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TOWARDS SATU BANGSA: A REEVALUATION OF THE RACE-BASED
NARRATIVE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA

LIM CHUN LEAN

MPHIL

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2021

TOWARDS SATU BANGSA: A REEVALUATION OF THE RACE-BASED
NARRATIVE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA

by
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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in Cultural Studies

Lingnan University

2021

ABSTRACT

Towards Satu Bangsa: A Reevaluation of the Race-Based Narrative and Its Impact on Chinese Communities in Malaysia

by

LIM Chun Lean

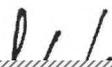
Master of Philosophy

Pakatan Harapan has terminated Barisan Nasional's 61-year rule in Malaysia through the ballot box in the 2018 14th General Election (GE14) of Malaysia. The regime change did not happen overnight; it resulted from (a) the democratization progress in Malaysia over decades, (b) the exposure of corruption and crime related to top tier government officials, and (c) the changing political landscape of Malay political parties. Criticism from the people and its coalition and party overwhelmed Najib Razak and Barisan Nasional. On the other hand, Pakatan Harapan successfully incorporated all the opposition voices to vote against Najib's regime, but the opposition front, too, had its dilemma. Pakatan Harapan had the same enemies but did not have a firm ideological foundation across parties. This issue was soon back to haunt them while they were in the reign. Barisan Nasional brought up many race and religion issues that Pakatan Harapan did not have a counter-narrative to respond. Hence, the Pakatan Harapan government collapsed in 21-month during a political coup.

Pakatan Harapan's fall was due to many reasons. However, the main one was its failure to address Malay anxieties. The Malay anxieties were rooted in the race-based narrative used by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) since the 1950s. To make a comeback, the opposition alliance needed an alternative discourse to combat UMNO's race card. In this thesis, I investigate the nature of race-based narrative and suggest an alternative way to interpret the history of Malaysia, i.e., the *Bangsa*-based narrative. *Bangsa* is a Malay word that carries many meanings like race, nationality, ethnicity, and locality, but all denote unity. Through understanding the idea of *bangsa*, we can see how Malaysians revise their imagination of collective at different times and thus formulate an alternate discourse other than the race-based narrative. Furthermore, I will use Malaysian Chinese as a case study to show how we can apply *bangsa* as a lens to read their history. Chapters One to Three analyse the political competition in Malaysia. Chapters Four to Six introduce the *bangsa*-based narrative. Chapters Seven to Nine examine the history of Malaysian Chinese through this new perspective.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.



SIGNED


(LIM Chun Lean)
Date: 19-11-2021

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

TOWARDS SATU BANGSA: A REEVALUATION OF THE RACE-BASED
NARRATIVE AND ITS IMPACT ON CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA

by
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Master of Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis claims that the Malay elites monopolize the state power by stabilizing the ethnic hierarchy in Malaysia. They subscribe to communal politics that assume ethnic representation in the state is proportionated to the structure of power-sharing in the nation. Hence, Malaysians are often overwhelmed by the race-based ideology and believe that the quadripartite division of Malay-Chinese-Indian-Others (MCIO) is natural. Political competition in Malaysia, too, is easily resurfaced as racial conflicts. However, changes in the political landscape are usually resulted from rivalries between Malay elites, while race issues are the effect rather than the cause.

This explains why Pakatan Harapan collapses within twenty-one months because when Barisan Nasional falls, its legacy endures, i.e., the race-based narrative. Barisan Nasional manipulates the Malay sentiment in the communities and solicits with lawmakers in the government by calling to restoration for the Malay dominance in the state power. In February 2020, the rule of Pakatan Harapan is officially terminated by a political coup devised by the ultra-Malay alliance. Led by Muhyiddin Yassin, this ultra-Malay alliance occupied by three large Malay-based power blocs and renders representations of other ethnicities almost irrelevant. More than ever, the Malay elites control the state; but also more than ever, the dispute among Malay elites is intricately.

Therefore, a reevaluation of the race-based narrative becomes a necessity for national reform at this particular juncture. Firstly, Malaysians need an alternative national discourse other than the race-based narrative that is favored to the Malay elites. Secondly, Malaysians need a different knowledge to understand the intricacies of state power as conflicts in politics are not ethnically defined in essence. Thirdly, Malaysians need a collective narrative that belong to all citizen regardless of race to progress as one united nation, like the title suggests, *satu bangsa*.

In Part One, I explain how the Malay elites and their conflicts shape the political discourse and landscape in Malaysia. In Part Two, I trace the historical thread of *bangsa* and integrate the race-based narrative into a larger discursive space of the *bangsa* narrative. In Part Three, I reconceptualize Chinese in Malaysia from the perspective of *bangsa* and investigate their historical subjectivities through four critical moments in history.

POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN MALAYSIA

The MCIO ethnic classification system is introduced by the British in the late nineteenth century to better rule the local workforce. The British established the Pangkor Agreement with the Sultan in the mid-1870s that allowed them to seize full control over three states in the peninsula. The laborers imported from China, India, and Indonesia quickly outnumbered the natives. To enhance the direct rule, the British classified the laborers into four boxes and separated them into different economic sectors that associated with different social role and connotation, i.e., the lazy Malay, the greedy Chinese, and the obedient Indian. The division among races intensified and the effort of acculturation for centuries was immediately disrupted.

The influence of nationalism started to penetrate the Malay Archipelagoes in the early twentieth century. While Chinese and Indians were devoted to the development in their homeland, Malays saw the Malay states as their identical home. The Malay intellectuals articulated their identity to a broader Malay unity instead of their separate sultanates. These propagandas were rapidly disseminated across the peninsula with the rise of print capitalism. As a result, Malays began to see colonialism as the nemesis of their communities. On the one hand, the Malay nationalists attacked the Malay aristocracies as they sacrifice the Malay interest for the British in exchange of their personal gain. On the other hand, they claimed that Malays are the *anak negeri* (son of the state) and saw other ethnicities as the *bangsa-bangsa asing* (foreign races). These Malay nationalists replaced the Malay aristocracies as spokesman of the Malay

communities. The 1930s witnessed a flourish of Malay nationalist associations. Led by Dato Onn Jaafar, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was founded in 1946 after the War to advance the independence of Malaya. UMNO effectively mobilized support from Malays across the peninsula and collaborated with other non-Malay race-based parties in the 1950s.

The Malay elites in UMNO engendered a different national imagination than the early Malay nationalists. UMNO realized that the demography of peninsular Malaya was not significantly favored to the Malays. As shown in the table, the Chinese population actually outnumbered the Malay population in 1947. Inciting the Malay-foreigner antagonism might eventually lead to a backfire from Chinese and Indian communities. Therefore, UMNO decided to refashion the MCIO ethnic classification system into their script. UMNO adopted the communal politics that emphasizes on the balance of ethnic representation in the state power. Subsequently, UMNO formed an alliance, which named Alliance Party, by collaborating with the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). This tripartite UMNO-MCA-MIC's partnership showcases a new national imagination, i.e., the race-based narrative.

There are three ways to spot the race-based narrative in everyday life: (a) the overemphasis of racial identity; (b) the romanticization of race; and (c) all issues can be escalated to race issues.

Malays seemed to be satisfied with this national ideology as the Alliance Party won the 1st General Election (GE1) in 1955 almost uncontestedly. This race-based configuration assumes a Malay dominance with the Malay-Chinese-Indian partnership, as the Federal Constitution dictates. According to Article 153, the ruler should safeguard the special position of the Malays and other natives. Wang Gung-wu, too, argues that 'Malayan nationalism consists of two component parts: a nucleus of Malay nationalism enclosed by the idea of Malay-Chinese-Indian partnership' (Wang 1981, p. 205).

Political competition in Malaysia has been dominated by a stable two-coalition structure since 1955. The UMNO-led Alliance/Barisan Nasional hold office from the start until its defeat in the 14th General Election in 2018 but soon restore its power in the state within two years. UMNO used the same old tactic – the race card – to create turbulence in the ruling coalition and in the society at large. Immediately after the cabinet has formed, UMNO probed that three major appointments, i.e., Minister of Finance, Chief Justice, Attorney General, were filled by non-Malays. In the late 2018, the government's attempt to rectify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) has been forced to stop as it caused much discontentment from the right-wing Malay communities. In the mid-2019, the introduction of Jawi calligraphy to the Bahasa Malaysia textbook was accused as Islamization by the Chinese education groups and communities despite the fact that it takes only four pages. In the late 2019, UMNO proposed to form a bigger Malay unity through inviting other major Malay power bloc, including a ruling party, in the Malay Dignity Congress. These incidents stroked the chord of ethnic sentiments among the people. Polarization between Malays and non-Malays reached its height after series of incitement. UMNO seized the opportunity to insurrect a coup d'état to overthrow the government in February 2020. Pakatan Harapan failed to address the Malay sentiments but the race issues are not the root cause of its defeat. The reason led to the downfall of Pakatan Harapan is its failure to establish a new national discourse other than the race-based ideology.

That is a necessity to understand the mechanism and intention of race-based narrative in order to disrupt this deep-rooted ideology in Malaysia. Malay elites consolidate their state power through stabilizing the ethnic hierarchy. Whenever there was a challenge to their leadership, the Malay elites would resurface it as jeopardizing the Malay special position or the racial harmony. More importantly, the rivalries in political arena are seldom ethnically defined. In reality, almost all political turbulences are caused by the conflicts among Malay elites over different non-race issues. For example, the 1969

racial riot is often characterized as a tragic outbreak between Malays and non-Malays after the 4th General Election (GE4) that year. Scholar Kua Kia Soong claims that it was actually a UMNO internal conflict, which the Abdul Razak's state capitalist sect's attempt to oust Tunku's aristocratic sect. Therefore, the race issues are often the effect of a political motive rather than the cause of it.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE BANGSA NARRATIVE

This thesis draws a conceptual resource from the Malay sociopolitical culture, i.e., the idea of *bangsa*. *Bangsa* is a Malay word carries multiple meaning including race, ethnicity, people, tribe, state, nation, community, citizenship, nationality, etc., and its denotation continues to develop until now. Although its meaning varies in different times and spaces, all connotes a certain kind of unity or communal solidarity. Therefore, through examining the historical development of *bangsa*, one can understand the changing perception of unity in this land. This *bangsa* approach is not an antithesis to the race-based narrative but an attempt to incorporate the modern invention of race into a holistic and larger Malay sociopolitical discursive space. Therefore, one can started to understand racialism or communalism is not the way we did in the past and hence not necessarily the way we need to continue doing in the future.

The *bangsa* narrative identifies four phases of development in the Malaysian history that dated back to the early Malay civilization. The first phase is the Indianized Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom Era; the second phase is the Islamized Muslim Sultanate Era; the third phase is the Modern Malay Nationalist Era; and the fourth phase is the Contemporary Malaysian Nationalist Era.

In the Indianized Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom Era, one sees the *raja* (ruler) as the ultimate figure and regards himself or herself as the *rakyat* (subject) of his majesty. This *raja-rakyat* configuration is built upon the system of *kerajaan* – being in a state of having

a raja, and it infiltrates into all aspects of their quotidian life. These *raja*-centric polities identify themselves as respective *bangsa* in accordance with their *raja*'s dominant territories, e.g. the Srivijaya empire and the Majapahit empire.

In the Islamized Muslim Sultanate Era, *sultan* replaced *raja* as rulers of the Malay territories, and *kesultanan* replaced *kerajaan* as the political entities. The political function of *kesultanan* is basically the same as the *kerajaan*, but *kesultanan* converted the state and royal religion from Hindu-Buddhist to Islam. These Muslim state started to define Islam as a major feature for being a Malay. Therefore, since the rise of Malacca sultanate, a *bangsa* is not only manifested through the polity but also the religion, and ties among the respective *sultan*-centric polities started to strengthen in the name of Islam.

In the Modern Malay Nationalist Era, influences of the Malay intellectuals and the Malay elites surpasses the Malay aristocracies. After the establishment of Pangkor Treaty in 1874, the British dominated all aspects of the socioeconomic life in the Sultanates of Perak, Selangor, Pahang, and Negeri Sembilan. Hence, Malays across the peninsula shared the same discontentment towards the rulers. Under this circumstance, the Malay elites rise as the representatives of *rakyat* to voice against colonizers, aristocrats, and foreigners. This shed light on the rise of Malay nationalism and the flourish of elite-centric nationalist groups since the 1930s. The Malay elites coined the term *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) as an antithesis to *bangsa Malayan* (Malayan race) and the term *kadaulatan rakyat* (people's sovereignty) as an antithesis to *kadaulatan raja* (raja's sovereignty). These propagandas emphasizes that the Malay peoples are the owner of this Malay lands. In this moment, *kebangsaan* replaced *kerajaan* and *kesultanan* to become the most influential concept in the Malay society. The feature of the first stage of *bangsa Melayu* is racism and democracy, while the second stage is communalism, and the third stage is communalism and regionalism. *Bangsa Melayu* started as an advocacy of Malay popular right in the prewar period, and gradually shifted to a partnership model to collaborate with other ethnic groups to advance the Independence in the postwar period;

after the outbreak of 1969 riots, the Malay elites extended their influence on more regionalist and indigenous groups. The fundament of *bangsa Melayu* remains unchanged but its cooperation across the nation becomes more complex and sophisticated throughout the time.

In the Contemporary Malaysian Nationalist Era, the Malay nationalism has appeared too racist and unappealing not only to non-Malays but also some Malay leftists. Besides, Mahathir Mohammad was aware the development of opposition power as his chairmanship and premiership was almost lost to Tengku Razaleigh in the 1987 UMNO Party Election. This historic fracture among Malay elites prompted Mahathir to seek more support from the non-Malays. Therefore, Mahathir presented the idea of *bangsa Malaysia* in 1991, but it was an ideological amendment of the idea of *bangsa Melayu* than an authentic transformation. Under the umbrella of *bangsa Malaysia*, Malaysian found an official discourse to accommodate all citizen into one united narrative, the Malays are refashion into *Melayu Baru* (New Malays) that associates with values of bourgeois and progressive Islam, and Malaysia repositioned itself as one of a leaders of the wave of Asianization in the 1990s. During then, the state changed Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) to Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysian language) although they are the same and promoted the spirit of *merdeka* through commercials. This state-defined *bangsa Malaysia* is a presentation of *ketuanan Melayu* in a subtle form; nonetheless, it prepares Malaysian to reimagine the nation. Mahathir's leadership was challenged again in 1998 when his deputy Anwar Ibrahim disagree with him on handling the financial crisis. Anwar was sacked and jailed but the largest social movement in the history of Malaysia also took place, i.e., the *reformasi* movement. Quickly, *reformasi* went beyond Anwar and became a space to incorporate all contestation against the state. Dr. Noor argues that 'a multitude of disparate claims and concerns are being articulated under the general rubric of *reformasi*, as an all-encompassing hegemonic project' (Noor 1999, p.6). Some writers

also coined the term *bangsa reformasi* which indicates that the script of *bangsa Malaysia* went out of control by the state and started to be defined by the people at large.

RECONCEPTUALIZING MALAYSIAN CHINESE

The changing conception of *bangsa* defines the identification of local inhabitants. Patterns of the local consciousness is subjected to change in accordance with how the public interprets the idea of *bangsa*. For example, Chinese in Malaya/Malaysia reimagine their relationship with homeland and locality every time when *bangsa* is added a new connotation. Accordingly, the history of Malaysian Chinese can be divided into three periods: (a) imagining China; (b) appropriating China; and (c) unimagining China.

The stage of Imagining China ranges from 1860 to 1946 when Chinese regards China as their homeland. To effectively recruit laborers from China, the British established the Sino-British Convention with the Qing Dynasty in 1860. Followingly, China withdrew the sea ban and the mass migration wave began. These Chinese migrants see China as *zhongyuan* (central) and Malaya as *nanyang* (south sea) which indicates their desire to back in the central land. The nationalist and communist propagandas from China also disseminated among Chinese communities quickly in the early twentieth century. In addition, the MCIO ethnic classification system and the Malay antagonism further draw Chinese away from the local politics. Chinese become the *bangsa-bangsa asing* that have no weight and right in the Malaya.

The stage of Appropriating China ranges from 1946 to 1998 when Chinese regards China as cultural capital to be appropriated to counter the overwhelming Malay dominance. Founded in 1949, MCA is the first Chinese-based political party in Malaya. Although it associated with many bad names in recent decades, MCA played an important role to safeguard Chinese interest in the road to Malaya Independence. Joining hand with UMNO, MCA became a major power bloc in the state formation. However, MCA

conceded to the controversial Article 153 that underplays the non-Malay rights. Institutionally, Chinese can never become the core of the *bangsa Melayu* or *bangsa Malaysia*. Chinese are merely their partner. To fill the void in their national identity, Chinese strengthen their Chineseness through preserving the Chinese culture and education.

The stage of Unimagining China begins from 1998 when Chinese articulate their Chineseness not from China but from the locality. The influence of MCA in Chinese communities started to decline in the millennium as it behaves too obedient to UMNO and constantly downplays the Chinese interest. Over 222 parliamentary seats, MCA won 31 seats in 2004, won 15 seats in 2008, won 7 seats in 2013, won only 1 seat in 2018 and that seat is mixed constituency with Malay majority. Data indicates that 95% of the Chinese cast their vote to the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party (DAP) or other non-race-based parties in Pakatan Harapan. Chinese rationale in politics also changed as they concern more about the socioeconomic matters than race issues in front of the ballot box. They comfortably fit in the *bangsa Malaysia* without overemphasizing their ethnic identity.

