communal, religious, linguistic or local interests". This is only possible when each group feels that they will get a square deal and have no fear of domination by others. Such a mental climate could be seen to prevail when intolerance, fear and inferiority complex are minimised or eliminated. Creating such a mental climate also largely depends on the relationships among and behaviour of the political leaders in the society. Therefore, it is important to start examine and analyse (1) The current state of play – what are we doing right and wrong?; (2) What do we

∗ Assistant Professor, Department of Fundamental & Inter-Disciplinary Studies, Abdulhamid Abusulayman Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia.

want to see in an integrated and united Malaysia?; and (3) How do we craft a Malaysian ethos of unity and cohesiveness?

Key Words: Consociational Democracy, Rethinking, Integration & Unity, Cohesiveness, Craft.

Abstrak

Perpaduan dan integrasi nasional adalah antara masalah paling kritikal yang dihadapi di Malaysia. Kebimbangan utama bukanlah pada perbezaan yang wujud dalam masyarakat semata-mata tetapi sifat perhubungan dalam kalangan masyarakat yang dicirikan melalui etnik, agama dan kelas sosioekonomi yang berbeza serta kepelbagaian identiti. Hubungan ini terdiri daripada hubungan yang harmoni dan berfungsi serta hubungan yang tegang dan tidak berfungsi. Secara umumnya, pendekatan undang-undang biasanya digunakan untuk mengawal tingkah laku kumpulan terhadap satu sama lain. Banyak negara mempunyai peruntukan perlembagaan atau menggubal undang-undang dan peraturan negara yang memperuntukkan kesaksamaan tanpa diskriminasi untuk melindungi hak kumpulan tertentu. Pelbagai langkah lain turut diambil. Walaupun pendekatan undang-undang adalah perlu, tahap pencapaian bagi pendekatan ini adalah terhad. Mereka mentakrifkan beberapa had yang mungkin tidak dilalui tetapi tidak menghapuskan pandangan dunia yang negatif, sikap serta kepercayaan yang mendorong kebencian dan permusuhan, juga tindakan tidak mesra dalam kalangan kumpulan masyarakat. Bolehkah dikatakan bahawa perpaduan dan integrasi nasional bermaksud penciptaan suatu keadaan mental serta penghapusan di mana setiap orang akan meletakkan "kepentingan negara jauh melebihi kepentingan komunal, agama, bahasa atau kepentingan warga tempatan". Ini hanya mungkin terjadi apabila setiap kumpulan masyarakat merasakan bahawa mereka akan mendapat kesepakatan yang sama dan tidak takut untuk dikuasai oleh pihak lain. Keadaan mental sebegitu boleh dilihat berlaku apabila sikap tidak bertoleransi, ketakutan dan rasa rendah diri diminimumkan atau dihapuskan. Proses mewujudkan keadaan mental sebegitu juga bergantung kepada hubungan dan tingkah laku pemimpin politik dalam masyarakat. Oleh itu, ianya amat penting untuk mula meneliti dan menganalisis (1) Keadaan semasa permainan – apakah yang kita sedang lakukan secara betul dan salah?; (2) Apakah yang ingin kita lihat dalam sebuah Malaysia yang bersepadu dan bersatu?; dan (3) Bagaimanakah kita membentuk etos kesatuan dan kesepaduan Malaysia?

Kata Kunci: Demokrasi Konsosiasional, Pemikiran Semula, Integrasi & Perpaduan, Kesepaduan, Kerajinan.

Background

National Integration and National Unity have come to be regarded as one of the most pressing problems facing many countries of the world in modern times. They concern basically with the question of relationship between diverse groups of people characterised by a distinct race, culture and religion living within the political boundaries of a state. The notion of distinction, apart from being evident in some of the objective and tangible facts, is strongly present far more in the perception of the groups about themselves or in the opinion of others who hold them to be different. The state of relationship between various groups and categories of people varies in each country depending upon such variables as its historicity, political process, and the many socio-economic configurations in it. This relationship ranges from a relatively harmonious form to one of antagonism and open hostility of a conflictual type. Thus the status enjoyed by various social, political, economic and demographic rights in different countries varies widely. So its problems too, assume different colours and pitches in their political overtones, accordingly.

