

NATION-BUILDING AND 1MALAYSIA CONCEPT: ETHNIC RELATIONS CHALLENGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to analyze the concept of 1Malaysia propagated by Malaysia's sixth Prime Minister, in the process of nation-building. Both notions have close connections in terms of the expected end results that aspire to develop an integrated society that share an ideal feeling of unity and solidarity. The difficulty in realizing the goal is quite tedious when cultural elements like language and education are taken into account. Hence, the objective of the article is to analyze whether the development of an integrated nation is difficult to achieve due to the three aspects identified: firstly, a deep-rooted racial sentiment; secondly, the bid to preserve one's cultural elements; and thirdly, the elements employed to develop a national identity to unite the different ethnics under the 1Malaysia concept. To fulfil the study's objectives, the method employed was library research with the emphasis on textual analysis. Based on the methods, research findings showed that the 1Malaysia concept could be reinforced if the traditional elements of each ethnic community are not threatened. However, the fundamental elements of the national identity must be distinctly ascertained to prevent any misunderstanding and conflict in ethnic relations, and this could be established by reflecting on the history of the country's nation-building process.

Keywords: 1Malaysia concept, nation-building, national identity

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The process of nation-building is an effort to develop the spirit of patriotism and solidarity to create a country whose people share a common identity. The major aim is to foster national unity by developing a new nation and an integrated race (Hippler, 2002:1-3). In Malaysia, the idea of establishing a nation was initiated before Malayan Union was introduced, during the struggles in seeking independence from British colonization. One of the initiatives was the concept of '*Negara-Cita Melayu*' with the slogan *Melayu-Raya* that involved the collaboration of nationalists in Malaya and Indonesia. The tie was made stronger as they share many common cultural elements such as religion, language, traditions, political system and economic background. However, it was an intricate mission to fulfill the aspiration due to the dissimilarities in the Malay community's social background and ideologies (Abdul Rahman, 2000: 44-45). The foremost objective for a colonized nation is to achieve independence, which was no different for Malaya. To realize the goal, the aspects of politics, economy and social were given the priority in order to achieve unity between the three major ethnics – the native Malays, who formed the majority; and the immigrant Chinese and Indians that formed the second and third largest communities in the country.

As a result, the differences between them were minimized in order to achieve the objective. To achieve political unity, the British proposed a merger between political parties that were ethnic based – *United Malays National Organization* (UMNO) that represent the Malays, *Malaysian Chinese Association* (MCA) that stand for the Chinese and *Malaysian Indian Congress* (MIC) that represent the Indians. The alliance of the multi-ethnic political parties managed to stabilize the politics and the nation (Ratnam, 1965: vii, 1-3 and 4-19). The radical Malays' fight for independence involved parties like *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (PKMM), *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API) and *Angkatan Wanita Sedar* (AWAS), who formed an ally through the slogan *Indonesia Raya*. In fact, the will to fight against the British colonization had resulted in a strong partnership between the left-wing factions, *Pusat Tenaga Rakyat* (PUTERA) with Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action (PMCJA) from March to July 1947 (Mohamed Noordin, 2005: 41). Then, a coalition between PMCJA-PUTERA-ACCC (All Chinese Chambers of Commerce) was realized, from August to October 1947 which received the backing of the Chinese Communist Party (PKM) (Purcell, 1965: 110). After the independence, the government's effort to unite the multi-ethnic residents of the nation in the economic sector was evident, especially after the May 13 social unrest, through the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

The implication was, the country's economic pie would no longer be ethnic-based, such as the Chinese's dominance in the mining and industrial sectors, and the Malay's reliance on self-subsistence economic areas. The purpose was to achieve a balance in the nation's economy, which might result in better unity among the nation's multi-ethnic society (Faaland, 1991: xvi-xvii). Even with the various means introduced by the past Premiers, unity among the multi-ethnic society is still fragile. Cultural elements that display any sign of ethnic sentiments are still disputed by certain quarters. Among the issues are the status of *Bahasa Melayu* as the national language, vernacular schools, the *Bumiputera* and non-*Bumiputera*, and the Malay's special privileges. The dominance of ethnic influence has caused some researchers to view it as an element or agenda that could be politicized by certain political parties with vested interests to garner the support of voters. In fact, there is even belief that a political party could rally support from the voters if it stirred up racial issues among the public. Hence, to strengthen national unity, the current Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak had introduced the 1Malaysia concept. It is a policy that aspires to integrate the society as one functioning unit without taking into consideration their background of diverse cultures and traditions. In fact, it is a new agenda that nurtures on shared elements or solidarity among the nation's different ethnics (Najib Tun Abdul Razak, 2008: 2-4).