In conclusion, I explain how the Malay elites rise in the early nineteenth century along with the nationalist movement and how they exploit the race-based narrative to monopolize the state power. Then, I claim that the race-based narrative can be incorporate into a larger discursive space of *bangsa* that sees race as a postcolonial artifact rather than the Malaysian nature. Last but not least, I reconceptualize the identity of Malaysian Chinese through the lens of *bangsa*.

PART I

POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN MALAYSIA

CHAPTER 1

POLITICAL RIVALRY IN MALAYSIA

Political competition in Malaysia has been dominated by a stable two-coalition structure since 1955. In the 1940s, the immediate postwar era, British Malaya saw an ascend of race-based parties across the peninsula. Amongst them were United Malays National Organization (UMNO), Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), which represented their communal interest, i.e., Malays, Chinese, Indians, respectively. On the other hand, dissidents from UMNO formed the National Party (Parti Negara) by offering a non-ethnic-based ideology to fellow Malaysians. In response to the challenge, UMNO, MCA and MIC came together as a united front, named the Alliance Party (ALLIANCE), to contest against Parti Negara in the 1955 General Election (GE). In result, the ALLIANCE commanded majority support across the peninsula, while the two-coalition structure has also consolidated ever since.

Notably, UMNO alone swept 34 out of 52 parliamentary seats in the GE and totally outnumbered the seats won by MCA and MIC, which rendered UMNO the most influential party in ALLIANCE. As a matter of course, the UMNO-cum-ALLIANCE's leader Tunku Abdul Rahman was sworn in as the first Prime Minister of Malaya in 1957, the year of independence. Soon, Tunku faced the dilemma of seeking an equilibrium relationship between the Malay and non-Malay communities. On the one hand, Tunku was responsible for promoting a firm national identity to unite all Malaysians; on the other hand, he needed to advance the interest of Malays. Eventually, his juggling policies proved to be a failure when the racial riot broke out on 13 May 1969. Before Abdul Razak took over the premiership from Tunku, Tunku's cabinet had been forced to transfer its political power to the National Operation Council (NOC), an Emergency administrative body headed by Razak, when the State of Emergency was declared immediately after the riot. Soon, Razak announced the National Economic Policy (NEP), and through which to

reengineer the social hierarchy between the Malays and the non-Malays. Until Mahathir published *The Malay Dilemma* in 1970, claiming that the Malay indigeneity needed to be preserved and rejecting the Chinese hegemony and Imperialist influence, it effectively substantiated the race-based ideology of NEP. (Mohamad 1970)

Razak dissolved the three-party ALLIANCE and reorganized it into a broader united front, named Barisan Nasional (BN), in 1973, which encompassed nine parties from UMNO, MCA, MIC to other regional parties in Sabah and Sarawak. Razak intended to centralize the constitutional power under UMNO's belt and yielded more support from people through asserting Barisan Nasional's influence on the other end of the political spectrum. Razak's tactic was proven successful in the forthcoming Elections as Barisan Nasional has never failed to secure a two-thirds supermajority in parliament until 2008. Followed by the rise of Barisan Nasional, the opposition parties were sidelined and forced to seek collaboration from each other to combat against the ruling coalition, albeit having a different political ideology.

Parties in the opposition camp have different political narratives and agendas. In response to UMNO-BN's dominance, there were two major opposition blocs: the social democrats and the Malay-Muslim dissidents. Democratic Action Party (DAP), founded in 1965, dominated by the Chinese, falls into the former category; Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS, Malaysian Islamic Party), founded in 1951, represented the Muslim communities in Malaysia, belongs to the latter category. Notwithstanding that both opposition blocs rejected the UMNO-BN's reign, there was no alignment between them as they had fundamental ideological differences. However, the political dynamics started to change in 1987 when UMNO's internal conflicts were intensified. Led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, a sect of members challenged Mahathir Mohammad's chairmanship – then-UMNO-cum-BN's leader and Prime Minister. Eventually, the coup has failed, but the dissidents formed a party, named Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (S46, Spirit of 46 Malay Party), to continue its battle against UMNO-BN in the parliament. Soon, S46 negotiated

with all opposition parties and successfully formed an alliance to contest against Barisan Nasional in the 1990 GE8. The opposition alliance did not crush the Barisan Nasional's two-thirds supermajority; nonetheless, it showcased the possibility of collaboration among opposition parties, i.e., the alignment between the social democrats and the Malay-Muslim dissidents.

The opposition alliance was merely short-term cooperation for the GE8 and GE9, and it was formally disbanded in 1996. In 1997, Malaysians experienced the Asian Financial Crisis, while Mahathir and his Deputy Anwar Ibrahim had a different opinion on handling the Crisis. Months later, Anwar was charged with several corruption and sodomy cases that many deem as a politically motivated act to dismantle Anwar's challenge to Mahathir. Anwar was sacked as the Deputy Prime Minister, expelled from UMNO and arrested in September 1998. Soon after the arrest, Anwar and his supporter initiated the *reformasi* movement to protest against the prosecution of Anwar and call for the resignation of Mahathir; still, Anwar was sentenced to six-year imprisonment. However, the *reformasi* movement successfully led to the formation of the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (KEADILAN, People's Justice Party), which drastically changed the political landscape in Malaysia.

KEADILAN rejected the Mahathir-led authoritarian state and its cronies from the beginning. KEADILAN aimed for promoting socio-economic justice and eliminating all forms of political corruption within a non-racial framework. Its leader Anwar spent a significant amount of time in jail from 1998 until a royal pardon was issued in 2018; still, he remained a symbolic figure of the party, just like the spirit of the *reformasi* movement became a foundation for KEADILAN insofar as the entire opposition bloc since 1999. In 1999, Mahathir called for an Election after putting Anwar in prison. Ten opposition parties, including KEADILAN, DAP, PAS and the other regional parties, formed the Barisan Alternatif (BA, Alternative Front) to contest against the Mahathir-led Barisan Nasional. Despite the defeat, Barisan Alternatif won 42 out of 193 parliamentary seats in the 1999

GE12. Unlike the 1990 GE8, where there was two opposition front that represented the two-strand political ideology, Barisan Alternatif was a united opposition alliance encompassing both the Malay-Muslim dissidents and the social democrats, because Anwar, as an early Muslim activist in Malaysia and a critic of Mahathir-led UMNO, resonated the narratives from both ends. As a result, the Anwar-led Barisan Alternatif united the opposition camp and further stabilized the two-coalition structure of political competition in Malaysia since 1999.

Nonetheless, Barisan Alternatif did not last more than six years. After its defeat to the fifth Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi-led Barisan Nasional in the 2004 GE11, Barisan Alternatif was formally dissolved due to PAS's advocacy of establishing an Islamic State and several unresolved infightings on the issue of seat allocation. The collapse of Barisan Alternatif indicated that the consensus among opposition parties was a question yet to address, notwithstanding that the *reformasi* movement inspired a more determined orientation in 1999. After Anwar freed from imprisonment in 2004, he continued to work with opposition parties to seek every possibility to collaborate again in the upcoming Election. Subsequently, Anwar invited the previous Barisan Alternatif's component parties to reunite as a new opposition front, the Pakatan Rakyat (PR, People's Pact). Although Pakatan Rakyat had no difference from Barisan Alternatif in terms of its aims and ideology, it did articulate a more comprehensive framework on its plan to advance democracy, equality and the economy in Malaysia, which outlined in Buku Jingga. (Pasuni 2012, p.1) Besides, KEADILAN and other opposition parties actively involved in a social movement named BERSIH (Coalition for Clean and Fair Election) since 2005. The BERSIH movement sought to reform the electoral system and successfully resonated with people across the nation. Eventually, Pakatan Rakyat won 82 out of 222 parliamentary seats and five states in the 2008 GE12. On the other hand, Pakatan Rakyat ended Barisan Nasional's two-thirds supermajority, suggesting that the

people were more open to departing from the orthodox UMNO-BN's race-based policies and ruling ideology.

Under pressure within UMNO, Abdullah decided to step down as Prime Minister and handed over to Najib Razak one year after the Election. Najib was known for introducing the 1-MALAYSIA programme and the Bantuan Rakyat 1-MALAYSIA (BR1M, Government's Aid for The People) scheme during his tenure. The 1-MALAYSIA programme was launched as a government franchise covering several public services, including clinics, housing, internet, groceries, tourism, et cetera. The BR1M scheme provided one-off financial aids, ranging from RM250 to RM1000, to low-income households. Najib received popularity, especially from the Malay grassroots, through these projects. However, the non-Malays remained unsatisfied with the UMNO-BN's rule because of the shrinking economy and corruption. Therefore, UMNO, too, quickly realized that, in the future Elections, their battlefield would rather be the Malay heartland in the peninsula than the stubborn non-Malays voters. Hence, UMNO decided to bring the race and religious issues to further escalation to secure support from the Malays.

In response to the UMNO's weakened position, the Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa (PERKASA, Mighty Native Organisation,), a non-governmental organization advocating to uphold the special position of bumiputera, was founded in 2008, immediately after the Election. [1] PERKASA claimed themselves as protectors of Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia, a law to safeguard the interest of Malays and Natives in Malaysia. PERKASA does not have a direct relationship to UMNO, but many deem there were ties among them. In the next few years, PERKASA actively organized rallies and made provocative speeches against the non-Malays and the non-Muslims, such as organizing a counter-protest against BERSIH, distributing white angpows during Chinese New Year, burning Malay language Bibles, denying Chin Peng's ashes returning to Malaysia, et cetera. The PERKASA's anti-non-Malay-Muslims narrative had coincided

with the UMNO-BN's script in the future Election; hence, a few PERKASA's key leaders became UMNO's candidate to contest in the 2013 GE13.

Still, Najib failed to restore the two-thirds supermajority to Barisan Nasional in 2013 and experienced a further setback. In contrast to 140 parliamentary seats secured in the 2008 GE12, Barisan Nasional lost seven more seats in 2013, resulting in 133 seats. Despite the mishaps, UMNO's performance has improved, as it alone secured 88 seats, i.e., nine more seats have gained compared to the last Election. In fact, MCA was accountable for Barisan Nasional's regression because it only won seven seats compared to fifteen seats in 2013. Therefore, some analysts characterized the 2013 GE13 as a 'Chinese Tsunami', suggesting that a large chunk of Chinese voters has swung from MCA to DAP and KEADILAN. (Lee & Thock 2014, p. 24) As a result, the non-Malay representatives in Barisan Nasional were in a more disproportionate position to UMNO. UMNO became the dominant party in Barisan Nasional more than ever and rendered its allied parties, i.e., MCA, MIC and other regional parties in Sabah and Sarawak, irrelevant. Under this circumstance, the political competition between Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat (later, Pakatan Harapan) in the post-2013 GE13 was often misappropriated as a struggle between the Malay power and the anti-Malay power. Consequently, the racial tension has reached a high point during the second term of Najib's administration.

In short, changes in political landscape in Malaysia are highly surrounded with UMNO's power in the parliament. According to Bridget Welsh, the state power was less influential and concentrated before the outbreak of 1969 incident; since 1969, the Malay political elites started to control the government through implementing a series of race-based policies and establishing state-controlled businesses; in 1999, conflicts between Mahathir and Anwar had given rise to an opposition electoral alliance that aimed to topple the UMNO-led administration. (Welsh 2020, pp. 43-47)

CHAPTER 2

CHANGING LANDSCAPE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The political landscape in Malaysia has experienced a drastic change after KEADILAN was established in 1999. KEADILAN successfully incorporates dissenting voices across all races, and collaborates with other opposition parties over the time, but these electoral alliances, i.e., Barisan Alternatif (1998-2004), Pakatan Rakyat (2008-2015), Pakatan Harapan (2015-incumbent), are formed to combat the UMNO-BN's state monopoly, but do not showcase consistent ideologies and policies. The loosely-tied opposition pacts have attracted many political opportunists, and transformed the parliament into a 'seat-number race', which resulted in the fall of Pakatan Harapan in 2020. The rise and fall of Pakatan Harapan indicates that (a) the UMNO's race-religious political rhetoric remains unshaken; (b) the political cronyism is deeply rooted in the parliament; (c) the alternative ideologies has not yet established by Pakatan Harapan. In the following paragraphs, I will explain these claims through demonstrating the political dynamic between UMNO-BN and Pakatan Harapan in the 2010s.

The 2013 GE13 saw the decline of UMNO-BN's ruling power and the incompetence of Najib's leadership. Despite the deterioration of its allied parties, UMNO set a satisfactory record in the Malay-dominated rural constituencies compared to its rival – the Muslim-based PAS. Therefore, in the second term of Najib's administration, UMNO continued to consolidate its Malay-centric right-wing position. Since the non-Malay parties in Barisan Nasional have sidelined even further after the Election, UMNO could easily assert its political agenda upon the Barisan Nasional coalition. The incline of Malay power within Barisan Nasional chased the non-Malay voters away and attracted the conservative Malays, which used to support PAS, to its base. Therefore, UMNO focused on improving the Malay livelihood, upholding Article 153, and put no effort to resolve, if not to exploit, the racial and religious tension in Malaysia. Conflicts on race and religion

during this period can trace to two major social activism, i.e., (a) the BERSIH movement; (b) the HINDRAF movement.

BERSIH, a non-governmental organization (NGO) aiming to reform the electoral system in Malaysia to ensure a clean and fair political competition, organized five rallies in Kuala Lumpur from 2007 to 2016. The first three rallies, taking place in Najib's first term, protested against collusion between the government and the Elections Commissions (EC) to prevent several malpractices like gerrymandering, malapportionment, corruption, cronyism. BERSIH also demanded a reevaluation of the Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) of the polling station. However, the 2013 GE13 saw massive electoral fraud as there were phantom voters, unexplained new ballot boxes, a sudden electricity shutdown, et cetera. (Houghton 2013) Plenty of petitions were filed against the government after the Election, but Najib, again, failed to address the public's discontentment. The voices and forces against the corrupted Najib-led Barisan Nasional have fully awakened in the post-Election period. Evidence of Najib's corruption and crime has gradually unfolded, such as the 1MDB (1-MALAYSIA Development Berhad) scandal and the Altantuyaa affair [2]. Therefore, except for demands filed in the first three rallies, the BERSIH movements held in 2015 and 2016 urged Najib to resign from his premiership.

The Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) was formed on 29 December 2005 to call for social attention on the Moorthy case. Moorthy, who died on 20 December 2005, was a famous Mount Everest climber in Malaysia. He converted to Muslim without informing his family before passing away. Hence, the religious authority prepared his funeral under Muslim custom without the consent of his family members, though his wife insisted that Moorthy was practicing Hindu. She brought the case to the court, but the high supreme court did not have jurisdiction over it according to the Syariah law. Eventually, this controversy led to the formation of HINDRAF to call for justice for Moorthy's family. (Kaur 2014, p. 341) Except for the Moorthy case, HINDRAF has drawn public attention to the government infringement of the local Hindu's rights and heritage since 2007. In

October 2007, HINDRAF organized rallies to protest against the demolition of a Hindu shrine in Kuala Lumpur. After that, a few HINDRAF's leaders were arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA). During Najib's reign, the emergence of HINDRAF posed a challenge to the Muslim-dominated authorities, and people are more aware of the Islamic influence on the power structure in politics. Due to this controversy, the Muslim-based PAS departed from the opposition coalition after the 2013 GE13.

BERSIH and HINDRAF, both aim to advance the progress of social equity, become the two major left-wing forces among the general public. In response, PERKASA created a foundation of right-wing forces to safeguard the Malay-Muslim special position in Malaysia. On 16 September 2015, BERSIH was demonstrating in the streets of Kuala Lumpur to call for Najib's resignation, while PERKASA also organized a counter-rally at the same spot to accuse BERSIH's supporters as anti-Malay extremists. Soon, the demonstration was depicted as a racial conflict, despite BERSIH supporters being mixed with all races. Scholars argued that UMNO's strategy in the 2013 and 2018 GE14 was to racialize all the social conflicts in order to fit its narrative of 'Malays in danger, Islam under threat.' (Kesser 2014; Ooi 2019, pp. 41-43)

A couple of years after the 2013 GE13, PAS terminated its political cooperation pact with Pakatan Rakyat because PAS insisted on promoting its agenda on fully implementing the Syariah law in Malaysia while the allied parties firmly remained in a secular position. After its withdrawal from the coalition, PAS quickly became embroiled in an internal dispute. A sect of lawmakers led by Mohamad Sabu disagree with the PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang and advocated a reformist strand of political Islam. In September 2015, Mohamad Sabu and a group of progressive leaders officially quitted PAS and rebranded their sect as the Parti Amanah Negara (AMANAH, National Trust Party). AMANAH later joined hand with other opposition parties to form Pakatan Harapan to contest in the 2018 GE14.

Differences within UMNO was also increasing during Najib's second term after the exposure of the 1MDB financial scandal on the *Sarawak Report* in 2014. The two most influential leaders opposing Najib's party presidency were the deputy Muhyiddin Yassin and the chairman Mahathir Mohammad. They deemed Najib a betrayer of UMNO and urged him to hand over his leadership to a member who was not involved with scandals and court cases. Najib refused to do so and sacked both Muhyiddin and Mahathir from their position. Hence, they were forced to use the external power to remove Najib's leadership. In September 2016, Mahathir founded the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU, Malaysian United Indigenous Party) and acted as the party chairman while Muhyiddin was the party president. From an ideological standpoint, UMNO and BERSATU were indistinguishable. The mission of BERSATU was to replace UMNO on the decline and restore a strong Malay party into the government. As a race-based party, BERSATU later had a hard time getting along with other Pakatan Harapan's left-wing component parties.