Since the inception of the Malaysian nation, Malaysian governments, past and present, have made serious efforts to propagate policies and programmes that are geared towards national integration. Despite such well-intended and unity-oriented programmes and policies, Malaysia's unity has continued to be plagued and threatened by embedded socio-cultural, religious, and political dichotomies. Unless efforts are made to checkmate these divisive tendencies towards national integration, the long expected and loudly proclaimed oneness and indivisibility of Malaysia will remain a utopia.

Professor Shamsul outlines four analytical paradigms (ethnicity, class, culture and identity) that according to him have been competing with one another and frame or organize knowledge about various aspects of Malaysian society. At the same time Shamsul considers colonialism not only had invaded and conquered the physical space of the country, but also conquered its epistemological space.[1]

---

[1] Shamsul A.B. Ethnicity, Class, Culture or Identity?: Competing Paradigms in Malaysian Studies. *Akademika* 53 (July 1998): 33-59.

The culture of tongue-wagging and not parang-wielding may suggest that these incidences will not resort to violence, but we should not simply depend on mere assumptions that this would solely determine the behaviour of individuals. In fact, if we map democracy in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is practically the only country that meets democratic standards, although the consolidation of democracy remains a work in progress. Malaysia still has the fundamentals that allowed it to soar as a "tiger", and it is time to show its true capabilities to the world as the model for integration & democracy. The rebranding of Malaysia must be about showing the world that we are governed well in all spheres that are the real examples of success of unity in diversity. [2]

The Politics of Accommodation and Nation-Building

On Tuesday, May 13, 1969, Tengku AbdulRahman declared a state of emergency in Selangor following clashes between groups of Chinese and Malay youths over a wide area of the Malaysian Federal Capital of Kuala Lumpur. On the next day, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, issued a Proclamation of Emergency under Clause with wide powers to amend or suspend any written law, suspend Parlaiment and electoral process, and even deprive a person of his citizenship.

On October 9, 1969, the National Operation Council, an appointed body that assumed political power in lieu of Parliament, issued its official report on the causes of the May riots. These included:[3]

1- A generation gap and differences in interpretation of the constitutional structure by the different races in the country, and consequently, the growing political encroachment of the immigrant races against certain important provisions of the Constitution that relate to the Malay language and the position of the Malays, principally Article 152 and 153;

---

[2] Speech Delivered by Prof Shamsul A.B. at The summit of Malaysian Think Tanks, organized by ISIS-Malaysian on Thursday, 1 December 2016.

[3] Alvin Rabushka & Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A theory of Democratic Instability,* (PEARSON Longman, 2009), PP 2-3.

2- The incitement, intemperate statements and provocative behaviour of certain racialist party members and supporters during the recent general election;

3- The part played by the Malayan Communist Party and secret societies in inciting racial feelings and suspicions; and

4- The anxious, and later desperate, mood of the Malays with a background of Sino-Malay distrust, and recently, just after the General Election, as a result of racial insults and threats to their future survival and well-being in their own country.

May 1969 riot was not the only riot that happened in the political history of the country. Two years earlier in 1967 Penang Hartal Riots, twenty-seven people were killed and 1,700 arrested on the island of Penang and elsewhere in Northeast Malaya. The riot was in response to the devaluation of the Malayan dollar against the British pound sterling and the newly established Malaysian dollar.[4] The riot began as a peaceful protest organised by the Labour Party over the devaluation of the Malayan dollar against the British pound sterling. However, the protest turned violent and the federal government declared a 24-hour curfew beginning 8PM on the same day to overcome the riot.[5]

The federal government launched an operation coded "Operation X", which closed down the Labour Party. During the raid, the police discovered communist documents at the party headquarters, which suggested that the Communist Party of Malaya might have played a role in the hartal.[6]

I mentioned these two riots to draw the attention to the centrality and the importance of history in understanding Malaysian politics. Nation-building or national integration has long been seen as an important focus for postcolonial Malaysian governments.

