State contestations in constructions of 1Malaysia

Saying it different to different people

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This article seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the relationship between political discourse and national identity. 1Malaysia, introduced in 2009 by Malaysia's then newly appointed 6th Prime Minister Najib Razak, was greeted with expectation and concern by various segments of the Malaysian population. For some, it signalled a new inclusiveness that was to change the discourse on belonging. For others, it raised concerns about changes to the status quo of ethnic issues. Given the varying responses of society to the concept of 1Malaysia, an examination of different texts through the critical paradigm of CDA provide useful insights into how the public sphere has attempted to construct this notion. Therefore, this paper critically examines the Prime Minister's early speeches as well as relevant chapters of the socioeconomic agenda, the 10th Malaysia Plan, to identify the referential and predicational strategies employed in characterising 1Malaysia. The findings suggest a notion of unity that appears to address varying issues.

Keywords: 1Malaysia, inclusiveness, referential strategies, predicational strategies, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

This study examines state constructions of inclusiveness within the context of 1Malaysia, a blueprint for national unity and inclusiveness proposed by Prime Minister Najib Razak in 2009, and officially launched on 16 September 2010. Specifically, this article will examine the manner in which inclusions in identity are constructed within the context of 1Malaysia in selected extracts from the Prime Minister's speeches and a specific policy document, the 10th Malaysia Plan.

Malaysian history suggests that state and society conceptualisations of identity have not always coincided. This discord is discernible in the introduction of

successive programmes of unity such as the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970, *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian Nation) in 1990 and *Islam Hadhari* (Civilisational Islam) in 2004 under previous administrations of prime ministers, all belonging to the same political party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the hegemonic party in the coalition, the *Barisan Nasional* (BN, or National Front). In tandem with these programmes, attempts to forge a united nation have been reflected in the various five-year Malaysia Plans under the BN, effectively linking the conceptualisation of identity to the government's development agenda. The introduction of 1Malaysia was considered a means to resolving such discord. Despite the introduction of this blueprint for unity, recent events indicate that the state ordained constructions have not addressed aspirational notions of identity.

Survey results on identity conducted by an English language mainstream newspaper, *The Star* on 3 May 2015 ("Survey: Most Prefer to be Known as Malaysian) found a majority preference for *national identity* over *ethnic identity*. In connection with this, respondents expressed concerns over the general tendency in various spheres to stress ethnic identity of Malaysians over their national or civic identity (Smith, 1986). In an apparent riposte, Paul Low, Minister in the Prime Minister's department, was quoted in an online media, *The Malaysian Insider*, on 12 May 2015 as stating that race-based politics was a matter of survival for political parties, presumably those in the BN, since Malaysians prioritised ethnicity over national identity ("People Still Want Race-Based Politics, says minister").

These differing views once again point to a divide between state and society in stances on national identity. The respondents of survey in *The Star*, a middle-class urban newspaper, were solely from Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Negri Sembilan, all industrialised states on the west coast of the peninsula. The idea of removing race-based politics has found little support among right-wing groups which emerged in the aftermath of the general elections of 2008 (Pepinsky, 2009). Minister Paul Low appears to have been referring to sentiments of such groups when he stated his views regarding the preference for prioritising ethnicity.

These differing opinions between state and society point to an inherent problem with identity markers in multiethnic Malaysia. In particular, they highlight the tension apparent between authority opinions of what is desirable as identity and that of the people. These differences in identity aspirations may raise questions as to how the people's wishes are being addressed by the representatives of the people in important policy documents of the Najib administration that purportedly address matters of unity.

The signification of exclusion through reference to ethnic identities as opposed to the apparently unified identity implicit in the concept of 1Malaysia is the interest of this study. This distinction finds a parallel in Wodak et al.'s (2009) study of Austrian identity which draws a distinction between *staatsnation* and *kulturnation*

within the paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The latter focuses on the means by which sameness and differences in identity may be constructed in discourse (Wodak et al., 2009).

However, to set the context for this analysis, this article will first refer to the shaping of race and identity in the country, then summarise the significant development models adopted in the five-year Malaysia Plans that outlined the economic and social agenda for the nation and highlight some present day challenges that were a prelude to the introduction of 1Malaysia, the guiding principle of the 10MP (2011–2015). With such information as a backdrop, this study will then examine the concept of inclusiveness apparent in the occurrence of civic and ethnic references in the 10MP and the specific contexts of the chapters where this occurs.

Ethnic categories in Malaysia

In the nineteenth century, the British colonial administration allowed for the migration of a large group of workers, primarily from India and China, into the Malayan (i.e. Malaysia before independence) peninsula. While these actions witnessed an immediate increase in the multicultural nature of the land, the different ethnic groups in colonial Malaya played functional, economic roles in relation to the state,[1] and consequently were segregated socially as well as in terms of their jobs (Alatas, 1977). This segregation of ethnic groups as well as their classification based on their jobs established a link between ethnicity and the economy, with ethnic identity indicating a utilitarian purpose, in relation to the state (Alatas, 1977).