Pakatan Rakyat was officially disbanded in June 2015. Simultaneously, the political landscape in Malaysia has experienced an unprecedented change. As mentioned in the last section, the opposition comprises two camps: (a) the Malay-Muslim dissidents; (b) the social democrats. In the modern political history of Malaysia, there was never a time when dissidents from the Malay and Muslim compartment had the power like the pre-2018 GE14 era. The three Malay and Muslim parties – PAS, BERSATU, and AMANAH – became the UMNO's direct threat in the Malay rural constituencies. While the *reformasi* narrative incorporated with the BERSIH and HINDRAF social activism for nearly a decade, the mixed constituencies in urban areas were also favouring KEADILAN and DAP instead of the Barisan Nasional. Hence, Mahathir decided to collaborate with his deadly foe, Anwar Ibrahim, after two decades of antagonism in light of these political dynamics. The Mahathir's petition for Anwar's royal pardon was approved by Yang di-Pertuan Agong soon after the two of them reached an agreement. Before the reconciliation,

Pakatan Rakyat was reformed into Pakatan Harapan in September 2015 upon the departure of PAS and the inauguration of AMANAH, and the latter remained in Pakatan Harapan. Joining forces with Mahathir-led BERSATU in 2017, Pakatan Harapan became an alliance comprising of four parties: the Anwar-led KEADILAN, the Chinese-dominated DAP, the Muslim-based AMANAH, and the Malay-based BERSATU. Mahathir, surprisingly, was agreed to be the opposition leader to contest against UMNO-BN, the party he worked for almost the entire life, in the 2018 GE14.

With Mahathir at the helm and Anwar returning to the political arena, many felt that Pakatan Harapan was much more promising than Barisan Nasional. Parties in Pakatan Harapan did not subscribe to the same set of ideology, but their aims, strategies, and enemies were quite sound. KEADILAN and DAP remained at the non-Malay and mixed constituencies; AMANAH contested the Muslim-based constituencies; BERSATU challenged the UMNO base; the East Malaysia allies Parti Warisan Sabah (WARISAN, Sabah Heritage Party) and others defended constituencies in Sabah and Sarawak against UMNO. Arguably, the most game-changing player in the 2018 GE14 was Mahathir and his BERSATU. Neither Mahathir nor the conservative Malays were ready to move away from race-based politics. Thereby, BERSATU allowed them to have an alternative for UMNO without sacrificing their preference for *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy). The second major factor should attribute to the influence of PAS and the emergence of AMANAH. AMANAH was an ideological alternative for PAS, and its strategy was similar to BERSATU for UMNO; while PAS also significantly disrupted the UMNO's base on the east coast of the peninsula. In addition to the political competition between Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional, Najib's policies and misconducts were highly responsible for the forthcoming Election result. Except for the 1MDB scandal, Najib implemented the unwanted goods and services tax (GST) in 2015, directly affecting many livelihoods. In a nutshell, the Pakatan Harapan successful electoral strategy, the

ineffective UMNO's race card, and the unpopular Najib's leadership were three of many factors which led to the fall of Barisan Nasional in the 2018 GE14.

The 2018 GE14 terminated the UMNO-led BN's sixty-one-year rule in Malaysia and handed over the administration to the Mahathir-led PH. However, the Barisan Nasional's downfall resulted from several corruptions and misdeeds conducted by Najib, rather than an ideological swing from Barisan Nasional to Pakatan Harapan. Hence, the immediate task of the Pakatan Harapan at the helm was to formulate an ideological fabric for different component parties. Yet, they had a fundamental disjuncture on advancing ethnic and religious equality. Meanwhile, Barisan Nasional and PAS formed an opposition alliance named Muafakat Nasional (MN, National Concord) in September 2019. It voiced against the government on declining Malay-Muslim rights in Malaysia and proposed integrating all the Malay-Muslim parties to replace Pakatan Harapan's government. Nonetheless, Mahathir and BERSATU, as the leader and the major party of PH, did not reject the proposal of Muafakat Nasional and publicly claimed support to a larger Malay unity in the Malay Dignity Congress in October 2019. On 24 February 2020, Mahathir walked away from his premiership all of a sudden. Following Mahathir's resignation, BERSATU withdrew from Pakatan Harapan at once and invited eleven KEADILAN's lawmakers to join their maneuvering. The infamous episode concluded with BERSATU's Party President Muhyiddin Yassin swearing in as the eighth Prime Minister of Malaysia with BERSATU, BN, and PAS support. Eventually, these parties formed a ruling coalition named Perikatan Nasional (PN, National Alliance) under Muhyiddin's leadership, while Pakatan Harapan ended its rule for merely twenty-one months.

The decline of UMNO-BN's government under Najib's leadership was attributed to the heated social discontentment over the electoral manipulation, the awareness for the interest of ethnic minorities, the Najib's corruption and misdeed, the economic recession and other livelihood issues. Pakatan Harapan managed to associate the dissenting voices

against the UMNO-BN's government in the GE14 and ended their sixty-one-year rule in Malaysia. However, the race-based mindset and the elite cronyism are still deeply rooted in the parliament. This causes the political instability in Malaysia since Pakatan Harapan at the helm.

CHAPTER 3

REFORMASI AT A CROSSROADS

Pakatan Harapan made bold promises on socio-economic and institutional reform in several campaigns before the Election and had those manifesto printed in a pamphlet named *Buku Harapan* [3]. In addition, Mahathir inaugurated a national blueprint, titled Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, during the first anniversary of Pakatan Harapan's government in May 2019, which aimed to aid the Bumiputera and B40 families to overcome their financial difficulties [4]. Though many commitments have made, the public failed to see the economic benefits after one year of Pakatan Harapan in Putrajaya. Scholars argue it was due to Pakatan Harapan being drawn to the institutional reform more than the actual bread-and-butter issues; but, most people were struggling to cope with the increasing cost of living. (Saiful Wan Jan 2020, p. 22) In the annual ceremony, the government claimed that 60 per cent of their promises had been materialized within a year in the office, but the public failed to feel the difference, if not worse, compared to the times under the rule of Barisan Nasional.

Furthermore, Pakatan Harapan failed to address the Malay insecurity and anxiety after the Election. Noteworthy, Pakatan Harapan won the Election only by a slim margin. Despite many deemed the electoral result as a Malay Tsunami because the rural Malay voters were captured by BERSATU and AMANAH, which delivered the success of Pakatan Harapan. However, scholars indicated that it was a Green Tsunami instead because UMNO voters who lost faith in Najib were shown casting their vote to PAS rather than BERSATU [5]. (Hazis 2018, p. 273) To look closely at these two camps of Malay parties, BERSATU and AMANAH won 23 seats while UMNO and PAS won 72 seats, which means most Malay populations still worried that the Malay interest would be compromised under the leadership of Pakatan Harapan. Therefore, UMNO in the opposition camp provoked the Malay sentiment by criticizing policies made by the

government, such as the appointment of Lim Guan Eng as Minister of Finance and the ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

Another never-ending dispute within Pakatan Harapan was the premiership succession issue. Mahathir promised to hand over to Anwar in not more than two years after the GE14, but he appeared reluctant to make a clear statement and date to finish the transition. Many deemed Mahathir had another candidate for the next Prime Minister instead of Anwar. Meanwhile, KEADILAN's deputy president Azmin Ali and his faction discontented with Anwar's leadership and frequently challenged Anwar's statement and position since late 2019. Pakatan Harapan seemed to have a hard time reaching a consensus on the leadership issue. Additionally, BERSATU and Mahathir openly express their interest in the UMNO-PAS's proposal of the broad Malay unity. These signs have foreseen the collapse of Pakatan Harapan as early as November 2019, three months before the Sheraton move. According to a current lawmaker in BERSATU, Mahathir had the plan to ditch Anwar and Pakatan Harapan to form a Malay-led government by joining hand with UMNO and PAS, notwithstanding that he publicly rejected the UMNO's corrupted leaders. (ibid, pp. 32-36) All these events led to the political saga in February 2020 and ended with the Muhyiddin-led PN replacing the Pakatan Harapan in Putrajaya.

In short, the collapse of Pakatan Harapan attributed to three causes: (a) failure to make a quick improvement in national economy and livelihood; (b) failure to address the Malay anxiety and discontentment; and (c) failure to sort out the internal conflicts; among them were the third reason which is the most detrimental and caused its downfall in less than one term. Differences within Pakatan Harapan was fully aware since the beginning. Nonetheless, they set aside their differences in order to topple the kleptocrats and restore a clean government to Malaysian. In order words, the foundation of Pakatan Harapan was not their ideology or philosophy but their enemies. Therefore, they ought to sort out the ideological dilemma after taking over the federal power and enforcing legal charge on

Najib and his cronies. However, Pakatan Harapan seemed not to have a consensus on its political agenda, albeit many visions have made.

Some background of the four component parties is needed to make sense of the internal dynamics within the coalition. KEADILAN has a rather diverse membership coming from all races and classes. Though members of KEADILAN mostly subscribe to social democracy but it does not have a definite political ideology. The loyalty to the *reformasi* spirit and the Anwar's leadership is the common fabric that unites them as a political sect. DAP, formed in 1965, is the oldest party in Pakatan Harapan. After Singapore left Malaysia, the People's Action Party (PAP) leaders who remained in Malaysia established DAP to continue their struggle towards a 'Malaysian Malaysia'. (Chew 1980, pp. 1-3) Since its historical link with the PAP in Singapore and the Chinese domination, the Malays are reluctant to cast their vote for them. AMANAH's political ideology is progressive Islamism, which separates them from PAS that demands establishing Islamic State and implementing the Syariah law. Its members practise Islam in a more progressive, democratic, liberal and subtle way. Last but not least, BERSATU subscribes to Malay nationalism, which has no different from UMNO. It intends to replace UMNO and functions as the Malay core in the new coalition.

Compared to Barisan Nasional, the power distribution among parties in Pakatan Harapan was equal and thus resulted in the lack of a clear coalition leader. Out of 222 parliamentary seats in the GE14, Pakatan Harapan won 113 seats. Among them, KEADILAN contributed 50 seats; DAP contributed 42 seats; AMANAH and BERSATU contributed 18 and 11 seats, respectively. As the data showed, none of the parties had half of the total seats to assert absolute influence over the coalition. On the bright side, the absence of a dominant party can better the check-and-balance system. Coalition members could have rational debates focusing on policies and toward a more mature and healthy idea-based political culture, but it has disadvantages, too. Mahathir-led BERSATU has a strong UMNO background that highly subscribes to race-based politics, while the other

parties advocate building a nation toward more social equity. This fundamental difference was attributed to the lack of a shared coalition ideology and philosophy. Meanwhile, both sides have no power to oust each other; otherwise, the coalition will collapse. BERSATU and Mahathir concerned that Anwar might enhance his *reformasi* agenda after his succession. Therefore, they started to seek collaboration outside the party and eventually led to the downfall of the Pakatan Harapan government.

There were plenty of opposition coalitions disbanded within one or two terms as parties in the coalition failed to negotiate a sustainable ideological foundation and had no common interest to strive after. The APU-GR coalition contested in 1990 and 1994. The Barisan Alternatif contested in 1999 and 2004. The Pakatan Rakyat contested in 2008 and 2013. Therefore, except for putting effort in seeking socioeconomic and institutional reform, Pakatan Harapan need to architect an alternative discourse to counter the UMNO-BN race-based narrative. To sum up, the main reason which led to the fall of Pakatan Harapan was its failure to establish a political discourse other than the traditional UMNO-led BN's race-based ideology.

PART II

PERSPECTIVES OF THE BANGSA NARRATIVE

CHAPTER 4

THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN NATION AND RACE

Malaysia is a modern concept which arose in 1963 after the peninsular Malaya merged with North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore as a nation. Hence, Tunku's administration's immediate challenge was to forge a new national identity and character. Malaysia was a racially polarized society as the Malay privilege was upheld after independence, which rendered the non-Malays living under threat. Immediately upon the proposal of Malaysia was realized, a similar concern was invoked among the Malay communities – merging with a Chinese-populated port like Singapore might jeopardize the Malay interest and constitutional right. This unsolved problem led to Singapore's departure approximately two years later and a series of social unrest happened in 1969. Thereafter, race becomes the first and foremost issue to deal with for manufacturing a national identity.

Nation was an abstract idea to Malaysian under the Tunku's administration. The Tunku-led Alliance engendered a concrete picture for Malaysians to imagine Malaysia as a nation – a Malay-Chinese-Indian partnership headed by a Malay leadership. The state reinforced this race-based national imagination through introducing a corresponding set of values, historical narrative, culture, and policies. Therefore, Malaysian history always begins with the Malacca Sultanate instead of the Srivijaya empire, as the state discourse needs a Malay-Muslim ancestor to legitimize its script, and it renders the pre-Malacca era a distant and irrelevant past for Malaysian. This narrative entitles the Malays to be owners and rulers of the land, while the non-Malays are latecomers. Ironically, the idea of nation did not bring unity to Malaysian immediately but further consolidate their race consciousness and division.

The emergence of race-based discourse dates back to the colonization era. Under the British rule, the ethnic relationship underwent a structural transformation. With the

establishment of the Pangkor Agreement in 1874, the British took control of three Malay states, as the British advisors and other investors believed that a full-range governance could maximize the profit from the tin and rubber plantation. While the local Malays did not make a cheap labor force, the British recruited the Chinese and the Indian immigrant to work in the plantations and the cities. On the other hand, the Malay political right was consent by the British. As there was a clear-cut economic and political role for the Malays and the non-Malays, the racial differences were increasingly emphasized, and the effort of acculturation for centuries was immediately disrupted.

The colonial experience under the British administration reshaped the concept of race in the Malay states. Before the mid-nineteenth century, the Malay Archipelago was already a cultural crossroad intertwined with different ethnic and civilization. There were conflicts and collaboration among the race communities, but all were inhabiting a shared cultural sphere. In the 1870s, the modern concept of race was manufactured in order to maintain the direct colonial rule and the economic interest. The division was intensified in the twentieth century. The British rulers incorporated with the Malay aristocracies in politics and the Chinese entrepreneurs in cities. Therefore, the Malay nationalism arose in the 1930s contained a democratic appeal but also a racist nature. It accused the Malay sultan of betraying his rakyat (people), and rejected the Chinese and the Indian as part of their *Bangsa Melayu* (Malay race).

The racial antagonism was further escalated under the Japanese Occupation as the Army employed a different treatment towards the Chinese and non-Chinese. Before the invasion, the Japanese diplomat had been supporting the local nationalist movement like Kesatuan Melayu Muda the Malay nationalist organization and Indian Independence League the Indian nationalist organization. But, the Chinese was hard to collaborate with as the China-Japan rivalry in the late 1930s sparked a strong hostility between Chinese and Japanese. After the Occupation, the Japanese took revenge on the Chinese, while the communists continued to combat the Army in the remote areas. The communist power

remained a threat for the British and the Malays after the War ended, and it resulted in the declaration of Emergency from 1948 to 1960. Although the communist influence had withdrawn from Malaya/Malaysia since the Tunku's administration, it became an image associated with the Chinese in Malaysia until now.

Decolonization in the postwar Malaya has a more significant influence in shaping the modern concept of race. In 1946, the British combined all nine Malay states and the Strait Settlements of Malacca and Penang under one Malayan Union. The Union proposal received a wide dissatisfaction among the Malay communities, because it offered equal citizenship to all residents in Malaya. The British abandoned Malayan Union and adopted Federation of Malaya in 1948. The Federation constitution enforced more restriction to the non-Malay citizenship, and reinforced the status of Malay tradition. While the Malay nationalist party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), played the most crucial role in facilitating the realization of Federation of Malaya. Thereupon, UMNO became an active political party collaborating with the British to advance the independence.

The race-based parties started to flourish in the 1950s like the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). Inculcating the British idea of multiracial cooperation, UMNO invited MCA and MIC to establish a race-based political coalition, the Alliance, in 1952. It claimed a landslide victory in the first General Election three years later. Thereafter, the UMNO-led Alliance became a prototype of interethnic political collaboration. The Alliance's formula, a Malay leadership in collaboration of the other races, demonstrated an example for the Malayan/Malaysian nationalism. But, it did not resolve the racial antagonism. Instead, it took racism to a national level in a subtle way. The British imperialist racial ideology was not diminished but internalized into the UMNO race-based narrative. This race-based narrative infiltrated the Malaysian culture and society from the politics down to all aspects of their quotidian life.

CHAPTER 5

THE ORIGIN OF BANGSA

The Malay sociopolitical culture is embedded in the non-Malay communities as much as in the Malay communities in modern Malaya and Malaysia, because it intervenes the life of other ethnicities, and thus invokes their counteraction. Under such a circumstance, the non-Malays tend to regard Malayness as an object of confrontation or collaboration to fixate their imagined community in defense of the Malay hegemony. Hence, we shall understand the formation and transformation of the non-Malay historical subjectivities as a series of reactions and counteractions to their Malay counterpart. In other words, the obsession of featuring the Chineseness and the Indianness in the historical narrative of Malayan/Malaysian Chinese and Indian is not innocently for the sake of its tradition, but an effort to demonstrate their non-Malayness, in order to unfold a discursive space to resist the shadow of Malayness. The competition between the Malayness and the non-Malayness resurfaces itself occasionally in every sociopolitical events since the immediate postwar period; therefore, the anxieties among the non-Malay communities also ranged from time to time. Notably, we shall not discount these anxieties as a passive reflection to sociopolitical turmoil; on the contrary, there are significant outputs for the reconstruction of the non-Malay sociopolitical discourse.