Malaysia has been the one major deviant case for consociational (power-sharing) theory. A deeply divided society with, supposedly, a mainly majoritarian type of democracy, Malaysia nevertheless has been able to

---

[4] The Straits Times, 25 November 1967, Page 1

[5] Ibid

[6] Dennis Bloodworth , *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, (Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd, 2010). pp. 221

maintain its democratic system. Careful examination reveals, however, that Malaysian democracy has displayed all four crucial elements of power-sharing theory. In fact, it was a perfectly and thoroughly consociational system since its independence.

Malaysia has long been a puzzle for students of comparative democratic politics. Its success in maintaining democratic rule since independence in 1957 runs counter to John Stuart Mill's proposition that democracy is "next to impossible "in multi-ethnic societies and completely impossible in linguistically divided countries.[7] In contrast with Mill's thinking, power sharing theory holds that democracy is possible in deeply divided societies[8] but only if their type of democracy is consociational, that is, characterized by; (Grand Coalition, Mutual Veto, Proportionality, Segmental Autonomy).

The term "Consociational Democracy" or more often as a synonym for Power Sharing democracy is considered not only as analytical concept but also as a practical recommendation for deeply divided societies. Although ethnically, religiously and culturally fragmented, Malaysia apparently democratically stable. Careful examination reveals, however, that the stability that Malaysia enjoys partly due to having consociational democracy.

On the eve of British rule in Malaya, on 31 August 1957, the Duke of Gloucester, who represented the Queen, gave his vote of confidence that "Malaya will respond worthily to the challenging tasks of independence" and "will continue to show to the world the example of moderation and goodwill between all races that has been so marked a feature of her history."

More than fifty years on, the Duke of Gloucester's words still ring true as modern Malaysia continues to grapple with moderation and goodwill between its different ethnic groups. Malaysia's political economy is characterised by a power sharing arrangement, what Arendt Lijphart (1969) defines as consociationalism. Lijphart describes consociational

---

[7] Arend Lijphart, *Thinking About Democracy: power sharing and majority rule in theory and practice,* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), pp1-5.
[8] John Stuart Mill, *Consideration on Representative Government,* New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), pp 230.

democracy as "government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy." He in fact describes Malaysia's political arrangement as being consociationalism since 1955, "with a temporary breakdown as mentioned above from 1969 to 1971."[9]

However, following Lijphart's work, many others have used consociationalism to describe Malaysia's political economy. Hague (2003) and Brown (1994) describe the Malaysian polity as a variant form of consociationalism, labelling it an "ethnic democracy" with "consociational variety". In her later work, Mauzy (1993) defines the Malaysian polity as one of "coercive consociationalism". Nordlinger (1972) gives a more expanded version of Malaysia's power-sharing arrangement, describing the Malaysian polity as an "open regime" where there exist channels of communication for political demands and where government actions are dictated by mixture of competition, conflict and compromises. Without doubt consociationalism has become an imprint of Malaysia's political and economic character so much so that Malaysia's political organisations from either side of the political divide are still stuck in power sharing arrangement.[10]

However, many local elites and scholars in the recent decades or so arguing that it is the right time that Malaysia should move away from consociational model, because the model no longer works and Malaysians would be better served if they started working *together with each other directly*, instead of relying on *elites* to resolve their challenges.[11]

---

[9] Arend Lijphart, *Thinking About Democracy: power sharing and majority rule in theory and practice,* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008).