Additionally, conflation of identities was noted when differentiated categories and segments of the population were reduced to some of the main categories for convenience by colonial census-takers,[2] leading to a construction of ethnic classification[3] of people in colonial Malaya (Hirschman, 1987). Thus, ethnic categories in the 1891 census under the colonial governance identified three major ethnic groups, Malays, Chinese and Indians (Shamsul, 2001), a colonial legacy that has become an accepted reality for many Malaysians in post-colonial Malaysia (Mandal, 2004).

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1. The three major communities had segregated contributions to the economy, with the Malays in agriculture, the Chinese in the tin mines and the Indians in plantations (Alatas, 1977).

2. The colonial priority in census-taking to creating clearly demarcated racial identities was for the ease and convenience of identification. In the facile constructions of these ethnicised categories, there was inattention to issues of jus soli of those who had historical ties to the land, dating back centuries (Hirschman, 1987).

3. The notions of race, and even terms to refer to race were largely absent from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, until the arrival of the Dutch and British colonial powers (Mandal, 2004).

In the negotiations for independence, the colonial government proposed an "equal ethnie" model of nation building (Cheah, 2005: 98), that is, the Malayan Union[4] aimed at creating a uniform identity for all Malayans. The proposal, however, was rejected by Malay nationalists such as members of the UMNO[5] who asserted recognition of the rights of the Malays, thereby initiating a nationalist push for a dominant ethnic model and an ethno-nationalist ideology (Cheah, 2005).

The term for dominant majority in the country, *Bumiputera*,[6] was created through the inclusion of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore on 16 September 1963 (Maznah, 2009). The inclusion of the Borneo states, in particular, was significant in increasing the *Bumiputera* population in the country. Although it was employed at first to refer to the natives of Sabah and Sarawak, by the *4th Malaysia Plan, 1981–1985* the term *Bumiputera* became a common reference for Malays and other indigenous groups in the country (Maznah, 2009). Thus, a political identity was created, which enabled a clear dominant majority to emerge in the country.

The history of racial segregation, pre-independence census practices and the dominant ethnie model promoted by local elites at independence played significant roles in the creation of essentialised ethnic categories, realised in the present day primordial identification of *Bumiputera* and Non-*Bumiputera*. These categories have been central to the discourses of unity and inclusiveness in the country, particularly in deciding how state-sanctioned programmes of social and economic support are to be apportioned and mandated. However, it has to be noted that the term *Bumiputera* is not employed in the founding documents of the country such as the Federal Constitution, which, instead makes references to Malays as well as the natives of Sabah and Sarawak. There is also an omission in the Federal Constitution of any mention of *Orang Asli*,[7] an important indigent group.

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4. This model proposed granting citizenship to 83 per cent Chinese and 75 per cent Indians, and reducing the powers of royalty; also, the term, *Bangsa Malayan* would be used to denote all communities in the country (Ariffin, 2009).

5. The formation of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) by its founder, Onn Jaafar, was in response to news of British plans for the Malayan Union (Ariffin, 2009). Upon British insistence, UMNO eventually formed a tripartite coalition with the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) to form the Alliance Party. This coalition, proposing an ethnic representation of the people, won the first ever elections held in the country in 1955, as well as the subsequent elections in 1959 and 1964.

6. A marker of identity employed for official purposes in Malaysia, the term is originally from Sanskrit, meaning "sons of the soil".

7. The administrative term, "*Orang Asli*", is a Malay term for Original People. The *Orang Asli* communities comprise 18 ethnic subgroups in peninsular Malaysia, and make up 0.5 per cent of the population (Rusaslina, 2013).

Society's contestations of state-led identity formation

While state-led initiatives which prioritised ethnicity in national identity established aspects of the "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006), alternative initiatives for unity underlined a differing conceptualisation of the nation. Pre-independence collaborations such as the PUTERA-AMCJA drafted the 'People's Constitution', proposing a single nationality for all citizens (Ariffin, 2009). However, the latter grouping and their proposals found little favour with the colonial government, and so this attempt was unsuccessful (Stockwell, 2005).

Other attempts to create a common identity included The People's Action Party's (PAP) proposal of a Malaysian Malaysia that prioritized a common national identity, rather than ethnic policies. Not only was this demand for Malaysian Malaysia rejected by political elites, but Singapore was also eventually expelled from the Federation on 5 March 1965 (Maznah, 2009).

Nevertheless, despite the dominant role of the state, society has since independence continued to seek an alternative to the state-led ethnic discourses propagated by the ruling coalition. The state has acquiesced with society's wishes at its most vulnerable moments through the introduction of various programmes of unity, particularly in the aftermath of loss of electoral support; with the 1969 elections, the ruling coalition introduced ethnic affirmative action policies, purportedly to unify the nation. Similarly, following the 1990 elections, the coalition introduced the concept of *Bangsa Malaysia*, stressing a common identity for all. Again, following the 2008 elections that recorded massive losses for the BN, the concept of 1Malaysia, a blueprint of unity and belonging, was introduced. Yet 5 years after the introduction of 1Malaysia, the dialogue regarding unity and inclusiveness continues apace as evidenced in the survey by *The Star*. This then raises the question as to how this inclusiveness is being constructed by authorities who present blueprints of unity to the nation.