This thesis initiates on the belief that *bangsa*, a Malay word carrying multiple denotations of race, ethnicity, people, tribe, state, nation, community, and nationality, is a foundational notion in the formation of Malay sociopolitical culture. By 1946 in the immediate postwar Malaya, the British proposal of the Malayan Union compelled both the Malay conservatives and radicals to reevaluate and reinterpret the orthodox idea of *bangsa Melayu* which originally bears foci on the Malay rajas and the Malay lands. Under the influence of nationalism and democratism, the foci of *bangsa Melayu* maneuvers from rulers and royals to leaders and communities; however, the *bangsa Melayu* still excludes

the non-Malays from becoming a Malayan or part of the *bangsa*. Almost half a century later, in the early 1990s, the fourth Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad officially introduced the idea of *bangsa Malaysia* to advance the national unity; by then, the non-Malays started becoming part of the *bangsa* if not an authentic Malaysian.

As stated above, the Malay word, *bangsa*, can mean race, ethnicity, people, tribe, state, nation, community, and nationality simultaneously; however, *bangsa* does not always carry as many meanings as in the modern age. Back in the precolonial era, *bangsa* simply means a group of people living under a Malay kingdom, such as Srivijaya empire and Malacca Sultanate; later in the colonial era, *bangsa* still mainly denotes people and community; but the arrival of the Japanese brings a critical change to the convention of Malay sociopolitical culture. For the convenience of administration, the Japanese establish a political entity by merging all the Malay states with the Strait Settlements; as a result, the respective Malay sultanate power declines, meanwhile a shared racial consciousness among the Malay state awakes. After the War ended, the British proposes to establish an all-embracing Malayan Union by endowing citizenship to all races. Along with the rise of Malay racial consciousness, and the inclined influence of the non-Malay communities, the Malays determine to reclaim their Malay *bangsa* (nation). It is when the idea of state, nation, nationality, and citizenship infiltrates the Malay word *bangsa*.

The denotation of *bangsa* is not fixed. *Bangsa* adjusts itself in accordance with the external and internal influences for the Malay communities. Due to its fluidity, we shall impose a binary-relation to the framework of interpretation for *bangsa*. In a context of tribalism, the Malay sultanates are separate *bangsa* which worships their respective rajas. In a context of racialism, the Malay race is a united *bangsa* which opposes other races in its state. In the context of nationalism, the Malayan/Malaysian is an allied *bangsa* which demands liberation from the British rulers. In a context of democratic reformation, the Malay people are an allied integrated *bangsa* which questions the legitimacy of the Malay royals and aristocrats. In short, regardless of its ambiguity, it occurs that unity is

the most fundamental element of the word *bangsa*; hence, in the later writings, I will regard the foundation of *bangsa* as unity if not communal solidarity.

The idea of *bangsa Melayu* is raised in the early twentieth century and reaches its height after the War ended. *Bangsa Melayu* implies that the Malay rights and the Malay lands solely belong to the Malay people instead of the rajas, and the Malay race instead of the Chinese and Indian lodgers. Its exclusiveness intensifies the class tension between the aristocrats and the people, the social tension between the conservatives and the radicals, and the racial tension between the Malays and the non-Malays. These tensions later create a new face of Malayan/Malaysian sociopolitical culture. Firstly, on the constitutional level, the *bangsa Melayu* legitimates the Malay political supremacy and leads to race-based politics; secondly, on the sociocultural aspects, the anxieties of the non-Malays always anchor to the structural changes of the implication of *bangsa*.

The mid-1940s and the early 1990s are two historic moments when the idea of *bangsa* goes through a series of critical reassessment. First of all, during the mid-1940s aftermath, both the Malay conservatives and radicals call for reform for the Malay communities. Onn Jaafar, later became the founding father of the UMNO, advocates that the object of loyalty shall orient to the *bangsa Melayu* instead of their respective sultan. Secondly, in the early 1990s, Mahathir Mohamad, the fourth and seventh prime minister of Malaysia, outlines a vision that aimed to become a fully developed nation within three decades; more importantly, he wants to form a united *bangsa Malaysia*. Both Onn's *bangsa Melayu* or Mahathir's *bangsa Malaysia* target to confront a larger conflict by using ethnic if not communal solidarity as a means. For Onn, *bangsa Melayu* is a new conceptual space where the boundaries among various Malay settlements could be shattered, then redirects their spearhead to the Malay feudalism. For Mahathir, *bangsa Malaysia* is an attempt to invent a new sense of ethnicity, the Malaysian, to cancel out the ethnic differences between the Malays and the non-Malays, so that the nation could proceed as a unity in the age of globalization. The emergence of *bangsa Melayu* and

bangsa Malaysia leaves us two immediate questions: (a) how is Malayness manifested within the *bangsa Melayu*; and (b) how is Malayanness/Malaysianness manifested within the *bangsa Malaysia*.

Firstly, the Malay sociopolitical culture defines Malayness. Being practiced for centuries in the Malay Archipelago, also known as Nusantara, there are two essential beliefs revolving around the political life of Malay communities: (a) *tanah Melayu*; and (b) *bumiputra*. *Tanah Melayu* means lands of the Malay; it claims that the peninsular Malaya is the property of the Malay race because the peninsular Malaya is within the domain of the Nusantara. *Bumiputra* means sons of the soil; it insists that the Malay race shall be endowed a unique position and privileges because they are born in and thus the owner of *tanah Melayu*. The Malayness manifests through *tanah Melayu* and *bumiputra*. Nonetheless, the Malayness has made concessions with the British rulers in exchange for Independence. Also, the Malayness tries to maintain the interest of Malay race; in the meantime, it finds a place for the non-Malays. All these compromises have been made for the nationhood to take the Malayness into another composition with Malaysianness.

Secondly, the Malay-Chinese-Indian multiracial composition, which develops during the twentieth century, defines the idea of Malayanness/Malaysianness. The idea of Malayanness/Malaysianness creates a more inclusive space to accommodate all races into one imagined community called Malaya/Malaysia. In this process, the national or regional unity gradually interrupts the Malay racial solidarity. However, on the contrary to the belief that the Malayanness/Malaysianness is to eliminate the racial identity, the Malayanness/Malaysianness makes room for all Malayness, Chineseness, and Indianness. The precondition is that the Malayanness/Malaysianness is an embracing nationality in which the Malayness is its foundation. Drawing back to the pre-independent era when the consciousness of Malayan and Malaysian first comes on stage, Wang Gung-wu says that the 'Malayan nationalism consists of two component parts: a nucleus of Malay nationalism enclosed by the idea of Malay-Chinese-Indian partnership' (Wang 1981, p.

205). Furthermore, according to the note from Tim Harper on the speech of Tunku Abdul Rahman (the first prime minister of Malaya/Malaysia), it writes ‘in 1951 Tunku Abdul Rahman had asked rhetorically who the Malayan were: his answer was that there could be a Malayan nation, but the Malay *bangsa* [race/nation] would exist as a distinct core within it’ (Harper 1999, p. 350). The unfinished project of Malayan nationalism later continues as the Malaysian nationalism in 1963 with the merging of north Borneo and Singapore and deteriorates since 1965 after Singapore’s departure. After decades of contestation on the legitimacy of Malay supremacies, Malaysians begin to agree on the policy of *bumiputra* and accept the Malay political and constitutional special position to a certain extent. However, this nucleus of Malayness within the Malaysianness varies occasionally, and the variation of the state of Malayness would result in their non-Malay counterparts. Hence, how *bangsa* is articulated will affect the relation of different components within the Malaysianness. Conceptualizing *bangsa* is, thus, not a luxury but a necessity.

As noted above, the foundation of *bangsa* is unity or communal solidarity, but the precise meaning of *bangsa* will vary in accordance with its respective context. Several terms that are closely related to *bangsa* need to be carefully examined. These terms can be divided into two groups: (a) the interchangeable words for *bangsa*; and (b) the words that branched from *bangsa*:

a-i) *kaum* refers to race, while *bangsa* refers to ethnic;

a-ii) *keturunan* refers to descendant, while *bangsa* refers to birthplace;

a-iii) *negara* refers to country, while *bangsa* refers to nation;

a-iv) *rakyat* refers to people, while *bangsa* refers to nationals;

a-v) *suku* refers to tribe, while *bangsa* refers to community;

a-vi) *warganegara* refers to citizenship, while *bangsa* refers to nationality;

b-i) *bangsawan* refers to aristocrat, while *bangsa* refers to civilian; and

b-ii) *kebangsaan* refers to national, while *bangsa* refers to racial.

Accordingly, both *bangsa* and *kaum* can mean race, but one's *bangsa* is decided by his or her cultural traits – more like ethnic, while one's *kaum* is decided by his or her physical appearance. Secondly, both *bangsa* and *keturunan* can mean descendant, but *bangsa* indicates one's birthplace, while *keturunan* indicates one's origin. Thirdly, both *bangsa* and *negara* can mean country, but *bangsa* is defined in terms of its socio-politico-cultural entity, while *negara* is defined in terms of its geographical boundaries. Fourthly, both *bangsa* and *rakyat* can mean people, but *bangsa* refers to the people comes from a certain nation, while *rakyat* refers to the ordinary people living inside a nation vis-à-vis the rajas and royals. Fifthly, both *bangsa* and *suku* can mean tribe, but *bangsa* is a general term to mean community, while *suku* has a restricted usage to mean a certain Malay kampung or Malay tribalism. Sixthly, both *bangsa* and *warganegara* means citizenship, but *bangsa* assumes a full set of commitments and emotive attached with the nationality, while *warganegara* simply means the residential right in a country. Lastly, the *bangsawan* and *bangsa*, which mean aristocrat and civilian respectively, add in a class dimension; while the *kebangsaan* and *bangsa*, which mean national and racial respectively, invite an ethnic dimension. Given the above, the meaning of *bangsa* is enriched and evolved along with the historical development in the Malay socio-political culture, and vice versa. In this sense, *bangsa* is arguably the base-entity of Malay and Malaysian culture.³ Studying the interpretation of the idea of *bangsa* is, therefore, not only crucial for rethinking the Malaysian history, but also helpful for relocating the emotional aspects aroused in the moments of ideological changes, given the fact that it is revolved around the entire formation of the historical subjectivity of Malaysian.

Integration is an anticipated outcome for making a *bangsa*. Yet, the process of manufacturing an integrated *bangsa* is indeed problematic because we need to question what is the centrifugal elements of the *bangsa* in the first place. Next, we shall continue to find out what policies are implemented in order to promote this idea of *bangsa*. By

adopting this idea of *bangsa*, we can immediately identify support and opposition from different communities, then we might proceed to ask what is the nature and motives of these reactions and counteractions. After deconstructed the *bangsa*, we shall finally see how the *bangsa* becomes a recurring motif in the historical and political development in Malaysia. In the following paragraphs, I will first compare the two prominent concepts of *bangsa*: the *bangsa Melayu* and the *bangsa Malaysia*.

During the 1940s, *bangsa Melayu* is a claim for the Malay sovereignty and the people's sovereignty. The belief of *bangsa Melayu* leads to the formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 that comprised of all states in peninsular Malaya. On the one hand, *bangsa Melayu* embraces the constitutional monarch to ensure the Malay people's mandate is prioritized; on the other hand, *bangsa Melayu* legitimizes the Malay special position in peninsular Malay by distinguishing the *bangsa Melayu* from the *bangsa-bangsa asing* (foreign races). Followed by the implementation of the Federation of Malaya, the non-Malays have no choice but to accept that they are conferred only with an inferior rank. Therefore, the non-Malays endeavor to work on their inherited traditional and cultural assets, in order to create a discursive space fighting against the overwhelming Malay hegemony.

Envisaging in the 1990s, *bangsa Malaysia* is a claim for the national unity and the economic prosperity. *Bangsa Malaysia* is still an initiative has yet to fully materialized. In 1991, Mahathir proposes the Vision 2020, and aims to forge a full partnership between the Malays and the non-Malays, particularly in the economic area. Instead of naively believing in multiracial harmony, this project envisions a stable growth of Malay middle-class in order to balance the social status between Malays and Chinese. Nonetheless, the *bangsa Malaysia* successfully creates a strong sentimental appeal because it appears as an inclusive idea of national integrity regardless of races. In fact, *bangsa Malaysia* still remains the nucleus of Malayness as a precondition of multiethnic integration since it wants to strengthen the interracial bond by not compromising the Malay supremacy. The

occurrence of *bangsa Malaysia* signifies the discursive contestation between the Malays and the non-Malays has escalated to an ideological combat where the Malayness and the non-Malayness are forced into a new battleground called the Malaysianness.

We shall capture the pattern of the interracial relation in Malaysia by picturing the changes of the conceptual framework of the *bangsa*. In other words, understanding the nature of *bangsa* can assist us to make sense of how Malayan/Malaysian live under the Malay nationalism and the Malayan/Malaysian nationalism.

CHAPTER 6

FROM BANGSA MELAYU TO BANGSA MALAYSIA

In the ancient Malay sociopolitical culture, it is believed that God confers the sovereignty power to the rulers, i.e., the rajas or sultans. (Brown 1970, p. 16) By this sacred endowment, the rulers would obtain a *daulat* (holy aura), which distinguished his or her majesty from the rest of the subjects. With this mandate, the rulers shall submit themselves to God, and all subjects shall obey their ruler unconditionally; otherwise, it would be considered as committing *derhaka* (treason). According to this belief, the sociopolitical life of the early Malay civilization always revolves around a supreme ruler, and the ruler becomes an ultimate point of reference for a civilization. This stable ruler-subject relation is built upon a system of *kerajaan* – ‘being in a state of having a raja’ (Milner 1982: pp. 8-9), and it infiltrates into every aspect of the ordinary life of the Malay community. After several centuries-long in cultivating this *raja*-centric political system, the people started to form a sense of community by identifying themselves as *rakyat* (people) living under a certain *kerajaan*, and this *raja-rakyat* formulation gradually becomes a prerequisite factor in forming a sociopolitical entity. By and large, the ruler-subject and the *raja-rakyat* composition shapes the early sense of *bangsa* in the Malay world. Channeling the loyalty to *kerajaan*, in other words, is the early form of building communal solidarity in the Malay society. For instance, during the Srivijaya empire, the Majapahit empire, the Melaka empire, and the Malay sultanates emerging since the twelfth century, *kerajaan* functions as a nucleus to unite the discrete Malay communities.

Arrived at an agreement between the Malay rulers and the British governors by signing the Treaty of Federation in 1896, the peninsular Malaya is divided into three components: (a) the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Melaka, and Penang under the direct British control; (b) the Federated Malay States of Selangor, Pahang, Perak, and Negeri Sembilan which enjoyed autonomy only in local affairs; and (c) the Unfederated Malay

States of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis, and Terengganu, which enjoyed greater autonomy. Accompanied with the arrival of nationalism in Southeast Asia in the early twentieth century, the Malay intellectuals begin to voice their dissatisfaction towards the rajas, royals, and the *kerajaan* on surrendering the political sovereignty of the Malay lands. According to Ariffin Omar's account on the rise of nationalism in Malaya, he stated that Munshi Abdullah was one of the Malay intellectuals who criticize the *kerajaan*.

[Munshi Abdullah] felt that indolence or negligence was not the cause of Malay backwardness: as long as people could derive benefits such as satisfaction and profits from their work, they would work. But if the people lived in perpetual fear of the persecution and greed of the ruler and the nobility, society would be poor and backward. If what they earned was seized by the ruling elite, it was pointless to be industrious for they would not enjoy the fruits of their labor. (Omar 2015, pp. 17-18)

Meanwhile, the establishment of Federated and Unfederated Malay States, on the one hand, weakens the function of *kerajaan*, because *negeri* (state) as a political unit has compromised for the greater unit of federation; on the other hand, the surrender of the political power of the four Federated Malay States renders their rajas and *kerajaan* the puppets of British. Under this circumstance, the Malay *bangsa*, which at first orients towards *kerajaan*, gradually turns its foci to the prominent Malay leaders. In other words, the ruler-subject and *raja-rakyat* relations are no longer stable since the late period of British rule, and it signify the awaken of Malay masses.

During the Hindu-Buddhist era in the Malay world, race is not a ubiquitous notion that carries political implications; instead, people tend to use territory and sovereignty to separate themselves from others. The arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia since the twelfth century gives rise to racial consciousness. Notably, while the Melaka sultanates, the center of Islamization in Asia, associate the Malays with Muslims and defined *Melayu* as people who practice Islam and speak Malay, a strong religious and political connotation began to develop in the Malay identity (Reid 2004, p. 7). This Malay-Muslim bilateral identification later penetrates the idea of *bangsa* as the *kerajaan* in decline, and the

growing menace from the *bangsa-bangsa asing* (foreign races), in particular, Chinese and Indians. The tripartite relation of Malay-Chinese-Indian exists in the peninsular Malaya since the British implementation of the divide-and-rule system in the early nineteenth century: the elite Malay in the civil servant sector, the elite Chinese in the business sector, the elite Indian in the police force; the rural Malay in the agriculture and aquaculture, the rural Chinese in the mining industry, the rural Indian in the plantation. When the British proposal of the Malayan Union is put forward after the war, the racial tension quickly intensifies; also, the Malay nationalism reaches its height.