[10] Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "Malaysia: Quasi Democracy in a Divided Society" *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, (ed.) Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1989; Karl Von Vorys, *Democracy Without Consensus: Communalism and Political Stability in Malaysia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975; William Case, *Elites and Regimes in Malaysia: Revisiting a Consociational Democracy*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1996; William Case, "Semi-Democracy in Malaysia: Pressures and Prospects for Change" In *Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific* (ed.) William Case, Canberra: Panther Publishing & Printing, 1992, pp.1-20.

[11] Moving away from the consociational model in Malaysia?, *ALIRAN,* 1Januray 2014.

Former Malaysian foreign minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said that racial politics is still relevant in the country and that the voters would only vote for an MP of their own race. He said we can either accept it as it is and go on practising politics of race or can decide to go beyond race and push for the ending of politics of race. He explained it was down to the political systems which different parties in Malaysia were practising. Therefore, he argues for centripetalism model, which is more inclusive, moderate, and progressive.[12]

While the consociational model has contributed to the peaceful – albeit risky – coexistence in Malaysia, it also has had an impact of delaying the nation-building process as well. News of growing inter- and interracial tensions and interfaith segregation over the years can no longer be ignored. Unless efforts are made by the authorities to checkmate these divisive tendencies towards national integration, the long expected and loudly proclaimed oneness and indivisibility of Malaysia will remain a utopia. In the context of pre-emptive measures against the manifestation of this extremely negative scenario, there is a whole host of options of intervention points that can possibly redirect the course of future history away from such a tragic trajectory.

The following is a selected list that may mitigate the effects of such wild-card scenario: These intervention points also represent a part of the recommended paradigm and policy framework. These points are neither exhaustive nor are they mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, they are meant to shed light on possible paradigms, policies, and practices that can influence national integration and social cohesion within the context of Malaysia's future.

---

[12] Speech Delivered by Saifuddin Abdullah, Former Malaysian Foreign Minister, at NETWORK OF MALAYSIAN THINK TANKS, *New Approaches and Strategies for National Unity and Integration Under the Harapan Government"*organized by ISIS Malaysia, 3 July 2018.

1. Rethinking National Integration and Unity

Riane Eisler, author of the international bestseller "*The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future*"[13] introduced a conceptual framework for studying social systems that pays particular attention to how a society constructs roles and relations. She proposes that underlying the long span of human cultural evolution is the tension between what Eisler calls the dominator or domination model and the partnership model. The dominator model is characterised by relations of control, domination, manipulation and competition, and the partnership model, characterised by equity, caring, sustainability, non-violence, and justice.

Essentially, we can view each other through two different lenses: commonality or difference. To emphasise commonality implies a quest for tolerance, coexistence and understanding, an overcoming of cultural differences, and above all, attaching major value to the very act of coexistence and partnership model. The result would be a society committed to cultural, ethnic, and racial pluralism – a commitment in which individuals representing different cultural, ethnic, and racial communities interact in a dynamic and collaborative way while maintaining and valuing their differences. Such interaction will produce an environment in which different perspectives are equally valued and utilised in the decision-making process. To stress commonality requires some degree of social and communal security and confidence in which one does not feel threatened by "the other".[14]

However, an emphasis on differences – valuing differences and treating separateness as a high value, having a tendency to exclude groups that are different from us, marginalising and discriminating against them – could ultimately breed conflict and violence.
Unfortunately, in Malaysia, race, and religion have become so deeply entrenched in the system and in everything that Malaysian do. In fact, the very vocabulary to discuss race, religion, and faith is fraught with sensitivities. Evidently, the state of social relations in Malaysia has

---

[13] Riane Eisler *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, (Harper San Francisco, 1987).
[14] Ibid

somewhat deteriorated and the current way of communicating with each other needs urgent reform. [15]

A nation can't survive, even a trivial crisis without some degree of integration. Auguste Comte, expresses his opinion that consensus universalis is the foundation of solidarity or cohesion, which is used to analyse social order of coexistence (social statis) and social progress (social dynamics) in any society. Durkheim employs the concept of social solidarity to analyse the society namely

(1) mechanical solidarity and (2) and organic solidarity It is through these concepts the different components of society are bound together to maintain social unity and cohesion. Talcot Persons suggests two theories of social integration. One is the theory of normative integration and the other is the theory of functional integration. Normative integration is based on common values shared by a population. In order to preserve these values and attain common goals, organizations are infused with these values and operate in accordance with accepted norms. Functional integration is based on division of label among a number of social actors.