The question is, how far can this objective be realized, and will the Malay, Chinese and Indians perceive themselves together as 1– Malaysians. This is because the concept of the Malaysian race was proposed by Tun during his tenure, but the issue is still debated up to this day. Therefore, is the 1Malaysia concept rhetorical, as it was already proposed by the previous leader, because in reality, it is considered an impossible mission to accomplish. The matter is highlighted because even if Malaysia has gained independence for 54 years, a national identity that should form the backbone of unity is still vague to the citizens. In order to determine how much impact has the concept made, the article aims to analyze the phases involved in nation-building. To support the discussion, a few nation-building strategies employed by foreign countries will be presented.

2.0 THE CONCEPT OF NATION-BUILDING

The term of nation-building originates from the English language which was popularized by the Western society as they were the ones who conceptualized the notion. It is a two-word term where the word 'building' is translated as *pembinaan* in Malay (Kamus Inggeris Melayu Dewan, 1999: 202), while the word 'nation' brings a wider meaning, as it could refer to either race or country (Abdul Rahman, 2000: 12). However, the article will employ both meanings as they are very much related as a 'nation' consists of people from various groups, while 'nation' will cease to function without a country. Before a nation could be founded, there are five elements that must be fulfilled. One of the aspects is that, the country must have gained independence. Next, the society should have solidarity, which could motivate its people into governing the country. Third, there should be an organized political system, which provides space for a government to carry out their responsibilities. The fourth element is that, the country must have autonomy, where the government has the authority to endorse, grant consent, demand loyalty and support to make the country's administration more systematic. Fifth, the government-of-the-day must have the people's mandate. The people must be loyal and support the government, at least to work towards achieving political unity or become a member of the country where the pact will continue even when the government face crisis (Friedrich, 1963: 27).

Based on the elements, it is determined that Malaysia has fulfilled the requirements. The issue and the predicament that arise are more concentrated on the establishment of a nation that shares an identical national identity. The main objective of nation-building, whether in a single-race or multi-racial nation, is in forming unity which can be channeled towards developing a country. Hence, each citizen must be prepared to embrace a one-nation concept that involves the restructuring of socio-politics, socio-economy, and socio-culture of the present society, to be adapted with the newly-founded nation and the needs of the government to improve unity and development of the country (Ribeiro, 1971: 40-41). Nation-building does not only aim to establish solidarity among its people, but it also labels the citizens with a new identity. By instilling unity, the spirit of integration could be nurtured, which could lead to loyalty towards the country of residence that surpasses their devotion towards their own ethnic.

According to Deutsch (1966: 3), the process of nation-building could be seen as an architectural design or a mechanical model that could be built based on authority, needs, and plan of the designer. To achieve unity, Emerson (1967: 91-98) believes that at this stage, nation-building involves the citizens' loyalty towards their country of residence, and reduces their prioritizing towards their own ethnic. There are researchers that refer to them as a community that is formed historically through the sharing of similar territories, economy and traditional elements that embody language, culture and name. Most countries involved in the process of nation-building are former colonies.

The impacts of colonization would trigger social changes, whether through cultural implementation or colonial policies or the import of immigrants, which was initially temporary, but became permanent due to the citizenship status that was granted after the independence. As a result, there were countries that were originally made up of a single race that became multi-racial. According to Pye (1962: 10-20), during the transition period, crisis was imminent as it involved social changes that touched upon the differences in the way of life, customs and traditional elements that were passed down through generations by certain ethnics, into a new culture. For example, in Myanmar, the society was expected to assimilate the colonials' culture (Western culture). The assimilation method was imposed by the Western masters for it was deemed necessary to ensure that the Burmese's backward way of life would not undermine their efforts in developing the country. The method was not successful as the majority of the Burmese refused to embrace changes. In fact, they rose in protest to demand that their culture be preserved. Therefore, the method was more difficult to achieve as it involved the attempt to stamp out the cultural status quo in order to establish a new nation with a new national identity that emphasizes on a collective cultural element.