Anticipating 1Malaysia

Following the Prime Minister's announcement of the blueprint for unity, there was much anticipation of what this new blueprint promised. The following refer to two sites, the NST opinion editorials and the New Economic Model, where there was much discussion of issues confronting 1Malaysia.

Opinion-editorials of a state-owned media

One of the first public sites where the concept of 1Malaysia was announced was in the opinion editorials of the oldest English Language newspaper in Peninsula Malaysia, the *New Straits' Times* (NST). The NST is owned by Media Prima, a grouping that has been linked to the Malay component of the ruling coalition, the UMNO, from which the country's Prime Ministers are also appointed. UMNO's ownership of the newspaper dates back to the 1970s when the party is said to have acquired a controlling stake in the newspaper under a consolidated grouping, the Fleet Group (Brown 2005). Thus, the mainstream media's political connections have been found to impact on the representation of news. In this instance, the fact that the newspaper is allied to the dominant coalition partner of the ruling government is considered an important connection in establishing its stances in relation to the concept of 1Malaysia.

An examination of opinion editorials of the NST between April 2009 and June 2010 revealed references to significant themes that emerging in relation to 1Malaysia. Of the 15 editorials referred to in that period, only the first editorial, "Mutually Malaysia" on 17 April 2009 was shown to have engaged directly with the idea of 1Malaysia directly by providing an interpretation of the same, albeit briefly. While attributing the concept of 1Malaysia and its interpretation to the Prime Minister, the editorial notes:

> *The anecdotes the prime minister chose in illustrating his idea to editors on Wednesday made it clear: 1Malaysia is functionally race-blind. From poverty alleviation to wealth creation; in housing, education, healthcare, economic mobility and the delivery of public services, his administration will regard all Malaysians as one.*
> (Mutually Malaysia, 17 April 2009)

The first editorial, therefore, refers to ethnic inclusiveness, with subsequent mention of specific sectors of social and economic life where this inclusiveness is to be initiated.

Subsequent editorials did not tackle the interpretation of the concept 1Malaysia. Rather, it was mentioned in editorials that called for the introduction of changes in a number of areas. The call for change and inclusiveness included the need for ethnic and gender diversity in recruitment policies and job promotions in the civil service,[8] a tacit call to remove the practice of ethnic identification in official forms,[9] the introduction of a single school system ensuring uniformity in

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8. Wanted: Men and Non-Malays, on 13 June 2009.

9. Out of the Box, 21 August 2009.

education[10] and the need to address the problem of low-income households.[11] It was found that while these editorials point to the reformist potential of inclusiveness within 1Malaysia, the positive representations of authority figures and powerful elites indicate the presence of partisan politics in media stances regarding 1Malaysia (Varghese and Ghazali, 2014).

The new economic model (NEM)

The NEM's relevance to the concept of 1Malaysia was underlined in the preface of the document that highlighted the National Economic Advisory Council's (NEAC) independent work on NEM as a part of the government's 1Malaysia initiative. The NEM was one among four pillars to move the country closer to the attainment of Vision 2020.

The objective of inclusiveness as one of three key objectives of the document was summarised as pro-poor growth, with its emphasis to go beyond ethnic based distribution policies of the past. So the NEM broached a break with the past ethnic-based policies that it contended had worsened social coherence and relations among various ethnic groups. The recommendation, instead, was a needs-based focus, to take into account the bottom 40 per cent of the population, which had the slowest income growth in 2008. Among this group, the income levels of the most vulnerable stood at one-seventh that of the richest 20% in Malaysia. According to the NEM 77 per cent of this grouping are *Bumiputera*, mostly from Sabah and Sarawak.

The NEM also refers to different inequalities including class, age, gender, spatial, occupation as well as intraethnic inequalities in the nation. Thus, the plurality of identities and its attendant inequalities are noted. The NEM further stresses that the alleviation of these inequalities will include creating opportunities for all, regardless of ethnicity.

Furthermore, the NEM notes that global changes require that the country implements increased competition and competitiveness as well as an emphasis on social justice and globalization. Among others, a focus on equitable distribution of services such as education and health services as well as a focus on processes rather than outcomes are among the recommendations of the NEM.

Among the critical areas of need identified by the NEAC in the NEM include slowing productivity, declining private investments, inadequately skilled human capital, poor support for doing business, low value added industries, low wages

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10. A Singular Objective, 2 November 2009.

11. A Bundle of Cheer, 12 June 2009; Closing the Gap, 27 August 2009.

and low-skilled labour as well as poor innovation and creativity. These conditions of decline have been the result of various regulatory measures, inadequate levels of education, inadequate attention by firms to develop talent as well as the brain drain.

The concerns of the NEM appear to parallel social concerns raised in the NST editorials in their references to 1Malaysia. These include concerns relating to unity, identity and belonging as a means to attaining inclusiveness.

Data, theory and method

At the outset, some clarity has to be established on the terms of use in this paper. A most important task is the need to clarify the terms that are to be employed in this study, particularly the difference between language and discourse. Simpson and Mayr (2010) distinguish between language and discourse by referring to the former as "abstract set of patterns and rules" (5) while the latter is the "instantiation of these patterns in real contexts of use" (5). The focus of this paper, in terms of context, is political discourse in constructing unity, with the data being drawn from the Prime Minister's speeches and a specific policy document, the 10th Malaysia Plan.