By integrated the Federated and Unfederated Malay States altogether with the Strait Settlements, except Singapore, in 1946, the British ideal of the Malayan Union is to grant all the residents, regardless of race and class, in the peninsular Malaya equal rights and citizenship. More significantly, the British aims to construct a sense of Malayanness and lead the Malaysians to advance the Independence project (Omar 2015, p. 54). The Malay rulers accept the Union plan though reluctantly, while the Malay society is unhappy with their decision without obtaining the consent from the people. Without lasted for two-year-long, under the massive pressure of the call for anti-colonialist, anti-royalist, and anti-foreigner from the Malay organization, the British agree to withdraw the Union plan and replace with the Federation plan, i.e., Federation of Malaya. The Federation plan, which remains its objective of conferring equal rights and citizenship that promised before, proposes that the Malays, and other *bumiputra*, shall enjoy a special position that more privilege than the *bangsa-bangsa asing* (ibid, p. 129). Meanwhile, the idea of Malayanness is also rejected together with the Malayan Union because the Malay accuses that the idea of Malayan is a pure invention of colonialism. The transition from the Union plan to the Federation plan, on the one hand, further fixates the imagined community of *bangsa Melayu* vis-à-vis the *kerajaan* and the *bangsa-bangsa asing*, on the other hand, the Malay nationalism acquires its legitimacy to monopolize the racial discourse in Malaya (later Malaysia).

Since the massive importation of foreign labor from China and India in the early twentieth century, the population and the ethnic diversity in the peninsular Malaya is growing rapidly. Fifty-six-year-time from 1911 to 1957, the population goes through almost a threefold increase from 2.3 million to 6.3 million, while the ethnic composition of three major races – Malay, Chinese, and Indian – reaches the balance of 49%, 36.6%, and 11.5% by the year of Independence. (Khoo 2005, pp. 2-4) These data signify that a plural society like Malaya/Malaysia depends very much on the interethnic collaboration; in fact, according to Saravanamuthu, Malaysia showcases ways of ethnic power sharing and coalition politics to the world (Saravanamuthu 2016, p. 3). Emerging immediately after the implementation of the Federation plan, the prototype of Malaysian politics comes into existence in the 1955 General Election. Dato Onn Jaafar, the founder of the Malay-based UMNO (United Malays National Organization), decides to withdraw from his party to establish a multiracial IMP (Independence of Malaya Party); while Onn's successor, Tunku Abdul Rahman, later becomes the first Prime Minister of Malaya/Malaysia, seeks collaboration with the Chinese-based MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) and the Indian-based MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) to form the Alliance Party to confront the IMP in the 1955 General Election. Consequently, the race-based UMNO-led Alliance defeats the multiracial IMP. (Lee 2007, pp. 491 - 495) Although it implies that the interracial equality would not be materialized in Malaya/Malaysia for a short term, but it also lays bare a new picture of interracial collaboration – the Alliance model. The Alliance model suggests that the Malay nationalism precedes the Malayan/Malaysian nationalism. In other words, the Malay-Chinese-Indian comradeship presumes mutual respect for the Malay privilege. The opposition between *bangsa Melayu* and *bangsa-bangsa asing*, therefore, gradually results in the accommodation of *bangsa-bangsa asing* into a national partnership by surrounding them with a core of *bangsa Melayu*.

Given that the allegedly Malay privileges have only provided little concession for the Malays and yet trigger strong disaffection among the non-Malay communities, the

inter-racial rivalries continue to intensify after the Independence in 1957. In the 1959 General Election, the popular vote for the Alliance Party drops from 81.7% to 51.8% as compared to the last Election. The politics of accommodation, according to Cheah, of the Tunku's regime, fails to please both the Malay and the non-Malay camp. (Cheah 2002, p. 51). Moreover, the formation of Malaysia, by integrating Singapore and North Borneo in 1963, further complicates the inter-racial tension in Malaysia. Although the Tunku's regime curbs the influence of PAP (People's Action Party) of Singapore by playing gerrymandering; still, the PAP succeeds in mobilizing many non-Malay parties to participate its "Malaysian Malaysia" campaign to declare a challenge to the special position of the Malays. Eventually, the Tunku's regime decides to expel Singapore from Malaysia, because it threatens the racial harmony among the nationhood. (ibid, p. 101) Singapore's departure consolidates the belief that the *bangsa Melayu*, at its core of Malaya/Malaysian nationalism, renders unchallengeable. Meanwhile, the Indonesian nationalists vehemently oppose the formation of Malaysia through the *konfrontasi* movement lasted for three years since 1963, as they accuse that the idea of Malaysia is a neocolonial invention; however, by facing a threat from abroad, an identification for the nationhood is strengthened. Accompanied by internal and external political turmoil during the formation of Malaysia, *bangsa Melayu* carries not only a racial and democratic implication but also began to develop a national and global connotation.

The most incandescent social concern, after Singapore's exit and *konfrontasi*, is the conflict over the revision of the National Language Act in 1967. Malay language is the national language of Malaya/Malaysia since Independence; however, the Malay groups demand that the government shall further implement the Malay language fully as the national and official language. Syed Nasir, an UMNO member as well as an ultra-Malay nationalist, accuses that the Tunku's policies are favorable to the Chinese education and ostracize the Malay language, complain that the Chinese culture encroaches the Malay lands (Vorys 1975, p. 204). Still, Tunku decides to delay the amendment of the National

Language Act; his decision triggers massive wrath among the Malay communities, while the non-Malays remain silent. All the piled-up social tension manifests in the 1969 General Election: the Alliance Party wins the Election by a narrow margin with only 74 over 144 seats and 44.3% popular vote. Two-day after the General Election, when the opposition supporters are still soaking in the joy of victory, the racial riot breaks out all over the country. Immediately, the Yang di-pertuan Agong declares the national emergency, then appointed Tun Abdul Razak, later becomes the second Prime Minister in 1970, to lead the National Operations Council (NOC) to handle the emergent situation from 1969 to 1971. This riot, also known as the 513 incident, signifies the end of Tunku's pluralistic bargaining politics – seeking balance from both the Malays and the non-Malays, and the beginning of an ultra-Malay regime. The 1970s, therefore, is a period when the core of *bangsa Melayu* goes through an enormous expansion, and the Malay-Chinese-Indian comradeship is in decline.

In a state of emergency, Tun Abdul Razak is entitled to absolute power, and he succeeds Tunku as Prime Minister in a few months after the outbreak in 1969. The social conflicts over the last decade, for Razak, shall attribute to the democratic excesses of the Tunku's administration, i.e., overly emphasizes on maintaining the racial equality but neglects the Malay poverty (Mauzy 1983, p. 24). Hence, the Razak regime seeks to close the economic gap between the Malays and the non-Malays, as well as the rural and the urban; also, he tries to find a balance between the state and local government. Under the Razak's administration, there are six major implementations which create massive influence for the contemporary Malaysian society: (a) National Economic Policy (NEP); (b) National Culture Policy (NCP); (c) National Language Policy; (d) the FELDA rural development; (e) the formation of Barisan National (BN); and (f) the establishment of Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. Firstly, NEP is a series of economic restructuring programs that privilege the Malay enterprises and workforce by enforcing racial quota in the business sector. Secondly, NCP is an official statement which claims that the

indigenous Malay culture and Islam should be the foundational elements of the national culture. Thirdly, all national institutions in civil services and education sector should use the Malay language as a medium of instruction except English subject. Fourthly, the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) launches several projects to resettle the rural Malay kampung and assist in the development of agriculture economy. Fifthly, by dismissing the Alliance Party, Razak registers a new coalition – Barisan National (BN), which comprises not only the old comradeship of UMNO-MCA-MIC but also includes the other six parties – to represent all social stratum in Malaysia.⁴ Lastly, the state weakens the Selangor local government by demarcating Kuala Lumpur – the political and economic center of Malaysia – as the Federal territory that directly governed by the state. Apart from this, the Razak's regime also tries to promote the national ideology by issuing *Rukunegara* (National Principles). By and large, these implementations not only placate the Malays but also manufacture a layer of Malay middle-income class; therefore, the social and economic status between the Malay and the Chinese are eliminated bit by bit. From the 1970s onwards, the authoritarian power penetrates deeply into the formation of *bangsa; bangsa*, thus, is not only a consensus among the people but also envisioned by wills of the state and regime.

The Razak administration ends with his sudden death while on medical leave in London by 1976; immediately, Tun Hussein Onn succeeds as Prime Minister. Later in 1981, Hussein decides to transit his power to Tun Mahathir Mohamad smoothly; while the inauguration of the Mahathir's administration marks a new era for Malaysian – an initial path towards authoritarian-capitalist Malaysia. According to Khoo's analysis of the Mahathirist philosophy of governance, the so-called Mahathirism consists of five core components: nationalism, capitalism, Islam, populism, and authoritarianism. His nationalism manifests in channeling the hostility of Malaysian towards the neocolonialist and neoliberalist manipulation of money market; his capitalism is ethnic-centric at heart but also promotes the collaboration of inter-racial businesses; his Islam focuses on

improving the work ethics of Muslim instead of the dogmatic principles that lack Muslim behind; his populism reflects in the ability to mobilize popular support to secure his premiership for twenty-two-year-long; his authoritarianism is exemplified through his ruthless action towards his opponents regardless within or outside his party. (Khoo 1995, p. 7) Similar to the Razak's administration, the Mahathir's administration tends to shape the *bangsa* according to wills of the state and regime as well; however, the former achieves through imposing a series of economic and cultural policies, while the latter utilizes its authoritarian means to further an ideological effect. In Althusserian words, Razak uses mainly the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), while Mahathir exploits both the RSA and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) to intervene in the formation of *bangsa*. (Althusser 2008, pp. 100 – 140)

In Mahathir's opinion, there are three inherent causes keeping the Malay race behind: (a) the innate nature of Malays; (b) the Chinese economic hegemony; and (c) the Western economic dominance. Published in 1970, Mahathir's book *The Malay Dilemma* writes that the Malays have yet to develop any sophisticated idea related to properties and monetary system (Mahathir 1970, pp. 166 – 169); also, it believes that the Chinese are some 'predatory immigrants' (ibid, p. 71) but 'good businessmen' (ibid, p. 84) who make profits through excessively exploiting the Malays. Moreover, Mahathir, rising as an Asian leader in the 1980s, is a spokesman for the Southeast Asian countries: he warns Malaysian to look out the Western manipulation of the capitalist market and advocates Malaysian to learn the work ethic from the East – Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Unlike Razak, NEP's under Mahathir reduces the state's government and encourages private businesses to incorporate with the government project. During the economic recession in the mid-1980s, Mahathir resolutely holds the NEP in abeyance from 1 October 1986 to 31 December 1990 to attract more foreign currencies and investments. Meanwhile, by the late 1980s, the UMNO also goes through a violent split; still, Mahathir manages to secure his party leadership and cabinet premiership. By 1991, when Malaysia restores to

normalcy, Mahathir announced the Vision 2020 (*Wawasan 2020*): it proposes that by 2020 Malaysia would become a fully-developed country and a united *bangsa Malaysia* free of racial inequality and discrimination. More importantly, apart from his reassertion of the cliché of the importance of the inter-racial collaboration, he states that the *Melayu Baru* (New Malay) plays a significant role, amongst others: the *Melayu Baru* denotes the Malays who had prepared themselves during the NEP times and were ready to undergo ‘a mental revolution and cultural transformation’ (Mahathir 1991). In short, NEP successfully reproduces the *Melayu Baru* social stratum; thus, the economic disparities between the Malays and the non-Malays were, more or less, eradicate. By closing the economic gap, the Malays invites the non-Malays into the historic bargain of *bangsa* to look for the way forward as Malaysians.

Mahathir believes that the authoritarian rule can guarantee a stable government to further the economic advancement for a nation; in addition, he indicates that the liberal values retard the progress of the Western countries – he sees excessive freedom can be harmful to a community. Mahathir’s authoritative means functions at its height in these four moves: (a) the 1987 UMNO split; (b) the 1987 Operation Lalang; (c) the 1988 judiciary intervention; (d) the 1998 Anwar’s maltreatment. In 1987, Razaleigh and Musa challenge the UMNO presidency of Mahathir and Ghafar; eventually, Mahathir wins the party election by a narrow margin, he then deregisters the UMNO and re-registers as UMNO Baru (New UMNO). By resembles the UMNO, Mahathir rejects the Razaleigh-Musa faction from joining the party; meanwhile, he detains some of these members as well as other oppositions by using the Internal Security Act. To ensure the judgement is favored to him, Mahathir demands several constitutional amendments to restrict the judicial autonomy. By claiming for his doings are to prevent the racial riot, hundreds of people are arrested in this operation, later also known as Operation Lalang. After that, for almost a decade, Mahathir’s premiership renders unchallengeable; at the same time, his deputy Anwar Ibrahim is rising as an anointed successor. Initially, Mahathir and Anwar

work well together; however, during the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997/98, the disagreement of the financial and monetary policies between them is intensified. At this very moment, letters, articles, and rumors impeaching Anwar for committing sodomy are publicized, Mahathir then decides to persecute Anwar from his deputy premiership and leadership for both the parliament and the party. By 8 September 1998, seven-day after being sacked, Anwar calls for *reformasi* – ‘for social and political reforms that opposed Mahathir’s cronyistic responses to the financial crisis’ (Khoo 2003, p. 100). Later, leading by Anwar’s wife – Wan Azizah, the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) was founded: PKR’s objective is to ensure a democratic, progressive, and united multiethnic nation. Significantly, the *reformasi* and the formation of PKR bring the possibilities of forming a multiethnic alliance. At this stage, *bangsa Malaysia* is no longer an ideological apparatus solely designed by the state but also rigorously contested by several groups of people that denied the state power.

PKR forms a new coalition named Barisan Alternatif (BA) by allying with other opposition parties – the Muslim-based Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP), and the multiracial leftist Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) to combat the UMNO-led BN in the 1999 General Election. Still, BA loses the Election; after that, PAS withdraws from the BA due to its contradictory ideology on Islamic State with the coalition; but, later in 2008, PAS reunites with PKR and DAP to form another coalition named Pakatan Rakyat (PR) to combat BN in the 2008 and 2013 General Election. Though the opposition coalition does not topple the ruling coalition, the BN does experience a critical setback, particularly since the late 2000s. Apart from the rise of the opposition coalition, the social movement and activism change the face of the political landscape in millennial Malaysia, i.e., BERSIH, HINDRAF, and PERKASA. The nature of social activism in Malaysia, according to Govindasamy, is closely associated with the welfare of racial and religious groups (Govindasamy 2015, p. 116). After the *reformasi* movement, there are still activism that concerns the ethnic issue: for instance, the

HINDRAF demands the preservation of Indian temples and the interest of the Indian working class; while the PERKASA claims for more room for the Malay rights. However, there is another trend of social movements which roots in a universal demand for democratic reform that can mobilize the Malaysian as a whole: for example, BERSIH earns many supports from promoting the electoral reforms – five rallies are taken place from 2007 to 2016. The BERSIH movements prepare the Malaysian for a critical transformation in 2018, along with the rise of Pakatan Harapan (PH). By the 2000s, with the decline of the ruling coalition and the emergence of the non-racial based activism, *bangsa Malaysia* becomes a realm that is more open for contestation – a scene that out of Mahathir's script.

Released from imprisonment in 2004, Anwar establishes the coalition of Pakatan Rakyat (PR), which inherited the ambition of Barisan Alternatif (BA) by restating their political ideology as social liberalism, social democracy, and social justice. PR contests Abdullah's administration in 2008 and Najib's administration in 2013, despite the loss, it obtains promising outcomes: by 2008 it wins 82 over 222 parliamentary seats with 47.79% popular vote; by 2013 it wins 89 over 222 parliamentary seats with 50.87% popular vote. Later, Anwar faces second sodomy charge in 2015; meanwhile, having retired for thirteen-year, Mahathir returns to the stage by establishing the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU). Functioned as an alternative to UMNO, BERSATU not only advocates Malay nationalism and Islamic democracy at heart but also emphasizes on anti-corruption. Given that the deterioration of Najib's regime – for his excessive act of corruption, cronyism, and other crimes, the opposition parties gain unprecedented popular support ranged from different races and classes. By then, Mahathir resurrects Anwar from prison; together, they form a new coalition – Pakatan Harapan (PH). PH consists of four component parties: the Malay-based BERSATU, the multiracial PKR, the Chinese-based DAP, and the reformist Muslim-based AMANAH. Eventually, PH topples the UMNO-led BN in the 2018 General Election by obtains a simple majority at 121 over 222

parliamentary seats with 48.31% popular vote – it successfully terminates the BN's sixty-one-year rule in Malaysia. However, from then on, the PH government is continuously challenged by the BN-led opposition over racial and religious issues. Mahathir, by February 2020, unnoticedly resigns from his Prime Minister's post, withdraws BERSATU from PH, and resolves the parliament immediately; for one week, the state government remains vacant. Muhyiddin Yassin, the chairman of BERSATU, later claims to obtain simple majority support from members of parliament. Upon the conferment of Yang di-pertuan Agong, the eighth Prime Minister Muhyiddin leads BERSATU, UMNO-BN, and PAS to form a new ruling coalition – Perikatan National (PN) – to govern the nation from 1 March 2020. This political outbreak signifies that *bangsa Malaysia* experiences a setback – the unsettled and repressed question of race, again, reemerges onto the surface.