According to Emerson (1963: 97), the process of uniting different ethnic communities which was founded upon independence was not permanent. It would end once a minority ethnic becomes more developed in the economic sector, construction, and industry. For example, the Bulgarian, Chinese and Egyptians that reside in certain countries have been discovered to revive and practice the cultures from their own country, as it is difficult for them to rid themselves of 'psychic attachment' towards their original traditions. Hence, the issue is more towards how far does the implementation and notion developed by colonial masters, or leaders that govern a country after independence, is accepted by the society. In fact, how does patriotism unite ethnic communities that embrace different traditional elements? For countries that are populated by communities that share similar traditions and cultures, the establishment of a new concept will not result in a conflict, as what transpired in Japan and China. However, for a multi-racial country like America, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, each ethnic fight for the rights to practice their traditional cultures such as rituals, language, educational system, politics, economics and arts. If there were attempts to remove or discriminate an element, such as in the national language issue, a conflict would ignite. Thus, the concern is, what are the foundations needed to develop a national identity?

2.1 Ethnic Relations and The Process of Nation-Building

The term ethnic is derived from the Greek word, *ethnos*, which stresses more on socio-cultural aspects such as language, religion, rituals and life values. The differences between ethnics are measured based on their cultural elements such as customs, family background, attitude, attire, political organization, economic activities, entertainment polarization, etc. Basically, each ethnic community is ethno-centric, as they feel that their cultural elements are superior compared to other communities that are often looked upon as inferior, weird, and immoral (Cox, 1959: 317). Ethnic ties become more important when shared elements exist, such as religion, language, family, culture, tradition, history and descendants. In fact, the tendency to defend one's traditions increased when similar information are shared and could be used to protect their interests. With those perceptions instilled in the ethnic communities, the founding of a new nation becomes more difficult, especially if it involves the whole society. The goal of building a harmonious society would be even more complex to achieve as the ethnic groups are keen to compare each other from the aspects of race such as skin color, traditions, origin, language or even arts (Hermann, 1963: 34).

Furnivall (1948: 304) claims that a multi-racial society is a community with different ethnic backgrounds that live together, but is separated, within one political unit. They may be living in the same residential area, but would only interact in public places such as the market place. The society lacks a strong tie, but they function as a unit under the colonial rule. The situation is replicated in the economic system, as the colonial masters had divided the laborers according to their ethnic backgrounds – the divide and rule policy. Multi-racial societies are usually the result of colonization by a foreign power, such as in the case of Malaysia, or due to migration by foreign nationals to another country. Migration could also be caused by troubles in country, such as natural disasters or unjust administration as what took place in mainland China. The nation-building of these societies are even trickier as it involves communities that differ in terms of traditions and practices involving religion, culture, language, education, economy, politics, social and arts. Reinforcing ties between different communities is the most difficult aspect as it needs the diverse communities to pledge their loyalty to the new nation in order to establish a national identity (Bell & Freeman, 1974: 11). The strong link to traditions influence each ethnic to defend their rights and this leads to changes in national entities such as culture, politics and economy to suit each community's interests (Deutsch, 1963: 11). As nation-building involves the realignment of a new territory and geographical boundaries (Rivkin, 1965: 15), it cannot be refuted that the relationship between the geographical context and the native community is very strong.

This is due to the reciprocal tie between the geographical regions with social norms, which had bred a traditional system that is subject to certain ethnic communities (Broom & Selzinck, 1977: 22). This is the sentiment that prevails among the majority of the natives of countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and other native ethnics like in the United States of America. As a result, the formation of a national identity would face challenges in provinces already populated by the natives. Tensions would definitely arise when it involves the issues of language, culture, religion, education, and race. Hence begs the question, what are the elements that should be the building blocks of national concept and ideology? This is because the natives and immigrants all insist on preserving their traditions. Next, how far will the policy and vision introduced after the independence withstand, and just how much could a community compromise their own traditional elements, like religion, customs, language, economy, politics, social and arts? From the differences, strains between the ethnic appeared as the natives felt that they had more rights to defend their traditions. As for the immigrants, even if their traditional values contrasted with their new environment as they left their country of origin, but they still insisted on preserving their customary elements.

2.1.1 Ethnic relations between the natives and immigrants in determining a national identity

Fostering ties in a multi-cultural society by forming a national identity is not an easy task. Strains between the natives that form the majority and the immigrants that make up the minority are quite the norm. Good ethnic relations in a multi-racial society rely much on the governing body in a country. There have been a number of stern actions taken by a number of nations, like the assimilation process meted out in Russia (Kuzio, 1999: 140-151). There are also countries that stress on equality, like the ones practiced in Malaysia and Indonesia that formulate a national culture and identity that every citizen can relate to.