This paper draws upon previous work done on studies of nationhood and unity (Fairclough, 2000; Ricento, 2003; Wodak et al., 2009) in the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the construction of unity in the context of 1Malaysia. CDA considers the role of language as socially constitutive and constituting. This notion has been extended to institutional discourse in that discourse is institutionally constituted and constitutive of such institutions (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Simpson and Mayr, 2010). The micro-level processes in the text, whether it be semantic choices or relationships between ideas represent choices that, in turn, reflect power and ideology. The choices may be purposeful in seeking consent for narratives that would then provide legitimacy for the dominant status of particular parties and individuals (Gramsci, 1971). These choices establish the hegemony and the dominant status of narratives and particular powerful groups (Fairclough, 2003), while marginalizing the less powerful voices (Ricento, 2003).

Previous studies of national identity and unity highlight the creation of inclusions and exclusions in discourse between in-groups and out-groups (Wodak et al., 2009). Such constructions were found to then legitimise the exclusion of the other and the use of politically and socially discriminatory policies. In examining constructions of national identity, Wodak et al. (2009) referred to various fields of action or different areas of a social reality which have their own specific functions and genres. These may include political field of action with policy documents and speeches by political leaders, the formation of public opinion through media

statements and articles and legal organs that make laws. In this paper, the focus has been on the Prime Minister's speeches and the 10th Malaysia Plan.

Foucault's theory of discursive formations (1972) posits the view that an understanding of knowledge is dependent on an awareness of the larger context in which the text operates. In such a context, the text is but a small part of a network of thoughts and processes working towards the production of that knowledge. The network operates on principles and rules that govern the production and continuance of that knowledge. Institutions and practices may constitute the network and these work together. In Foucault's (1972) view, these may exert power in the production of knowledge. Thus, the production of the discourse by these fields of force is always linked with power. In reflecting on this power, Van Dijk's (2003) views regarding the symbolic resources of access and control are instructive in this paper. As shown in the earlier sections of the paper, the constructions of unity and identity in Malaysia has been a largely political elite preserve of the coalition party that has held power in one form or the other since independence. To understand how political elites were achieving this, this paper chose data sources that would provide the dominant perspectives.

These power relations are discursive (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) in that discourse is the means through which the dominant narratives gain a foothold to seep into the collective consciousness of the nation. However, this study chooses a limited examination of these contestations by focusing on the field of action of politics and the state-owned media. By drawing on principles of interdiscursivity and intertextuality (Fairclough, 1995), this paper sought to establish how the interpretive potential of 1Malaysia found alignment and consistency in different political spaces.

The Discourse-Historical approach (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001) proposes texts be examined for use of macrostrategies as well as microstrategies. Four macro-strategies identified in Wodak et al.'s (2009) study of national identity include construction, perpetuation/justification, transformation and dismantling. Constructive strategies are discernible in discourse that attempts to establish identity, unity and solidarity as well as differentiation; perpetuation is highlighted in discourse that defends a threatened identity by proposing to maintain the identity, to protect and to support it; justificatory strategies as a subgroup of perpetuation stress the legitimacy of a problematic past; transformational strategies is the discourse of change, proposing that particular components of a national identity change to accommodate a newly conceptualized version; dismantling strategies highlights parts of the identity that must change, but is unable to provide a new model.

Strategies of assimilation and dissimilation (Wodak et al. 2009; Reisigl and Wodak 2009) are examined at the micro-level through a selection of microstrategies.

One of the primary areas of interest in these studies is the creation of in-groups and out-groups in the language employed (Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Van Leeuwen 2008). Referential as well as predicational strategies are employed in achieving this. In the study on national identity, Wodak et al. (1999) employs the use of microstrategies to study the construction of sameness and difference.

In the following analysis, the Prime Minister's speeches are first examined to identify the context and the predication of 1Malaysia. This is followed by an examination of the referential elements in Chapter 4 of the 10th Malaysia Plan and how this reflects the interpretation of 1Malaysia in terms of needs.

Discussion on findings

Prime minister Najib Razak's speeches

Prime Minister Najib Razak's early speeches on 1Malaysia on 7 April 2009 and 9 April 2009 suggested a new inclusiveness different from the past. On these occasions, in addressing the media as well as in introducing his cabinet, the address was directed to Malaysia and Malaysians. However, in his commemoration speech before the King on 6 June 2009, the Prime Minister referred to lMalaysia as a continuation of ideas and policies of previous administrations. As he notes in his speech:

> *Sesungguhnya, 1 Malaysia bukanlah konsep atau formula baru. Sebaliknya, matlamat akhir 1 Malaysia iaitu perpaduan nasional juga merupakan wawasan utama pendahulu-pendahulu patik yang telah diterjemahkan dalam pelbagai rupa bentuk dan jelmaan prakarsa sepanjang lebih lima dekad yang lalu. Jika diamati, apa yang berubah adalah pendekatan dan gerak kerja menurut kesesuaian zaman dan generasi yang silih berganti.*

> In fact, 1Malaysia is not a new concept or formula. Rather, the main objective of which is national solidarity has also been the main aims of previous leaders who have implemented it in various ways over the past five decades. If examined carefully, what has changed is the approach and actions taken to fit in with changing times.