Many scholars (sociologists, political scientists, etc.) argue that national integration is not a unidimensional concept. Rather, it is a multidimensional one. Because of its multidimensionality, it has been divided into four types of integration:

CULTURAL INTEGRATION - consistency among cultural standards;

NORMATIVE INTEGRATION - the society's values are institutionalised in structural elements of the social system;

COMMUNICATIVE INTEGRATION use of mass media in achieving consensus; and,

FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION - mutual interdependence among the units of a system of division of labour.

---

[15] Ibid

Abdul Wahed Jalal Nori

Amitai Etzioni has argued that a community can only be considered cohesive when it meets the following touchstones:[16]

- It has effective control over the use of the means of violence;
- It has a centre of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards; and
- It is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens

Etzioni believes national integration is an emotional condition, which includes the concept of nation as well. It is a self-sufficient integrative mechanism and form is provided for by its own processes and is not dependent upon those of external systems or member units and the notion of integration of the nation-unit is its ability "to maintain itself in the face of internal arid external challenges". Through this process, it is possible to maintain a harmonious and lively relationship between the various structural components of society, where so that people feel themselves to be part of a comprehensive and harmonious social life.
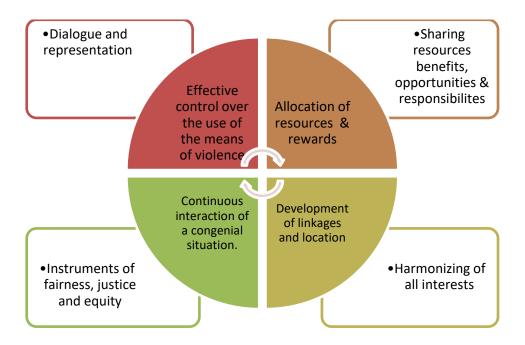
---

[16] Etzion, Amitai,, *A paradigm for Political unification,* World Politics, Vol. 15, No.1 (Oct.,1962), 44-74.
https://www2.gwu.edu/~ccps/etzioni/A23.pdf

A Framework for National Integration

Harmonious & prosperous

- Dialogue and representation

Effective control over the use of the means of violence

Allocation of resources & rewards

- Sharing resources benefits, opportunities & responsibilites

Continuous interaction of a congenial situation.

Development of linkages and location

- Instruments of fairness, justice and equity

- Harmonizing of all interests

A conclusion that can be drawn from the above cycle matrix is that national integration is made possible when ethnicities within a political entity achieve integration by consensus, social structure and function in society which brings about social order. This position is supported by the theory of social functionalism. As a rule, this theory tries to explain how the relationships among the parts of society are created and how these parts are functional (meaning having beneficial consequences to the individual and the society) and sometimes dysfunctional (meaning having negative consequences). It focuses on consensus, social order, structure and function in society. Structural functionalism sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability; it states that social lives are guided by social structure, which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour.[17]

---

[17] Macionis, J. J, *Sociology*, 6th Edition, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1997).

2. Crafting Social Values and Norms

The diversity of culture and religion in Malaysia is not a threat to the integrity of society as long as a core of shared values and institutions — constitutions, the democratic way of life and mutual tolerance — are respected. The shared memory and mutual aid are rich resources of moral voices. To build the moral foundations is to bring the regard for individuals and their rights into a better relationship with sense of personal and collective responsibilities.[18]

Social values and norms are not derived directly from state power, authority and sanctions. They can nevertheless play a powerful role in producing the kinds of social behaviour essential to maintaining social peace and ensuring progress. In more homogenous societies, these values and norms are usually organically rooted in civilisation-wide worldviews and attributes. Culturally diverse societies, however, are less likely to have the benefit of naturally evolving common values and norms across diverse groups, thus increasing the propensity for tensions and conflicts.