PART III

RECONCEPTUALIZING MALAYSIAN CHINESE

CHAPTER 7

UNDERSTANDING MALAYSIAN CHINESE

The Malay sociopolitical cultural belief of *bangsa* creates critical impacts not only for identification but on the historiography of Malaysian Chinese. The focus of Malaysian Chinese history varies in accordance with their imagination of the locale and homeland from time to time; therefore, by observing the changing conception of *bangsa* with reference to China's imagination, we can witness the shift of language and narrative in their history. These alterations in the historical discourse are no changes for its own sake but indicators of the underlying affection of the narrative. Accordingly, with the spectacle of *bangsa*, we can compartmentalize the Malaysian Chinese history into three periods: (a) imagining China; (b) appropriating China; and (c) unimagining China.

THE FIRST PHASE: IMAGINING CHINA (– 1948)

The stage of Imagining China ranges from 1860 to 1946 when Chinese regards China as their homeland.

From the twelfth century on, under the Song dynasty's rule, the Chinese voyagers start sailing to Southeast Asia for exploration and trading. Reciprocally, the Malay rulers offer them some local spices occasionally to show their tribute to China, because they want to maintain good diplomacy with China as it is a powerful state for them. Notably, in those times, fleets are mainly navigated by the monsoon; thus, the voyagers have to settle in the Malay states to wait until the next monsoon to bring them back. Then, some Chinese decide to marry the locals and settle down permanently – they are the first generation of *peranakan*. The *peranakans* conform to the Malay customs, learn the Malay language, and practice the Malay culture; moreover, they bring the Chinese culture into the Malay world to create a creolized cultural practice, i.e., the *Baba-Nyonya* tradition

which originates in Melaka. (Tan 1999) Later, during the Ming dynasty, Zheng He, the well-known Chinese diplomat, and mariner, further popularizes the culture and products of the Malay archipelago to his Chinese compatriots and the world; but, the mass Chinese migration wave begins in the late nineteenth century after the withdrawal of the sea ban followed by the signing of 1860 Sino-British Convention. Since then, the Malays start to perceive the Chinese as the collaborator of British colonists.

Unlike the Baba-Nyonya, the Chinese settlers in the late nineteenth century have a strong attachment to their homeland China, because their purpose is to earn as much money as possible and send back to their hometown; thus, the Malays always regard the Chinese settlers as an economic-driven species. Although others might have a similar impression on the Chinese race, the Chinese themselves have yet to develop a strong sense of ethnicity in the early Malaya; instead, they draw their identification towards a dialect group (Canton, Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew, Hailam, etc.) or a filial tie. Later, apart from these dialect-filial bonds, a communal-based idea of overseas Chinese, or *Huaqiao*, nourishes among the Chinese community: *Huaqiao* means Chinese living abroad. Its emergence shall attribute to: (a) the *Nanyang-Zhongyuan* dichotomy; (b) the collapse of the Qing dynasty; and (c) the British invention of ethnic Chinese.

Firstly, the traditional Chinese political ideology believes that China is located at the center of the universe – the *zhongyuan* (central land); while Southeast Asia, which situates in the south of China, is the *nanyang* (southern sea). This *zhongyuan-nanyang* dichotomy informs the overseas Chinese about their relation to homeland China from geographical term to psychological term. Secondly, followed by the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, Sun Yat-sen and his *Kuomintang* popularize the Three People's Principles – *minzu* (nationalism), *minquan* (democracy), *minsheng* (livelihood); among them, *minzu* has the most impact in the *nanyang* Chinese communities. Particularly, the Chinese entrepreneurs send a vast sum of money to support *Kuomintang* and the resistance of the Japanese force. Thirdly, the British officially registers the different Chinese dialects

and filial groups into a unity of ethnic Chinese for the convenience of imposing a divide-and-rule system. Through this tripartite discourse of *Nanyang*, *minzu*, and ethnic Chinese, the face of the first phase of Malaya Chinese is revealed – the imaginary homeland China is their object of desire.

THE SECOND PHASE: APPROPRIATING CHINA (1948 – 1998)

The stage of Appropriating China ranges from 1946 to 1998 when Chinese regards China as cultural capital to be appropriated to counter the overwhelming Malay dominance.

Dominated in the business sector and mining industry, the Malaya Chinese have a sole aspiration for money; however, they are politically divided. During the 1930s, four major divisions are penetrated the Chinese society: (a) the pro-KMT nationalist camp; (b) the pro-CCP communist camp; (c) the pro-local camp; and (d) the pragmatic camp. By sharing the same sentiment for anti-Japanese invasion, the nationalists have the most attachment to Republican China; the communists found the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) while maintaining a comradeship with Chinese Communist Party (CCP); the localists concern about their livelihood in Malaya more than their compatriots in China; the pragmatics donate to the Chinese warfare but carefully manage their relationships with British governors and local Chinese. In the immediate postwar period, the Sino-Malay clashes broke in Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, and Selangor. The Malays fear that the Chinese would take over the state sovereignty, while the communists denounce the Malay's collaboration with Japanese during the War, the racial tension is unprecedentedly heightened. (Khong 1984, p. 32) The return of the British calms the racial antagonism, but their attitude is more favorable to the Malay and tends to discount the communist contribution for the War. Later, the British declares the state of emergency to combat the communist thoroughly. The ruthlessness of the British towards communists weakens its influence in Malaya; also, the hardships of the War strengthen the local consciousness of the Malaya Chinese. Lastly, along with the implementation of the Federation of Malaya

in 1948, a preliminary consensus between the Malays and the non-Malays is construed – the non-Malays to confer with citizenships in exchange for their political rights.

The foundational principle for the Federation is based on mutual respect for the *bangsa Melayu*. Notably, the *bangsa Melayu* is an antithesis to the Malay monarchy and the Malayan: it aims at reclaiming the sovereignty to the Malay people by rejecting the confluence between rulers and governors, as well as the pure imperialist invention of Malayan. Hence, since the late 1940s, in order to obtain legitimacy and mobilize popular support, the political coalitions should always safeguard the rights of *bangsa Melayu*, regardless of its advocacies and ideologies. For instance, there is a rivalry between the UMNO-MCA-MIC coalition and the PUTERA-AMCJA⁶ coalition over the issue of drafting Federal Constitution in 1947: the UMNO-MCA-MIC represents the views of the Malay right in alliance with Chinese and Indian representatives, while the PUTERA-AMCJA represents the views of Malay left in alliance with Chinese and Indian representatives – it implies that the Malay opinion has to be putting forward no matter what its content is. Later, this belief further consolidates when the UMNO-led Alliance claims victory in the 1955 General Election and leads the Malaya to Independence in 1957. Even more, the Malay dominated regime ruthlessly denies the challenge from the PAP's advocacy of Malaysian Malaysia by expelling Singapore in 1965 and promotes the pro-Malay policies immediately after the 1969 racial riots, further proves that the Malay monopoly is true. Thus, the Chinese opt for collaboration instead of confrontation, negotiation instead of rebellion, and this confrontation and negotiation between Malay dominance and Chinese subordinates are manifested in the domain of politics, economics, education, and culture.

Politically, although the Chinese-based parties would bring the Chinese demands to the cabinet and voice out for the Chinese interest and education occasionally, they carefully act particularly upon the racial conflicts to avoid the accusation of Chinese chauvinism or nationalism – unlike the Malay parties and organizations which usually

earn support when they claim to be a Malay nationalist or radical. Therefore, to maximize the support, the Chinese-based DAP welcomes the Malay and Indian faces by showing its multiracial value which aims at achieving social democracy. Economically, people tend to believe that Chinese would be discontent with the implementation of NEP in 1970, on the contrary, they begin to accept the pro-Malay economic packages soon, because it stimulates the massive Malay market and encourages the Malay business to collaborate with the Chinese enterprise, which benefits the Chinese entrepreneurs as well; thus, the conflicts between Malays and Chinese are not usually money-related. Educationally, the Chinese act aggressively toward preserving the Chinese schools, because apart from the prevalent belief of with good education comes wealth among the parents, the Chinese schools are institutions passing on the Chinese tradition, language, values, literature, and culture, i.e., the Chineseness (Baharuddin 2004, p. 127). This preservation has its political implication: preserving the Chinese tradition makes a discursive space available for the Chinese to confront the Malay dominance. Therefore, culturally, the Chinese tend to draw China's origin to a local Malaysian Chinese practice. For instance, *lou-saang*, a dish consisted of several colorful vegetables, crispy chips, and vermicelli, is originated from Malaysia, but people always associate it with some Canton cuisine. During this period, China is no longer served as an object of desire; rather, it is the *bangsa Melayu* becomes an object of desire for Malaysian Chinese, while imaginary China allows a space for them to maneuver between their Chineseness and Malaysianness.

THE THIRD PHASE: UNIMAGINING CHINA (1998 –)

The stage of Unimagining China begins from 1998 when Chinese articulate their Chineseness not from China but from the locality.

Facilitated the interethnic relation by using authoritarian means, Razak and Mahathir have different philosophies and approaches. Razak's mission is solely focused on devising a new national-building economic package to close the gap between the

Malays and the non-Malays, while Mahathir's vision is to eternally eliminate the Malay backwardness by treating the Malay dilemmas (Mahathir 1970; 1986): Razak is a pragmatist, Mahathir is an idealist. Thus, under the Razak's leadership, the Malay-Chinese conflict is significantly mitigated since the implementation of NEP and the formation of BN coalition, but under the Mahathir's leadership, the ethnic-tension becomes a means for him to achieve the peak of power. Publicized since 1970, Mahathir indicates that the Malay dilemma, apart from their incapability to follow the modern capitalist world, is attributed to the Chinese economic dominance and the Western monopoly of money market, hence, by targeted at the Chinese, Mahathir wins the Malay popular support. Similarly, by challenges the monarchy's constitutional power, suppresses the PAS and DAP opposition, and purges the rebellious UMNO's faction, Mahathir successfully mobilizes the conservative and rural votes to secure his premiership. By proposes the Vision 2020 in 1991, the idea of *bangsa Malaysia* strengthens the national consciousness, particularly for the non-Malays. However, the Mahathir's *bangsa Malaysia* is more like an act to incorporate the non-Malay discourse into a superficial *bangsa* to eliminate the dichotomy between *bangsa Melayu* and *bangsa-bangsa asing*. The first predicament for Malaysian Chinese, it occurs, is the eternal absence of Chineseness in this Malaysianness – the alternative discourse associated with their racial identity is under threat.

Initiated from a massive discontent for the Anwar's maltreatment to broader social activism demanding for democratization, the 1998 *reformasi* movement redefines the substance of *bangsa Malaysia* originally intended by Mahathir – the Mahathir's idea is to repackage *bangsa Melayu* as *bangsa Malaysia*, i.e., make Malayness appear as Malaysianness; yet, the *reformasi* projects the *bangsa Malaysia* as a sphere to voice out the Malaysian disaffection to the authoritarian regime. Gradually, the power of defining *bangsa Malaysia* shifts from the state to the people; moreover, it creates an ideological edifice to channel the affection within the *bangsa Melayu* to the larger sphere of *bangsa*

Malaysia: considered that the *reformasi* movement starts as a Malay opposition at the Anwar's maltreatment, then becomes a site to accommodate dissenting voices and social criticism, and finally transforms to large-scale civil activism directed at the state hegemony (Khoo 2003, pp. 100 – 108). For Malaysian Chinese, the previous state-defined *bangsa Malaysia*, which tries to eliminate Chineseness secretly, therefore, becomes a civil-defined *bangsa Malaysia*, which invites interracial collaboration to crush the authority. Yet, it brings the predicament to a second level: for decades, Chineseness is served to counter the Malay hegemony, not the state establishment, and now it has to change its faces.

Launched by Anwar in September 1998, the *reformasi* rallies and sentiment do not cease after the imprisonment of Anwar; on the contrary, the supporters react more aggressively than before – the movement goes 'beyond Anwar' (Gomez 2007, p. 1). Later, the formation of BA further escalates the *reformasi* into a constitutional level: the BA acquires much support from the youth and the subordinated groups; more importantly, it crushes the BN's stronghold in the Malay rural areas. Thus, Mahathir decides to pass his premiership to Abdullah; furthermore, universal awareness of Muslim terrorism invoked after the 911 incident directly wrecks the image of conservative Muslim-based PAS, which advocates establishing Islamic State. Eventually, the BN secures its helm in the 2004 General Election and calls an end to the *reformasi* movement. Yet, the spirit of *reformasi* later reemerges in the BERSIH movement; more significantly, this sentiment starts developing by a cross-ethnic endeavor for democratization. The critical conceptual realm of *bangsa Malaysia*, at this stage, becomes a site of vigorous contestation between the state hegemony and the 'popular culture' (in Gramsci's term; Turner 2003, p. 168). Hence, there are two kinds of *bangsa*: the state's *bangsa*, which aims at eliminating the non-Malayness; and the people's *bangsa*, which aims at democratizing the authoritarian regime. Correspondingly, there are two kinds of Chineseness: the Chineseness, which

appropriates Chinese tradition to counter the Malay-dominated state hegemony; and the Chineseness, which unimagines its China's root to register into Malaysianness fully.

CHAPTER 8

GAPS BETWEEN MALAYS AND CHINESE IN BANGSA MALAYSIA

Malays are not the earliest inhabitants in Southeast Asia; instead, tracing back between 4000 and 3000 BCE, their ancestors are some sort of Austronesian speakers who resides in current Taiwan archipelago; they start migrating southward to current Philippines and Borneo since 2500 BCE; they then move further to Borneo hinterland, Java, Sumatra, the Malay peninsula and the Vietnam since 1500 BCE (Andaya 2004, p. 57). Derived from the Austronesian, these migrants in current Maphilindo area are now commonly known as Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (Bellwood 1997, p. 242); they speak Malayic language, so we can still see tones of resemblances among Melayu, Indonesian, and Tagalog now. The earliest sense of *bangsa* is, therefore, taken shape through a language tie.

Yet, the exact word Melayu appears for the first time in a note by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Yijing in 644. According to Yijing's notes, his purpose of visiting Melayu is to learn Sanskrit in order to read Buddhist scripture; he then returns to Melayu again from 689 to 695 and finds that Melayu has become a part of Srivijaya (Andaya 2004, p. 60). After the fall of Srivijaya, Melayu comes under the siege of Majapahit, then Melaka and other Malay sultanates. That means the sense of *bangsa* among Melayu transforms from a linguistic tie to a *kerajaan* tie. This *bangsa Melayu* with *kerajaan* tie endures during the Portuguese and Dutch administration because the early form of colonization focuses on exploiting natural resources instead of intervening the local politics.

Nationalism in Europe begins to hit Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth century and wakes some Malay intellectuals to stand up for *bangsa Melayu* though their influences in Malay community are lukewarm. Yet, as Benedict Anderson suggests, the arrival of print-capitalism in Southeast Asia accelerates the national consciousness of the people (Anderson 1991, pp. 37 – 46). Ariffin Omar observes that, the print media in the early

twentieth century helped to spread some key ideas for people in Malaya to make sense of the status quo in the peninsular Malaya.

With the advent of print, Malay newspapers and journals in the first half of the twentieth century, though limited in circulation, were able to forge a commonality in the understanding and use of terms like bangsa Melayu, DKK (darah keturunan Keling or Indian blood descent) and DKA (darah keturunan Arab or Arab blood descent). They propagated effectively against the emergence of the imagined 'Malayan' community and showed forth its political and historical weaknesses. (Omar 2015, p. 22)

In the 1930s, some Malays are moved by the nationalist promotion of *kedaulatan rakyat* (the people's regime). The Malay people start directing their rages towards the Malay aristocrats and the non-Malays. Firstly, the Malay sultans are not ready to become a total independent polity; instead, they want the peninsular Malaya to remain a protectorate. Secondly, the British recruits too many foreigners to lodge in the Malay lands. Under such circumstances, the sense of *bangsa* transforms from a *kerajaan* tie to a Malay nationalist tie, and this Malay nationalist tie continues to strengthen after the War ended. Then, after the formation of Federation of Malaya in 1948, this Malay nationalist tie allows the existence of non-Malays but stresses that they are not a part of the *bangsa Melayu*.