In the extract, the Prime Minister characterises the similarity between his vision of 1Malaysia with that of past administrations as "*wawasan utama pendahulu-pendahulu patik*" or the primary vision of his predecessors. In this way, he links

his initiative to the aspirations of his party and its predecessors, thereby rejecting any notion of a break with past policies.

In the same speech, the Prime Minister went on to specifically emphasise that 1Malaysia supported clauses 3, 4, 152 and 153 parts 2 and 3 of the Federal Constitution. These clauses refer to the official religion of Islam in clause 3, the constitution as the supreme law of the land in clause 4, the position of Malay as the official language in clause 152, the special position of Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak in terms of specific quotas relating to positions in public service, education privileges such as scholarships, granting of permits and licences for businesses and trade. Finally, Article 153, part 3 refers to the authority of the king in directing those responsible for ensuring these quotas. Thus, the reassurances focus mainly on the issue of ethnic policies in the country, and their continuation.

Later in the same month, on 15 June 2009, the Prime Minister provided further clarification in parliament of his conceptualisation of 1Malaysia. This was in response to concerns and questions raised by members of his party about its meaning by emphasising its instrumental role in achieving stability and progress:

> *Dalam erti kata lain, 1Malaysia adalah satu gagasan bagi memupuk perpaduan di kalangan rakyat Malaysia yang berbilang kaum, berteraskan beberapa nilai-nilai penting yang seharusnya menjadi amalan setiap rakyat Malaysia. Ia bukan satu pendekatan yang terpisah dari dasar-dasar kerajaan Barisan Nasional sebelum ini, sebaliknya ia merupakan pelengkap kepada pendekatan-pendekatan yang sedia ada untuk mengukuhkan lagi perpaduan bagi menjamin kestabilan, ke arah mencapai kemajuan dan pembangunan yang lebih tinggi bagi rakyat dan negara Malaysia. Makanya, 1Malaysia digagaskan sebagai satu formula yang menjadi pra-syarat bagi memastikan aspirasi negara, iaitu Wawasan 2020 tercapai jika ia diterapkan ke dalam sanubari rakyat dan diamalkan oleh setiap lapisan masyarakat. Jika "Bangsa Malaysia" adalah matlamat akhir perjalanan ini, maka 1Malaysia adalah penunjuk haluan kearah matlamat itu.*

> In other words, 1Malaysia is a concept to foster unity among Malaysians of all races based on several important values which should become the practice of every Malaysian. It is not an approach that is separate from previous government policies of Barisan Nasional, but is complementary to approaches available to strengthen unity to ensure stability, to achieve progress and development for the people and the country of Malaysia. Therefore, 1Malaysia, envisioned as a prerequisite for ensuring the national aspirations of Vision 2020 is achieved if it is embedded in the minds of the people and practiced by all levels of society. If "Bangsa Malaysia" is the goal of this journey, then 1Malaysia points the way toward that goal.

Once again the purpose of 1Malaysia is spelt out as "*satu gagasan bagi memupuk perpaduan*" or a concept for achieving unity among all the different ethnicities in the country. In the same sentence he goes on to state that this concept, consisting

of important values ("*nilai-nilai penting*"), should become part of everyday life for all Malaysians. Once again, it is further characterised as an approach that does not deviate from past policies of the party. Rather, 1Malaysia is referred to as a "*pra-syarat*" or a pre-condition to achieving Vision 2020, underlining once again the correspondence between his policies with those of past administrations. In addition to showing the equivalence of the concept to policies of previous administrations, the instrumental nature of this policy is also referred to as a means of fostering stability, progress and development ("*menjamin kestabilan, ke arah mencapai kemajuan dan pembangunan*"). In addition to the theme of continuity, his speech underlined the pragmatic necessity of this blueprint for unity and identity.

These pronouncements of continuity came within 2 months of the NST article, 'Mutually Malaysia', on 17 April 2009 that referred to significant changes to issues of ethnicity. While this may suggest that the newspaper may have been overly enthusiastic in its grasp of the changes to be introduced through 1Malaysia, it is equally possible that a state-owned newspaper would be fairly cautious in broaching a subject on which public debates were relatively minimal. As Pepinsky (2009) noted, the introduction of 1Malaysia was greeted with much criticism from right-wing groups that opposed the removal of race-based policies. These speeches could therefore be considered a move to appease such parties that were also the bulwark of the coalition government.

The pragmatic reference to 1Malaysia is seen again in the Prime Minister's address to the business community, the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (NCCIM). As he notes:

> *Finally, I believe that the values, the vision and the commitment behind 1Malaysia will be vital to the long-term strength of Malaysia. Business cannot succeed and economies cannot be strong when our society is divided. We will not succeed in the new global era if we do not extend opportunity to all according to their needs and look to utilise the talents of all our people, not just some.*   (NCCIM, 12 Feb 2010)

The above extract suggests a linkage of the economy, business, society as well as politics. The emphasis here is on economic growth, dependent on a unified nation. However, the speech proceeds to emphasise the need for redistribution as a means to attaining this unified nation. These are broad areas of concern indicating simultaneous emphasis on economic growth as well as redistribution, suggesting a dynamic tension between the approaches.