The Rukun Negara was a national ideology specially formulated on 31st August 1970 after the racial clash on 13 May 1969. The Rukun Negara clearly states five core principles (Belief in God, Loyalty to the King and Country, Supremacy of the Constitution, Rules of Law, Courtesy and Morality).

Although the principles and objectives are expounded in the Rukun Negara, there are no clear, and acceptable standards on how one should interact with another in order to meet these objectives. In seeking to recover the meaning of what it means to be Malaysian, this should be converted into a National Social Compact (i.e. agreement or covenant not contract), that Malaysians can voluntarily sign on to and that will form the accepted social norms for behaviours. A Social Compact is an explicit and voluntary agreement among diverse groups about the desirable and acceptable standards, behaviour and practices that should characterise people's interactions with each other. These values and norms already

---

[18] Abdulwahed Jalal Nori, *Restoring moral values,* New Straits Times, February 3, 2017.

exist in the country, as is evident by the relatively infrequent incidences of open social conflict throughout its year history. Notwithstanding, increasing social stresses and outbursts are becoming a reality. Malaysia already has the Federal Constitution as the legal basis for the protection of communal rights.

Those behaviours that is socially desirable and acceptable and socially undesirable and unacceptable such as;

i. Awareness

There had been many a time when one makes a comment on basis of one being unaware of the sensitivities. However, a small issue could easily and unnecessarily, escalate to create racial / religious tensions. This is mostly due to the increasing social stresses in Malaysia which renders some to be more easily offended and agitated.

There is a great need to understand and accommodate the differences that exist between individuals and the boundaries of inappropriate behaviour. Being aware of differences including religious and/or cultural sensitivities would assist in the development of tactful communication between individuals, consequently minimizing unnecessary verbal aggression.

ii. Respect

In recent years, Malaysian have witnessed reckless comments thrown about without remorse resulting in rather unwelcomed responses.

To have respect is to be courteous and polite both in speech and action. This should be practiced in daily conversations and even more so during situations of conflict where differences in beliefs or stances are highlighted. Respect means not to ridicule, belittle or any form of acts that could offend or create harm to others either physically, mentally or emotionally. This also includes protecting and respecting the dignity of all citizens by not allowing discriminatory behaviour and harassment, whether intentional or not.

iii. Inclusiveness/ Cooperation

The lack of space for open and healthy discussions on topics deemed sensitive in Malaysia have left many feeling disenfranchised. It is imperative that the government continue to provide the space for all individuals to voice out their needs and concerns and to encourage their participation in the decision-making process.

Combining the efforts of individuals or groups regardless of race, creed and religion towards a common goal will ultimately build trust in society. Furthermore, establishing the moral, cultural and intellectual conditions for cooperation and recognise the rights of all people in the society to state their case and express their views. The cooperative behaviour among citizens is positively associated with the endurance of the political stability.

iv. Integrity

Involves the act of being ethical, truthful and sincere without having vested interests. Actions undertaken are aligned with common ethical principles in seeking and spreading the truth. Such values should be practiced by all in every situation.

v. Accountability

Includes being responsible for one's speech and actions, including those that would influence others. Being accountable also means assuming ownership of one's actions to find solutions to resolve the situation at hand without placing blame on others. A huge disappointment that Malaysians face when there seems to be such conflicts is the absence of authorities and their inability to come forth to condemn *all* acts which may cause further disintegration.