After getting along for decades since Independence, the Malays appear more comfortably with the non-Malay inhabitants. However, it is not solely because they start knowing each other more or removing their wall to embrace differences; instead, it is because the material structure of Malaysia has changed. By implementing the NEP after the 1969 riot, the economic breach between Malays and non-Malays are gradually diminished. Meanwhile, Mahathir sees that *bangsa Melayu* is no longer a useful concept for national and economic progress; therefore, he reinvents *bangsa Melayu* into *bangsa Malaysia*. This is an ideological move. Ostensibly, the non-Malays is officially given tickets into the realm of *bangsa*; however, through incorporation with the non-Malays into the *bangsa*, the Malays can utilize the non-Malay capitals with a stronger nationalistic and moral appeals. In other words, *bangsa Malaysia* remains a core of *bangsa Melayu*. Here,

bangsa transforms from a Malay nationalist tie to a Malaysian nationalist tie and brings in an ideological contestation between the Malays and the non-Malays simultaneously.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of Chinese settlers in peninsular Malaya: (a) the *peranakan* Chinese; and (b) the *huaqiao* Chinese. Firstly, the *peranakan* Chinese arrive in the Malay peninsula since the twelfth-century; they are mainly voyagers, merchants, and some retinues of China diplomats; they marry the local Malay woman and have their life and family here. Secondly, the *huaqiao* Chinese arrive in the peninsular Malay during the British administration; they are coolies, businessmen, and expats; they move southward mainly for earning money but some because of prosecution. However, no matter which group these Chinese belong, they see the idea of *bangsa* and *bangsa Melayu* as a potential threat, because they are all *bangsa-bangsa asing* in the eyes of Malays. Under such a circumstance, the Chinese identify with the idea of *nanyang*, which implies that their homeland is China; and by internalizing the *nanyang* consciousness, they not only immediately withdraw from competing to be a part of *bangsa* but also demonstrate their capability through China's great power.

The rise of local consciousness of Malaysian Chinese in 1960s does not make the *nanyang* consciousness retreat from the Chinese communities. Until now, we can simply witness many Chinese schools, institutions, enterprises, and organizations which name after the word *nanyang*; even more so, some Malaysian-Singaporean Chinese culture are prefixed with the word *nanyang* to differentiate with China's Chinese culture, such as Nanyang coffee and Nanyang arts. However, leaving aside the word, the uses of *nanyang* are different. Malaysian Chinese with strong local consciousness do not regard *nanyang* as a sign of being in the south of China but instead a self-sufficient region. Interestingly, *nanyang* denotes the land of Malaysia-Singapore in a geographical term but connotes the Malaysian-Singaporean Chinese in an ideological term. In other words, while *bangsa* becomes a space that dominated by the Malays, *nanyang* reclaims a space that dominated

by Chinese. This second phase of *nanyang* consciousness among Malaysian Chinese embodies in their preservation of Chinese culture and education.

The emergence of *bangsa Malaysia* in the 1990s inevitably disrupts the discursive balance of *bangsa* and *nanyang*. Malaysian Chinese are now absorbed into the realm of *bangsa* (*bangsa Malaysia*) but not at the very core of the *bangsa* (*bangsa Melayu*). For instance, Minister of Education changed the title of Bahasa Melayu (Malay language) to Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysian language) in 2007; moreover, Mahathir proposes to establish a new stream of Sekolah Wawasan (vision school) that combines both characteristics of Sekolah Kebangsaan (national school) and Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (vernacular school). These projects are perfect embodiments of the idea of *bangsa Malaysia*: the state invents an empty cube to rehabilitate then further enhance an orthodoxy. However, the *reformasi* movement in the late 1990s and the *bersih* movement in the 2000s attempt to redefine the idea of *bangsa Malaysia* through mobilizing the massive social discontents towards the authoritarian state. Significantly, the rise of Chinese proportion from *reformasi* to *bersih* signifies that Malaysian Chinese seek to step out from an old *bangsa-nanyang* configuration and try to accommodate themselves into a new composition of *bangsa Malaysia*.

CHAPTER 9

MOMENTS OF ABSENCE IN THE HISTORY OF MALAYSIAN CHINESE

This chapter attempts to see the history of Malaysian Chinese through the lens of *bangsa Malaysia* which means examining Chinese in Malaysian history as a whole instead of a particular race-based perspective. Through which a clear vision might not be obtained as the official Malaysian history assumes a Malay political elitist narrator, but weaving the moments of absence in the narrative of Malaysian Chinese can provide us a chance to look into what predicaments are they facing in retelling their history and rebuilding their Malaysian identity, i.e., the identity of *bangsa Malaysia*.

MOMENT OF ABSENCE I: NOT AT HOME, 1948

Home is not there for Malayan Chinese after the War ended because the postwar Malaya experiences a critical resurgence of Malay nationalism. The Japanese surrender does not put Malaya immediately in a peaceful state; instead, the Malays rival against the Malayan Communist Party on the issue of land distribution over almost a month. Thus, the British return to Malaya in 1946 is widely welcomed by the Malays because the British governor determines that the prewar law and order will restore to the Malaya. Immediately, the Union scheme is drafted and consented by all Malay sultans; then, the Malays protest to the Union scheme and condemn the betrayal of sultans. Overwhelmed by an immense pressure from the Malay people, the British revises the Union scheme and replaces it with the Federation scheme. The Federation scheme satisfies the Malay people, but the Malay society begins to polarize into two camps: the conservative Malay nationalists, and the liberal Malay nationalists. Lastly, the conservative Malay nationalists claim victory in the 1955 General Election; more importantly, their ideology dominates the sociopolitical culture of Malaya/Malaysia ever since. Malayan Chinese, on the other hand, do not have

any weight in these sociopolitical bargains; they are neither here at Malaya nor there at China. In the following paragraphs, I examine several forms of existence of Malayan Chinese and their predicaments: (a) the Malayan Chinese conservatives; (b) the Malayan Chinese liberals; (c) the Malayan Chinese communists; and (d) the Malayanness.

The Malayan Chinese conservatives collaborate with the Malay establishment to promote a multiracial nation with Malay nationalism at its core; besides, they assist the British commissioners to combat the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in the postwar era. Leading by the Straits Chinese leader Tan Cheng Lock, they found the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) in 1949; MCA's membership consists of mostly government officials, businessmen, educationalists, philanthropists, and local gentries. Hence, with the most powerful men among the Chinese community, MCA is deemed as a spokesman of Malayan Chinese; however, as a non-Malay party within the UMNO-led Alliance, it makes very limited influences in the parliament, and people also realize that these Chinese elites safeguard only for their business interest. After the General Election in 1959, the non-Malay opposition parties arise to compete with MCA for Chinese support; they are the Labor Parties (PPP), and the People's Action Party (PAP, later replaced by DAP). It turns out that the PPP and the PAP defeat MCA in some Chinese majority towns (Means 1970, pp. 225 - 264); since then, the Chinese community is split into a solid two: the conservatives and the liberals. It occurs, the predicament of the pro-MCA conservatives is that they could neither find a home within the Malay establishment nor a home within the Chinese communities.

The Malayan Chinese liberals join hands with the Malay liberals to strive for a multiracial and democratic Malaya that based on mutual respect for all Malayan citizens regardless of ethnicity and class. In May 1947, the British commissioner Sir Edward Gent decides to put a stop to the Union scheme after severe social unrests break out among the Malay communities; then, Gent invites the UMNO leaders and the Malay rulers to form a working committee to draft the Federation constitution; the constitution remains the

significant prospects of the Union scheme except for upholding the Malay special position (Omar 2015, p. 129). On the other hand, the Malay liberal organization the Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (PUTERA, Centre of People's Power) collaborates with the Chinese liberal organization the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action (PMCJA) to establish a coalition to voice their disaffection towards the Federation scheme. By rejecting the Federation constitution, the PUTERA-PMCJA coalition submit the People's constitution that insists on establishing a democratic state council and conferring equal political rights for all citizens who regards Malaya as their permanent home. (p. 147) Although their proposal is not accepted by either officials or Malay majority, it is the first collaboration between the Malay and the non-Malay liberals. Meanwhile, we shall also see that the Chinese can only articulate their opinion and gain legitimacy through a partnership with Malays, no matter a conservative voice or a liberal voice. Thus, the pro-liberal Malayan Chinese can neither find a home for their articulation nor find an articulation that can be a home.

The Malayan Chinese communists have an immense contribution in resisting the Japanese invasion during the wartime. Founded in 1930, the MCP is one of the CCP's oversea branches, and its members are also dominated by the oversea Chinese (huaqiao). The British and the Malays are extremely cautious about its movement; also, the colonial government issues warrant to arrest these MCP members. Meanwhile, the MCP donates a lot of anti-Japanese funds to their homeland China, so the Malays also tend to believe all the Chinese are only loyal to China if not CCP. In December 1941, when the Japanese arrives at peninsular Malaya, the MCP immediately organizes an armed resistant force called Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). The MPAJA disrupts the Japanese invasion and accelerates the surrender of Japanese in Southeast Asia. Notably, during the wartime, the Japanese behaves mild to Malays but extremely brutal to Chinese; this sharpens the antagonistic relation between the Malays and the Chinese in the immediate postwar time. According to historian Buyong Adil, upon the Japanese leave, the MPAJA forces murder the Malays who previously support the Japanese (Buyong Adil

1971, p. 323 – 324). The British returns to Malaya one month after the Japanese surrender and establish many designated villages to restrict the movements of Chinese; in 1948, the British announce a state of emergency to begin an extensive hunt for the MCP members. On the other hand, although the oversea Chinese do contribute many funds back in their homeland, China's Chinese tend to see these huaqiao as traitors and collaborators. The fate of Malayan Chinese communists reveals that they are not at home not only in terms of their physical existence but also in terms of their discursive existence.

However, a few though questions have yet to be answered: (a) who is the Malayan; (b) is Malayan a legitimate utterance; (c) what about the *bangsa Malayan*? The word 'Malayan' is indeed problematic. British author Michael Ardizzone writes, "Malay is a member of the Malay race; Malayan is a person of any other origin who happens to live in Malaya (Ardizzone 1946, p. 34)"; apparently, this is a British imperialist view; in fact, the Malays would not accept this definition of Melayu and Malayan. From the view of the Malay conservatives, both the Malaya and the Malayan are nothing more than a colonial invention. Therefore, when the British carry out the idea of Malayan Union, it is not only those policies do harm the Malay nationalism but the idea of 'Malayan' itself is untenable; thus, when it comes to 'Federation of Malaya', the Malays carefully translate it as 'Persekutuan Tanah Melayu' (Federation of Malay land). For the Malays, the idea of Malayan commonly denotes to the inhabitants in the Malay land other than Melayu, its legitimacy is doubtful depends on its use; and the *bangsa Malayan* would absolutely be an antithesis to the *bangsa Melayu*. Under such a circumstance, the Malayan Chinese who regards Malaya as permanent home ironically find no home in their Malayan identity, meanwhile they are also not at their China's home anymore.

The idea of home moves beyond a physical presence to an extent of sociopolitical and ideological space. In the immediate postwar Malaya, the conservatives find no home in either the Malay establishment camp or the Chinese popular camp, the liberals find no home in either their own articulation or other discursive space, and the communists find

no home in either the physical or ideological territory; on the other hand, Malayan as an identity also becomes not legible in the eyes of Malay nationalism. The 1948 is a moment of absence for Malayan Chinese; they need to settle elsewhere, but not here and there.

MOMENT OF ABSENCE II: NOT A TRUTH, 1969

According to the state official account, the outbreak of the May 13 Incident in 1969 shall attribute to: (a) the excessive post-election celebration of the opposition supporters; and (b) the intention of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). In the 1969 General Election, the ruling Alliance Party experiences a major setback. On the federal level election, it fails to maintain a two-thirds majority, which allows it to amend the Constitution; on the state level election, it almost loses the Selangor and Negeri Sembilan to the opposition. As the official sources write, the Chinese see it as a victory for their communal interest; while their overreaction provokes the Malay communities; hence, the racial riots between the Malays and the Chinese break out spontaneously. Meanwhile, the communists devise to take control of some local towns through manipulating the racial tension. The official discourse tends to blame on the MCP, while the public opinion widely conceives it as a consequence of challenging the Malay status quo. Subsequently, the May 13 Incident is listed as an extremely sensitive issue which is not allowed to discuss in public; thus, for the millennial Malaysian, it is like a haunted story recurring over and over, but nobody knows whether it is a truth.

However, some declassified British archival of the May 13 Incident in the 2000s reveals that the racial riot is not as spontaneous as it occurs. Published in 2007 soon after the release of British classified archival, Kua Kia Soong's *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969* exposes some important news, journals, telegrams, and interviews back then (Kua 2007). According to his analysis, one major reason that leads to the May 13 Incident is the UMNO internal rivalry between the Tunku's old aristocratic class and the Razak's new state capitalist class (ibid, p. 123). The

public usually recognize the fact that back then the demographic ratio by race is about half-and-half for the Malay and the non-Malay population, and the Malay majority rural site is allocated for more seats than the heavy-populated Chinese majority urban site; still, the opposition makes a major advancement; therefore, the Malays might worry that their special position is in danger, and it eventually leads to the outbreak of racial riots. Yet, this is only the facade painted by the official discourse; in fact, there is a faction leading by the Deputy Prime Minister within the UMNO, which arises in the 1960s through manipulating the state capitals in favor of the Malay agricultural enterprises in order to win supports from the rural Malays, wants to crush the Tunku's leadership. The evidence shows that this UMNO state capital class might somehow involve in plotting the May 13 Incident.

Tunku and Razak immediately blame the communists on invoking the riots on 13 May; however, no evidence shows that the MCP is behind the clash; in fact, the 1948-60 emergency almost disintegrates them; yet there are witnesses to some Malay mobsters who assemble at the residence of the Chief Minister of Selangor on that day, and the riot breaks out soon. Two days later, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong declares a state of emergency, and also appoints Razak to lead an interim National Operation Council soon to restore law and order; by then, Razak is in control of the cabinet and Tunku retains his premiership without power. Moreover, the armed forces and police are reported not only discriminating against Chinese but also collaborating with the Malay thugs to rob the Chinese shop and burn their cars; however, it is noteworthy that there are only few Malays who agree with these violent acts; it is not a pure Malay versus Chinese episode as represented in the official record. According to the official statistics, there are 137 killed and 18 of them are Malays, but the real number might be ten times or more. Malaysia finally restores to normalcy in a few months, yet this new normalcy begins a new era.

The Razak's new state capitalist class is different from the Tunku's old aristocratic class in three ways: (a) the ultra-Malay centrism; (b) the military-inclined

regime; (c) the authoritarian state. After the Razak's faction defeats the Tunku's leadership, two major reforms are soon taken place. First, the National Cultural Policies (NCP) assures that the Malay culture and customs shall be the foundation of all Malaysian; apart from this, the Malay language shall also be the sole official language of Malaysia. Second, the National Economic Policies (NEP) aims to close the economic breach between the Malays and the Chinese. In the meantime, Razak also asks the British and Australia to provide him some extra armed forces and military equipment. The British have agreed to Razak's request because it believes this is a critical period for Malaysian to pay particular attention to preempt the communist from resurrection; while the Australian has rejected Razak because it is immoral given that the state is reported abusing the security forces to mistreat the Malaysian with Chinese descent. Furthermore, Razak amends the Constitution to restrict people from discussing the sensitive race issues in public, and the amendments include strengthening the state censorship on media, education, and academia. These three directions put the democratic progress in Malaysia in stagnancy if not backward.

In addition, the other notable transformation under the Razak's administration is a conceptual alteration from an Alliance formula to a Barisan formula. Upon the British return to Malaya, some prominent Chinese leaders are summoned to form a communal organization. On the one hand, the British need a communal organization to represent the Malayan Chinese in the Independence project; but more importantly, it functions as an ideological alternative for the Malayan Chinese other than MCP. Hence, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) is formed in 1949 and incorporates with the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) and UMNO to constitute a multiracial Alliance Party in 1954. Represented by all three major races in Malaya/Malaysia, the Alliance formula ensures opinions from different racial sectors will be heard. Yet during the 1960s, the Chinese and Indian think the MCA and the MIC are mere puppets endorsing with all UMNO's agenda, the Malays think that the UMNO does not endeavor in upholding the Malay special

position. Under such circumstances, the Razak's faction emerges as a Malay-centric force within the state power, and successfully mobilizes the Malay rural supports. After succeeding Tunku as Prime Minister, Razak incorporates all major opposition parties except the Democratic Action Party (DAP) to form the Barisan National (BN). Unlike the Alliance formula, the Barisan formula is clearly dominated by the UMNO by putting all the other component parties in the eclipse of UMNO. Likewise, the non-Malay communities also gradually lose their bargaining power under the overwhelming Malay hegemony.

Half-a-century has passed; however, the May 13 Incident seems never to depart. In the 1987 Operation Lalang, Mahathir threatens his dissidents to deliberate thoroughly about the consequences of challenging the state by referring to May 13 Incident; likewise, the state brings out this tragedy over and over before every General Election. Ironically, this is the state issuing the Ordinance to restrict people from talking about it, but this is also the state that keeps reminding people about this episode. Perhaps the politicians have no clues as well about what and how the May 13 Incident happens back then; they simply employ it as a tale to intimidate people to watch out and prevent them from doing something. In other words, the May 13 Incident can be deemed as a pure ideology; or better, it is always a pure ideology since it breaks out. In Kua's final remarks, it writes to completely outlaw the fascist tendencies in the Malaysian race-based politics, they must first to 'exorcise the ghosts of May 13' (ibid, p. 134). The Malaysian Chinese are suffering from the absence of truth since 1969, as the truth is neither some coldhearted numbers or data, nor some excavated on-the-spot real experiences, but the constant not-being-there when the 'truth' is articulated.

MOMENT OF ABSENCE III: NOT WITH PAST, 1991

Some colonies or colonized subjects do not have their own history; or, they have lost the stories of their own. Regions having no past normally attribute to three reasons. First of

all, there is no civilization in that area; secondly, there is no precolonial history in that area; thirdly, there is not a self-sufficient entity. Yet the polity needs a narrative to justify its presence; therefore, it starts manufacturing ideologies to its subject, in order to make the absence appears as presence. From this perspective, the Malayan/Malaysian history has its own absence; the absence, it occurs, is the over-repression of the problematic Malayanness/Malaysianness: the Independence merely represents the Malayanness at its form without substance, and the May 13 Incident further rejects the discussion for the Malaysianness. However, intrigued by the 1991's proposal of *bangsa Malaysia*, the Malaysians again return to their repression.