The need for the private sector to take up the slack in assisting the government was addressed again in Najib Razak's speech at the Presentation Ceremony of Prime Minister's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) awards on 8 March 2010. Thus the private sector is asked to work with the government to "raise educational standards, enhance healthcare, protect and improve the environment, (and)

alleviate poverty and hardship". Social concerns appear to have been outsourced to the private sector here.

The class-based dimension is observable in speeches such as the one on 8 March 2010, when addressing enterprises gathered at the PM's Corporate Social Responsibility awards 2009. As he notes in his speech on that occasion:

> *It is in your best interest to bring the poorest and least privileged into the mainstream of economic activity, to create a 1Malaysia that is inclusive and cares for all.*
> (Presentation awards of Prime Minister's CSR awards)

The speech delivered on 8 March 2010 in front of the representative of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development stresses the need to address poverty among the "poorest and least privileged". The emphasis on class over ethnicity parallels the NST editorial of 17 April 2009, 'Mutually Malaysia' that referred to 1Malaysia as being "colour-blind". In a subsequent speech on 3 June 2010 to Malaysians living and working in Laos, the same message of inclusiveness was emphasised.

The Prime Minister's speech to the Chinese Economic Congress on 13 August 2010, indicates that government support would be provided for the poor, but his speech also addresses the ethnic dimension:

> *We will continue to support those who are poor and those whose income level are below RM1500 as listed down in the New Economic Model. This is hardly a question of favoritism but is being equitable. The non Chinese role in the economy remains relatively low and in the true spirit of 1Malaysa where all Malaysians will be given fair opportunities, assistance will be provided to the targeted communities until they are ready to be lifted eventually.*   (Chinese Economic Congress)

There is some mystification as to whether the non-Chinese group mentioned refers to specific groups in the country or it takes into account all the non-Chinese communities. At the same time, the comment takes an essentialist approach to those who are poor and whose income levels are below RM1,500 by linking the support to be given to the economic participation of the community as a whole. The Prime Minister appears to indicate that all Malaysians of Chinese ethnicity are financially capable, with income levels above RM1,500 at the time of his speech in 2010.

The essentialist disparities are apparent again in a later speech. In his speech on 22 October 2010[12] at the UMNO General Assembly, Najib Razak draws a crucial distinction between the *Bumiputeras* and the non-*Bumiputeras*.

> *Misalnya, kaum bukan Bumiputera, setelah 39 tahun dasar afirmatif dilaksanakan, masih lagi merupakan kaum yang memiliki kekayaan terbesar. Kita menyedari, ada pihak mendakwa tindakan afirmatif itu sendiri yang mendatangkan kesusahan,*

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12. UMNO President's address on the occasion of the UMNO General Assembly 2010.

akan tetapi, bukti empirikal menunjukkan sebaliknya. Sebenarnya, sikap penerima bantuan, cara pelaksanaan dan landskap di mana tindakan itulah yang menjadi punca masalah.

For example, non-Bumiputeras, after 39 years of affirmative action, are still the race with the greatest wealth. We are aware that certain quarters claim that affirmative action had caused hardship. However, empirical evidence shows otherwise. In fact, the attitude of beneficiaries, methods of implementation *and the landscape of action were source of the problems.*

Most significant is the reference to the non-*Bumiputeras* as a "*kaum*" or race, thus homogenising and essentialising the citizens who qualify for this reference, regardless of their ethnicity, occupation, socioeconomic status, geographical location as well as educational background. Furthermore, he asserts that this group is wealthier than the *Bumiputeras*, despite 39 years of affirmative action policies. This serves to underline the continuation of ethnic-based affirmative action programmes of the NEP. However, the Prime Minister did not state the reasons for the ineffectiveness of 39 years of affirmative action policies for those who were supposed to have benefited from these policies. Nor did he offer solutions for those in need of such policies but who do not qualify on account of their ethnicity.

There is an essentialist notion of race and economic capability; but more importantly, the contradiction between the earlier sentiments about 1Malaysia transcending notions of ethnicity is not borne out here. This suggests some lack of correspondence between articulations of intentions and actual interpretation of the concept in relation to social justice.

In addressing the Chinese Economic Congress, the Prime Minister refers to values significant to the nation as a whole. As he observes:

> *Therefore, we need to rejuvenate Malaysia's spirit and identity. I believe 1Malaysia is more than a concept and certainly more than a slogan. It reflects not only a return to the values of our great leaders: Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Tan Cheng Lock, Tun V.T. Sambanthan, and others but goes beyond that as it emphasizes the people, performance and it is very strategic in its conception. The courage of our forefathers and their commitment to unity remain as shining examples to us today. But this revitalization of our national identity cannot succeed without the support of all communities in the country – both here and abroad.* (Chinese Economic Congress)

Once again, common heritage and beginnings are emphasised. At the same time, unlike previous speeches where the references were only to Malay Prime Ministers, here Najib Razak introduces the names of the non-Malay leaders at Independence. The reference would appear to be strategic in suggesting the "spirit" and "identity" to be revived should be in accordance with that of the Independence era. Thus, the cooperation that is sought is not for a common identity, but on the basis of separate but equal status that was emphasised at Independence.