3. A Paradigm Shift in Moving Education Forward

Education is always being regarded as an important policy domain for Malaysian government to pursue national integration. However, the discussion on achieving integration through the education is apparently endless and for too long the need to change conversation and the public debate has been narrow and diverged which led into a 'dark alley' that can't come out of it. For that purpose, the Malaysian education system should undergo a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning process.[19]

What and how we teach our children today will determine the attitude, values, social awareness as well as skills of tomorrow's citizens. Perhaps, it is the right time to rethink the goal of education. Is it to socialise young people so they can fit into the fabric of society? Is it to train a workforce for business and industries? Is it to introduce young people to greater possibilities that life has to offer? These are all reasonable goals, but they do not really address the deepest purpose that education has — helping young people to be creative, bringing new ideas and creating their own future. In this age of globalisation and information technology, there is always a limit to how much educators and teachers can convey to their students.[20]

The issue stems from the fact that we have yet to have a meaningful conversation about how schools can best help our children get ready for the future and to address the fundamental question of why education is important in the present and what we want the educational system to accomplish. We don't need additional road maps or blueprints for that; instead, we need a paradigm shift or new visions that change the direction toward the creation of a better future.

When politicians state their commitment to education, they usually talk about growth in GDP and job creation. If the kids work hard and are clever enough, they are likely to land a good job. There is no doubt that participation in education can improve the socio-economic status of those who are poor as it will open up a world of opportunities and employment for them. As David Price says the conversation on reforming the education system is often fuelled by the idea of recreating

---

[19] Abdulwahed Jalal, *Rethinking our education,* New Straits Time, May 2, 2017.
[20] Ibid

some past golden age schooling, even as we are heading into radically different future. Meanwhile, societal and technological change, of a kind never before witnessed, demanding us that we radically rethink every aspect of our lives. [21]

If we want a real reform of the education system and resolve the flaws that have caused the quality of education to deteriorate, I would like to make some suggestions on how to develop healthy social processes and bring about real reform.

First, learning should not be about exams. As a lecturer, I was often asked by students during lessons if a particular subject was "going to be on the test, because if it's not, I don't want to waste my time." Well, I don't blame the students considering I used to ask the same questions when I was a student. It is the system that placed examination results as important determinants of a student's progress to higher education, as well as occupational opportunities. Such systems as Guy Claxton[22] argued, "are designed so that a substantial proportion of youngsters are condemned to fail-through no fault of their own, no lack of effort, or no inadequate teaching". The bad news is that exam grades are becoming irrelevant. Nowadays Large Corporations around the world are no longer interested in exam grades or certificates. They are asking for the applicant's talents, networks, and portfolio.

In recent years, Finland has been ranked among the best in the world. What is interesting about the Finnish Education system is its success can be attributed to the unconventional outside the box philosophy regarding education. Finland does not have mandated standardized tests, aside from an exam at the end of high school. It limited school hours to 20 hours per week and allow the students extended recess time to do as they wish – play, read and 'to be kids' as a way to encourage curiosity and nurture learning for the sake of learning culture. Finland prohibits private schools which encourage resources to be channel towards public schools. While duplication of such system in Malaysia might not be

---

[21] David Price, *OPEN*: How we'll work, live and learn in the future, (Crux Publishing ltd, 2013)

[22] Guy Claxton, *Bringing school to life*, in *Education Forward: Moving School into the Future*, ed by David Price, (Crux Publishing Ltd, 2017), pp9-19.

feasible in the near future, it's a worthwhile endeavour to take a closer look at the lessons from Finland's experiences.

Second, formulate a long term vision for education. Apart from the importance of education to raise people from poverty, achieve greater equality; create a thriving economy, we need to have a long-term vision and paradigm shift in the teaching and learning process to prepare the younger generation for the future. The world is changing at a rapid pace, hence, the education system must transform too. Creating a school culture that is based on reflection, learning, and imagining the future is very important. Incorporating a future study course into the curriculum could help.

Third, creating a pool of 'quality teachers'. There is a broad agreement among educationist that no matter what reform strategy we are pursuing, the quality of an education system rests on the quality of its teachers. We need to adopt policies "to attract, prepare, support, reward, retain, and advance high-quality teachers." Especially in rural and remote areas, further effort is needed to attract and retain qualified teachers by providing basic services and incentives in the form of allowances and housing.