There is no pre-Independent history for Malayan/Malaysian since Malaya does not exist until it becomes a British colony. In the late eighteenth century, the British naval forces made their first disembarkation in Penang Island, and took control of it after reaching a consensus with the local Malay sultan; later, the British continue to conquer the other Malay sultanates; in the meantime, the Dutch influence penetrates into the peninsula; by 1824, both of them agree to draw the line at the strait of Melacca where the British take control of the peninsular Malay states and the Dutch take control of the Sumatran Malay sultanates. After demarcated the borderline, the British commonly call all these Malay state colonies as Malaya; until the early twentieth century, they officially merge all the Strait Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and the Unfederated Malay States together as a united polity; by then, the idea of Malaya is realized and started to popularize in public. Yet the dilution of border consciousness does not spark a Malayan identity; instead, it unites the Malays across the border, and result in a Melayu identity. The British, however, demand a multiracial leadership as a condition for Independence, so the Malay invites the Chinese and the Indian to form an alliance government solely for this purpose. Malaya/Malaysia is built upon a promise of a multiracial community on its surface; however, the unfinished formation of Malayan/Malaysian identity is repressed in the deep down of Malaysian history.

The Malaysian identity becomes a more suppressed issue after the outbreak of the May 13 Incident, yet it is Mahathir who brings this problematic Malaysianness back onto the discussion. Mahathir is expelled from his UMNO's membership by Tunku when Malaysia returns to normalcy after the outbreak because of his call for the Tunku's resignation (Wain 2010, p. 26); nonetheless, he becomes one of the most reputable Malay spokesmen after publishing *The Malay Dilemma* in 1970. At the Razak's invitation, Mahathir comes back as Minister of Education; and, before Hussein's succession of Razak's premiership in 1976, he is deemed as a potential candidate for the future Prime Minister. Mahathir rises as a new state capitalist class in line with the Razak's faction; however, his hardcore Malay-centric ideology is more ambitious than Razak. The Razak's NEP initially aims to restructure the society through eradicating the Malay poverty, while the Mahathir's NEP/NDP attempts to rehabilitate the Malays into an authoritarian-capitalist Malaysian state. First of all, he centralizes the constitutional power in the hand of Parliament, and eliminates the old aristocratic class members from the UMNO. Secondly, he introduces the capitalist ethics into the traditional Islam teachings, and creates an alternative to the classic PAS's Islam. Thirdly, he stabilizes the *bangsa Melayu* through relocating it into a larger configuration of *bangsa Malaysia*. Therefore, the repressed Malaysian identity back on stage in the 1990s.

Under the Mahathir's administration, the 1980s Malaysia experiences a marked economic advancement due to the development of the manufacturing industry, the maturity of the monetary market, and the privatization of state-owned projects. Although there are a financial crisis and several political turmoils in the late 1980s, Mahathir's contributions to the modernization of Malaysia are widely recognized. Furthermore, he centralizes more power in his hands through prosecuting the dissidents from the UMNO, the Parliament, and the opposition camps. In 1991, Mahathir announces the Vision 2020 and raises a catchy idea – *bangsa Malaysia*. The Mahathir's *bangsa Malaysia* promotes interracial harmony in its surface but intends to extend the Malay hegemony to the non-

Malays in its deep heart. In the economic sphere, *bangsa Malaysia* encourages Malay enterprises to incorporate with the Chinese business and vice versa. In the ideological sphere, *bangsa Malaysia* legitimizes the Malay special position as an internal logic of all Malaysian. From the 1990s on, the state commercials start promoting interracial comradeship by depicting the harmonious relationship among three races, the moment of Merdeka, the hardship of ordinary Malaysia, and et cetera. All these efforts eventually lead the Barisan National and UMNO a tremendous victory in the 1995 General Election. Yet the idea of *bangsa Malaysia* does not remain as an ideological state apparatus for long; instead, the people's voices begin to infiltrate it, and later transform it into a space to question the Malaysianness.

Mahathir deliberately cultivates the idea of *bangsa Malaysia* to Malaysian since 1991. On the one hand, the *bangsa Malaysia* as an ideological state apparatus proves tremendous results; on the other hand, it engenders a common imagination and invites a shared language among the Malaysian across racial borders. For instance, reports show that there is a steady growth of Malay children in Chinese schools in the 1990s (Khoo 2003, pp. 27 – 28). Besides, for three years from 1995 to 1997, the Chinese and Muslim calendars are coincidentally within the same month, and the term Gongxi Raya (combining the Chinese Gongxifacai and the Muslim Hari Raya) is on viral. These examples reflect a fact: perhaps the initial intention of *bangsa Malaysia* is quite cynical, but it can be taken and used in a good way. As Michel de Certeau suggests, popular culture can make do with what is offered to it (Turner 2003, p. 182). Accordingly, the state *bangsa Malaysia* gradually becomes the people's *bangsa Malaysia*, and becomes an ideological source of defiance against the state. The outbreak of 1998 *reformasi* movement can be read as a contestation between the state *bangsa Malaysia* and the people's *bangsa Malaysia*. By then, Mahathir sacks Anwar from the cabinet and the UMNO because of his alleged moral misconduct; later, Anwar is imprisoned for five years. The mistreatment of Anwar strikes the chord of social grievances, and the people start coming out to support the Anwar's

call for *reformasi*. The *reformasi* later escalates into a large-scale social activism that contains dissenting voices from different sectors. According to Farish Noor, the reason why the *reformasi* can make such an impact is because of its over-determined nature and ambiguity (Noor 1999, p. 13). Precisely, this over-determined nature also allows the *bangsa Malaysia* slipping into the *reformasi*; by joining hand together, the *reformasi* becomes a nationalist movement for the first time in Malaysia. Vice versa, it redefines the *bangsa Malaysia* as a united Malaysian against the authoritarian state. Freed from the state intervention, the Malaysian can search for the absence in Malaysianness.

The Malay, Chinese and Indian have their respective history, but the Malaysian have no past. The Alliance formula represses the Malayanness as a currency to exchange Independence. The May 13 Incident represses the Malaysianness as a taboo which might sabotage the national solidarity. The Mahathir's *bangsa Malaysia* resurrects the Malaysianness as an ideological means to assert domination of dissidents. The people's *bangsa Malaysia* appropriates the state sources search for their Malaysianness. Perhaps there is no authentic Malayan/Malaysian history in the official account, since the state is too adapted to exploit a certain racial and communal perspective to view and review the pasts. Paradoxically, the absence of the past might be the only past that can be certain.

MOMENT OF ABSENCE IV: NOT WITH HOPE, 2020

Hope can function as a drive or an illusion. Hope as a drive directs humans to proceed in a certain orientation. Hope as an illusion feeds humans with false representation and excessive ecstasy. Likewise, the disintegration of hope leads to an emotion of despair and total disillusionment. The disenchanting subject, therefore, either escapes from that ideological edifice or enrolls in another hope. In short, the hopelessness is political.

Mahathir, as noted in before, read his Vision 2020 to all Malaysian on 28 February 1991. The Vision 2020 has a far-reaching impact in the nation-building of Malaysia as it

is not simply a politician's manifesto but an ideological bedrock for contemporary Malaysia. According to John Hilley, the Mahathir's Vision 2020 'contextualizes popular understandings of modernization, social mobility and cross-ethnic prosperity as part of an inclusive national framework', therefore helps the state to establish 'a strong popular association between the idea of "collective economic development" and Vision 2020 as a signifier of future reward' (Hilley 2001, pp. 6 – 7). Its main prospects are: (a) establish a Malaysian nation consists of one *bangsa Malaysia*; (b) prepare to face all kind of adversities; (c) develop a democratic and ethical society; (d) create a liberal society free of discrimination; (e) cultivate a scientific and innovative spirit; (f) prioritize the collective before self; and (g) ensure an economically-just society. Notably, the rhetoric of Vision 2020 is not solely imposed by the state, but some individuals also begin to use the word *wawasan* (vision) as their company's name. In the meantime, Malaysia in the early 1990s is experiencing a tremendous economic growth insofar as the World Bank proclaims it as an East Asian Miracle; so Malaysian during that time 'saw nothing but wealth' (Halim 1999, p. 189). The Mahathir's office is resumed by Abdullah Badawi in 2003 and later by Najib Razak in 2009; both of them continue to champion the Vision 2020.

However, the Vision 2020 starts to lose its script since 2008. The UMNO-led BN under Abdullah's leadership and Najib's leadership fails to win a two-thirds majority in both the 2008 and 2013 General Election, respectively. Notably, the ruling coalition will be allowed to amend the Constitution with a two-thirds majority mandate. Finally, the people succeed to vote down the UMNO-led BN and terminate its sixty-one-year rule in Malaysia through the 2018 General Election. Soon, the domestic and international media all celebrate the victory of Malaysian, and depict it as the people's victory. It is indeed delightful in terms of the Malaysian topple the corrupted government through ballot box despite the severe gerrymandering and malapportionment. Yet it is too naive to believe that it is a result of enduring combat between the corrupted state and the people. There are

three main reasons which lead to the collapse of the UMNO-led BN. First, Najib's misdeed involves not only corruption and money laundering but also a handful of strange murders and disappearances. Second, the calls for the Najib's resignation not only comes from the Bersih protestors but also among the UMNO and the Malay leadership (Ooi 2019, p. 43). Lastly and most importantly, the UMNO and Najib's fall is neatly devised by Mahathir. Having retired for thirteen-year long, Mahathir returns to the political stage in his nineties by setting up BERSATU (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia). He knows that to win the Election, the opposition coalition needs to represent all range of social sectors by providing a variety of ideologies; therefore, he founds the Pakatan Harapan (PH). The PH's component parties include the Malay-based BERSATU, the Chinese-based DAP, the Anwar-led PKR, and the Muslim-based AMANAH. It follows: the BERSATU competes for the rural Malay votes with the UMNO; the DAP and the PKR compete for the urban votes; and the AMANAH competes for the Muslim votes with PAS. Notably, the victory of PH is excessively romanticized as a common effort of Malaysian regardless of races; in fact, it is the brilliant play of racial card crowns the PH. Unfortunately, this repressed racial plot recurs during the Mahathir-led PH's administration.

Shortly after the Election, Mahathir announces to substitute the Vision 2020 with a new national blueprint, i.e., the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV2030). The SPV2030 appears more pragmatic compared to the Vision 2020. Its main objective is to assist the lower income strata (Bottom 40%, B40), especially the poor bumiputra. Meanwhile, he establishes a police force to investigate the Najib's corruption and restores the fund back to the exchequer. Besides, Mahathir balances his cabinet members in accordance with the racial proportion; it is noteworthy that the Minister of Finance is Chinese for the first time in the history of Malaysia. The most onerous and concerned issue is when does Mahathir handover his premiership to Anwar as he promises before; Mahathir reassures the public that it shall be done in no time, but the date is constantly being delayed. On the other side, the UMNO and PAS keep accusing the PH government

of neglecting the Malay interest; they represent the Malay conservatives to protest the PH government's misconduct. For instance, they support the Malay organizations to protest against the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) from passing in Dec 2018. The PH coalition cannot escape from racial politics.

The hostile towards PH from both UMNO and PAS eventually leads the latter to form a new opposition pact in September 2019. Simultaneously, there is an internal conflict within the Anwar-led PKR, in which the deputy chairman Azmin challenges the Anwar's leadership; therefore, the PKR splits into two factions, i.e., the Anwar's faction and the Azmin's faction. In the meantime, there is another internal conflict within the Mahathir-led BERSATU, in which the deputy chairman Muhyiddin wants Mahathir to incorporate with the UMNO-PAS pact to form a new government; yet Mahathir rejects him resolutely. These time bombs are detonated when Mahathir suddenly resigns from his premiership and his BERSATU chairmanship, and withdraws the BERSATU from the PH on 24 February 2020; the PH government is dissolved immediately; soon, Mahathir is appointed as an interim Prime Minister. Within one week, the BERSATU and the Azmin's faction join the UMNO-PAS pact to form a new coalition, i.e., Perikatan Nasional (PN, The National Alliance); later, PN obtains a majority to form a new government; Muhyiddin becomes the eighth Prime Minister of Malaysia. The Malaysian accuse the BERSATU and the Azmin's faction for betrayal and see the PN as a backdoor government which does not have any people's mandate.

On the first level, hopelessness is the failure of Vision 2020. In 1991, the Vision 2020 can function as a signifier of hope because 2020 was in the future; however, when 2020 becomes an unpromising reality, the Vision 2020 is not sustainable as hope. On the second level, hopelessness is the failure of harapan. Interestingly, the Pakatan Harapan literally means the Coalition of Hope (harapan means hope). Hence, the collapse of PH not only signifies a failure of a democratic reformation in Malaysia, but also symbolically

implies a collapse of hope. On the third level, hopelessness is the failure of people. The Malaysian envisages for a change through their ballots, but the truth is the politicians can maneuver amongst the parties and coalitions for their own political interest. But in the bright side, being hopelessness urges Malaysian to look forwards for the real hope and look inwards for the hard truth.

In conclusion, the reasons why the Malaysian Chinese are facing difficulties in refashion their identification into a *bangsa Malaysia* are caused by four absences in their historical subjectivity, i.e., the absence of home, the absence of truth, the absence of past, and the absence of hope. On the other hand, acknowledging oneself being in a state of absence have opened up spaces for more voices to be heard.

CONCLUSION

Race is an imperialist and colonial construction that continues to endure in Malaysia after its independence as it serves the interest of particular group of political elites. Malaysian becomes too adapted to the idea of race through administrative practices and ideological inculcation. Therefore, the political elites mastering in the racial rhetoric can easily turn the table when they are facing accusation and challenges. Sharmani P. Gabriel concludes that race is the ‘most readily referenced signifier of difference in Malaysia.’

Race is a fundamental organizing principle in Malaysian society. Founded on the political economy of British colonial rule in the nineteenth century, it continues to be used in the post-colonial imagining of the nation and its identity. It is ascendant over other markers such as class, gender and religion and remains the most readily referenced signifier of difference in Malaysia. (Gabriel 2015, p. 783)

However, race is not an idea that has always been accessible. Under the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom and Islamized Muslim sultanate, *rakyat* see themselves as a subject of the *raja* residing in a *kerajaan* polity. During the British colonial Malaya, the colonizer started to introduce the MCIO ethnic classification system to better rule the workforce. The rise of nationalism in the twentieth century sees a confrontation to the local aristocracies and the colonizers but the racism and ethnic communalism, too, has taken shape in the process of national formation simultaneously. After the 1969 riot, the Malay political elites started to accumulate capital and political resources; as a consequence, corruption, cronyism and authoritarianism, in disguise as rhetoric of race and religion, becomes ubiquitous in the political arena.

Mahathir introduced the vision of *bangsa Malaysia* in 1991 that offers Malaysian an opportunity to rethink the historical idea of race in this nation. *Bangsa* has not always carried the denotation of race. It signifies different forms of communal solidarity. But the official Malaysian history assumes a race-based perspective which renders us difficult to

reimagine a history of *bangsa Malaysia* that applies different foci in different historical epoch, i.e., *kerajaan* in Hindu-Buddhist era, *kesultanan* in Islamized-Muslim era, race in colonial and postcolonial era, and other possibilities in the future. Examining the Chinese in Malaysia through this *bangsa*'s perspective, one realizes that they have adjusted their local consciousness in accordance with how inclusivity of the Malaysian identity, and the memories that are not compatible with the official account will be sidelined or eliminated completely. These moments of absence shape the historical subjectivities of Malaysian Chinese and invite more conversation in the future.

The conception and application of race is rather fluid than fixed, and the notion of *bangsa* has shown us possibilities in defining what race means. Finally, I would like to conclude this thesis with a remark from Gabriel.

The meaning of race produced within such signifying practices can never be finally fixed or settled as it is subject to contexts which are themselves always shifting. (Gabriel 2015, p. 803)

NOTES

1. Bumiputera, meaning the son of the soil, is used in Malaysia to indicate the Malays and the indigenous people.
2. Shaariibuugiin Altantuyaa, a Mongolian woman who worked for Najib's aide, Abdul Razak Baginda, was found dead after she blackmailed Baginda about his allegations of corruption and an affair. Many deemed the homicide was related to Najib.
3. *Buku Harapan* was a booklet published by Pakatan Harapan before the General Election in 2018. In the booklet, it made sixty promises, which covered five pillars: (a) reduce the people's burden; (b) institutional and political reform; (c) spur sustainable and equitable economic growth; (d) return Sabah and Sarawak to the status accorded by the Malaysia Agreement 1963; and (e) create a Malaysia that is inclusive, moderate, and respected globally.
4. The Malaysian government classified its people into three income groups: T20 (Top 20%), M40 (Medium 40%), and B40 (Bottom 40%).
5. Conventionally, the electoral diagram will shade the UMNO Malay-based constituencies in red colour, the PAS Muslim-based constituencies in green colour, and the KEADILAN non-Malay and mixed constituencies in blue colour, following their party flag.

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CHAPTERS AND ARTICLES

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