Overall, the speeches noted here point to an audience-sensitive interpretation of 1Malaysia. The earliest references to a common identity and thereby referencing change appear to change very rapidly within a matter of months to reflect a continuity of programmes initiated by previous Prime Ministers and Independence era leaders. Similarly, while the predication of 1Malaysia focuses on the message of continuity and the maintaining of the status quo, presumably that of ethnic politics, when faced with a Malay audience, there are more frequent references to removal of class-based disparities in the Prime Minister's speeches to a predominantly non-Malay audience. So while 1Malaysia is about ethnic politics in certain spaces, there is a tendency to focus on the politics of class in relating to minority audiences.

Emphasising difference or ethnic identity

One of the texts selected for this study was the 10th Malaysia Plan, a crucial 5-year socioeconomic agenda for the nation that would highlight the realisation of 1Malaysia. Specific chapters of the 10th Malaysia Plan were examined for ethnic referential elements employed in the different chapters. Table 1 (Appendix A) reflects the frequency of occurrence of various ethnic references to identity in Chapters 1 to 7 of the 10th Malaysia Plan. Such differentiated references also highlight the exclusions constructed in the 10th Malaysia Plan.

Chapter 4 on social justice discusses inclusive socioeconomic development, and records the highest number of references to *Bumiputera*; there are 75 occurrences of the term. This is in sharp contrast to Chapters 3, 5 and 6 which indicate the highest number of occurrences of collectivised reference to Malaysia among all in the table; there are no references in these chapters or in Chapter 7 to the term, *Bumiputera*. Thus, in relation to the theme of social justice, the collective, "Malaysia", is differentiated along ethnic lines. Also among all the ethnic groupings indicated, the *Bumiputera* grouping has the highest occurrence, thus suggesting greater focus in this chapter on this grouping.

At the same time there are references to other ethnic identities, with the *Orang Asli* getting the second highest mention in Chapter 4 at 14 occurrences, 8 references to Chinese, 10 references to the term, "ethnic minorities" and finally, 6 references to Indians. There is no reference in this chapter or anywhere in the remainder of the Plan to the ethnic grouping of Malays. So it must be assumed that Malays are assimilated in the term *Bumiputera*.

Also, the distinct reference to ethnic minorities of Sabah and Sarawak as well as the reference to *Orang Asli* in Chapter 4 suggests that these two groupings are treated as distinct and different from those categorised as *Bumiputera* in

the chapter, and therefore, there is a differentiation in the types of programmes being organised under the banner of the previous NEP or affirmative action. It is therefore assumed that the term *Bumiputera* in the chapter refers primarily to the Malays. This limited ethnic reference employed in Chapters 1 and 4 to signify Malays may indicate that the term *Bumiputera* has changed from the original sense in which it was coined to refer to all indigent groups and particularly with reference to the natives of Sabah and Sarawak (Maznah, 2009).

Also, while the broad grouping of *Bumiputera* may be referenced to highlight problems of social justice, it does not differentiate the relative nature of this problem between those at the higher end of the scale and those at the bottom, falling into the bottom 40 per cent of the population. Similarly, the grouping *Bumiputera* appears to be lopsided, comprising a variety of communities, rather greater than the other minorities that effectively comprise the group, Non-*Bumiputera*. So a historical and collective memory is invoked in relation to the former through conflation of identities to represent needs, whereas the latter are still considered disparate groups and communities whose needs are considered in isolation, thus producing isolated pockets of needs.

Furthermore, with the intra-group inequalities among Malays highlighted in local studies (Ragayah, 2013), the question arises whether this fact has been taken note of in addressing this limited ethnic grouping, or whether the policies suggested in the 10MP are meant to be adopted across the board for all, including wealthy as well as poor Malays. Similarly, there is lower incidence of references in Chapter 4 to communities in Sabah and Sarawak, the *Orang Asli* as well as the Indians who reportedly make up a significant proportion of the urban poor. This leads to questions regarding the emphasis placed on addressing the inequalities recorded among the smaller groups such as the rural Malays, *Orang Asli*, the ethnic minorities of Sabah and Sarawak as well as the Indians (Ragayah, 2013; Rusaslina, 2013; Nagarajan, 2009).

Nevertheless, as mentioned, the highest occurrence of the term, *Bumiputera* is to be found in Chapter 4. Therefore, the stress on the ethnic identity is underlined in this chapter when referring to state support in addressing social inequalities. Similarly, the high occurrence of the term *Bumiputera* in Chapter 1 to the exclusion of other ethnic groupings, as well as its occurrence in Chapter 4 would suggest that the authority mindset regarding ethnic poverty does not differ from the stance adopted in the 2nd Malaysia Plan.