Fourth, need to globalize education. Recognizing the increasingly interconnected and digital world into which we are moving, the education system should go global. If we combine our own assets with the world's best practices, we could indeed develop a world-class education system for our children and grandchildren. Currently in Malaysia some universities have twinning programmes which allow students to study at home as well as abroad at the 'twin university'. Such programs should be strengthened and expanded to include study tours at primary and secondary levels. According to ICEF Monitor[23] annual report "internationally mobile students are half as likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with those who have not studied or trained abroad".

---

[23] https://monitor.icef.com/2014/10/new-study-makes-link-study-abroad-employability/

Conclusion

As a multicultural society, Malaysia must start valuing the diversity rather than merely tolerating one another. Moreover, if this dream is not supported by the institutions, it will result in tensions that will not only be felt now, but affecting the future generation. This worrying culture if eternalized by the next generation, will lead to a bigger danger to the society and require much more effort to be untangled. Malaysians in general support each other and are ready for a more civilized society.

Reexamining education strategies and policies is a necessary step in the right direction. It is crucial to integrate multiculturalism into the curriculum since schools have a significant impact on the development of society. Tomorrow's kids need to get to know one another better. Understanding, followed by respect and, eventually unification as necessary steps towards integration.

Furthermore, the roles and influencing power of both political and religious elites need to be recognized. Thus, the elites themselves need to be wary of their actions and inactions, and start to be more educated, open as well as not to preach ideas that create tensions in the society. This holds true for the media as well. As a significant force in society, the media must take greater care to report the truth and refrain from manipulating facts. Youth involvement is necessary in discussions on unity. They must take the initiative, begin strategizing, and begin acting as only they can paint the picture of tomorrow, the preferable future they would want to live in.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdulwahed Jalal Nori, *Restoring moral values,* New Straits Times, February 3, 2017.

_____, *Rethinking our education,* New Straits Time, May 2, 2017.

Alvin Rabushka & Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A theory of Democratic Instability,* (PEARSON Longman, 2009), PP 2-3.

Arend Lijphart, *Thinking About Democracy: power sharing and majority rule in theory and practice,* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), pp1-5.

David Price, *OPEN*: How we'll work, live and learn in the future, (Crux Publishing ltd, 2013)

Dennis Bloodworth , <u>*The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*</u>, (Marshall Cavendish International Asia Pte Ltd, 2010). pp. 221

Etzion, Amitai,, *A paradigm for Political unification,* World Politics, Vol. 15, No.1 (Oct.,1962), 44-74.

Guy Claxton, *Bringing school to life*, in *Education Forward: Moving School into the Future,* ed by David Price, (Crux Publishing Ltd, 2017), pp9-19.

John Stuart Mill, *Consideration on Representative Government,* New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), pp 230.

Karl Von Vorys, *Democracy Without Consensus: Communalism and Political Stability in Malaysia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975;

Macionis, J. J, *Sociology*, 6th Edition, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1997).

<u>Riane Eisler</u> *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*, (Harper San Francisco, 1987).

Saifuddin Abdullah, Former Malaysian Foreign Minister, at NETWORK OF MALAYSIAN THINK TANKS, *New Approaches and Strategies for National Unity and Integration Under the Harapan Government”*organized by ISIS Malaysia, 3 July 2018.

Shamsul A.B. Ethnicity, Class, Culture or Identity?: Competing Paradigms in Malaysian Studies. *Akademika* 53 (July 1998): 33-59.

William Case, "Semi-Democracy in Malaysia: Pressures and Prospects for Change" In *Regime Change and Regime Maintenance in Asia and the Pacific* (ed.) William Case, Canberra: Panther Publishing & Printing, 1992, pp.1-20.

_____, *Elites and Regimes in Malaysia: Revisiting a Consociational Democracy*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1996;

Zakaria Haji Ahmad, "Malaysia: Quasi Democracy in a Divided Society" *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, (ed.) Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1989;