The definition of the grouping *Bumiputera* has likewise been interpreted in unique ways. It would appear that while there is a homogenous grouping referred to in the mention of *Bumiputera* in Chapter 1, in Chapter 4 which addressed socioeconomic development among target groups, a clear differentiation is made of the grouping to divide these into three categories which are the *Orang Asli*, the

ethnic minorities of Sabah and Sarawak and an undifferentiated grouping, un-identified by ethnicity or geography that is referred to by the term, *Bumiputera*. The manner in which Chapter 4 lays out the programmes intended for the differing intra-groups of this grouping may raise more questions about differing kinds of support based on community identity.

Overall, in reference to social justice, the chapters of the 10th Malaysia Plan indicate that the social actors are ethnically labelled, with the term *Bumiputera* being given a nuanced treatment. The primary implication of this is that the authority discourse of the 10th Malaysia Plan's approach to identifying and addressing poverty returns to essentialised ethnic portrayals of poverty. The 10th Malaysia Plan, therefore, contrasts with the NEM as well as the expectations of the NST, both of which suggested a needs-based approach, thereby providing a clear indication of serious contradictions within these government plans. Such contradictions raise questions about the validity of the government's promotion of "1Malaysia".

Conclusion: 1Malaysia as a signifier of unity and change

The Prime Minister's speeches reflect a slippage in the interpretation of unity within the context of 1Malaysia. Such slippage in meaning could lead to confusion regarding the actual intentions of this blueprint. At the same time, while the NST articles and the NEM promote an expectation of change, the early messages of inclusiveness and change appear to disappear from the speeches rather quickly, possibly in response to concerns of party members and the right wing elements. The examination of referential elements in Chapter 4 of the 10th Malaysia Plan, however, suggest a tendency to remain rooted to past ideals of identity formation and construction of unity.

The use of differentiated ethnic identities suggests a continuation of the NEP programmes introduced in 1971 in the context of addressing social inequalities. Specifically, there appear to be two groups of *Bumiputera* referred to in relation to addressing inequalities: the natives of Sabah and Sarawak as well as the *Bumiputera* group that has reportedly benefited from the past affirmative action programmes of the 1970s, presumably the Malays. The latter group are however, not identified as such. Indeed as Table 1 indicates, there is no mention at all of the grouping, Malays in the 10th Malaysia Plan as a whole. If vulnerable groups among indigene cultures are to be fairly targeted for interventionist policies, establishing the basis on which such groups are identified would ensure that all deserving of such intervention are fairly targeted and helped. If ethnicity and culture were not a crucial aspect of one's identity in present-day Malaysia, the conflation of categories should not merit consideration. However, affirmative action policies

instituted in 1971 professed a national concern to ensure inclusiveness for those needing state support.

In addition to the *Bumiputera*, the *Orang Asli* is also mentioned. However, no other ethnic grouping is referred to in considering groups that need state support. This overreliance on ethnicity as a factor in identifying inequality suggests an inflexibility in acknowledging the needs of all Malaysians. In comparison, the NEM stressed a need to adopt newer paradigms for a more cohesive and substantive approach at tackling the issue of disadvantaged groups in the country instead of limiting the discussion of disadvantage in ethnic terms.

While the assumption of interethnic disparities is apparent in the groups identified for government support, it has been pointed out that the assumption of horizontal inequalities overlooks the disadvantaged groups that suffer vertical inequalities or intraethnic inequalities (Gomez et al., 2013). In actual fact, the reference to horizontal inequalities indicates a renewal and perpetuation of past policy assertions, rather than a change that addresses disadvantage vertically. This begs the question regarding the new paradigm and the change that was to be implemented with the introduction of 1Malaysia.

However, the question regarding the narrowed focus on vulnerable ethnic groups for targeted intervention raises questions regarding the implicit message that some of the vulnerable groups are more deserving of this targeted action, possibly on the misrecognition of primordialism when compared with other groups. 57 years since independence and 51 years after the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, this implicit message suggests exclusions of citizens, whose eligibility for these forms of state support should have been a birthright. Instead, the focus on ethnicity gives the strongest message yet of the state's indication of who belongs in twenty-first century Malaysia. While indications of support for the vulnerable in other ethnic groups are also referred to in Chapter 4 of the 10th Malaysia Plan, the nature of the support, the substantive forms of support rendered and the limited extent of such support are indications of a state-ordained hierarchy in the identification of vulnerable groupings and communities.

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Appendix A.

Table 1. Ethnic references

Chapter	Chapter Title	1M	Bumiputera	Indian	Chinese	*Orang Asli*	Ethnic minorities	Total word tokens
1	Charting Development towards a High Income Nation	9+0	15	0	0	1	0	7589
2	Building on the Nation's Strengths	2+1	3	0	0	0	0	8463
3	Creating the Environment for Unleashing Economic Growth	1+1	0	0	0	0	0	18380
4	Moving Towards Inclusive Socioeconomic Development	4+5	75	6	8	14	10	13664
5	Developing and Retaining a First-World Talent Base	2+0	0	0	1	0	0	15383
6	Building an Environment that Enhances Quality of Life	0+3	0	0	0	0	0	17389
7	Transforming Government to transform Malaysia	0+2	0	0	0	0	0	10107
	TOTAL	**18+12**	**92**	**6**	**9**	**14**	**10**	**90,975**

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