To realize the establishment of unity and national identity among its people, a few countries apply the assimilation process strictly to ensure the people's loyalty towards the government. In France, solidarity among the people was based upon the natives' culture and traditions. After the World War II, France rebuilt its nation based on the Marshall Plan. As a result, foreign communities began arriving in big numbers, such as from Portuguese, Poland, Turkey, Morocco and Algeria, especially around 1962. To preserve its culture, the government reacted by ensuring that the immigrants assimilate the natives' culture. The aspects included implementing the ruling to accept and use French as the national language and French customs and traditions as the country's national culture. In fact, the French government rejected integration, even on the grounds of maintaining traditions among its immigrants. The government faced harsh resistance from the Islamic community, as they received French-nationalist factions' support in implementing assimilation among its citizens. One of the highly-debated issues includes the prohibition of the wearing of *jilbab* among French's Muslim women which clearly contrast with the local culture.

In fact, if Muslim citizens were found guilty of crimes, they would either be stripped of their citizenship or deported from the country. The acts obviously violate Human Rights' provisions, but the European Union had consented to the moves (Bhabha, 1998: 600). As a result, the Muslim community had no alternative but to adhere to the rulings, and adapted their traditions to suit the French's culture (An-Naim, 2000: 1-15). With the firm stand, a national ideology was successfully implemented. A similar scenario was witnessed in the United States of America's nation-building experience, which population was made up of various ethnics and race. In the earlier days, the country was inhabited by natives from the Aztecs, Mayan and Incan civilizations also known as the Andean and Indian communities (Freidel, 1984: 7). With the arrival of the European communities, the *Anglo-Saxon*, America flourishes into what it is today. Hence, the *Anglo-Saxon* was categorized as early settlers responsible in developing the nation's first effective settlement and thus, was not regarded as immigrants. From then on, American nation-building was founded by assimilating other ethnics with the *White Anglo-Saxon Protestant-WASP* elements (Huntington, 2005: 39). According to Huntington, the American's National Principles were founded upon the fundamentals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The integration of the American people was developed based upon the *WASP* ideologies of systematic socio-political, socio-economics and socio-cultural elements that continue up to this day.

With a strong determination to preserve the identity, stiff penalties would be meted out to any ethnic community that finds it difficult to assimilate. One implication was when the American government prohibited a massive migration by the Chinese community in 1889, as the community found it difficult to assimilate due to their deeply-ingrained Chinese traditions that could pose danger to America's civilization. In another aspect, in order to reinforce the Protestant faith among Americans, the Catholic faith was discriminated until their followers could accept the Protestant values (Huntington, 2005: 71; Goldfield, 2004: 419). The enthusiasm to uphold the *WASP* concept was endorsed by its leaders, like President George Washington who urged immigrants to embrace the *WASP* values as the country moved to develop a multi-racial American nation that was united and integrated in every aspect.

As a result, WASP was viewed as the melting pot that has a strong influence in turning the American residents into one huge functioning society (Schlesinger, 1998: 30-37; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970: 12). Fast forward to present time, though, the U.S.A is facing a community crisis as some immigrant groups such as the Hispanics, are pressing for the rights to maintain their traditions. One of the demands is to request for the education system to be bi-lingual. However, the proposal was shot down as it was believed that it could hamper the WASP concept and threaten the objective of uniting the nation under a single language. Other than that, there are countries that implement the integration concept as a way to unite the society, as practiced by Malaysia. However, the success rate is still far from satisfactory, as each community has their own agenda in preserving and upholding their traditions.

In general, the effort to idealize a concept that could integrate multi-ethnic communities for nation-building is not a simple affair. Based on foreign nations' practices, the basic foundation of nation-building is to found the national identity based on the traditional values of the natives, or early community or settlers that developed the country, as observed in France, United States of America, Indonesia and Thailand. Thus, will the 1 Malaysia concept be fruitful in integrating the Malays, Chinese and Indians under the ideology? Will the implementation threaten the traditions of the natives, and how far will the non-native communities embrace the concept if it gives priorities to the Malay community? These are the issues that must be sorted out in order to avoid confusion, as the government should identify the elements that should form as the foundations of nation-building.

3.0 THE PROCESS OF NATION-BUILDING AND 1 MALAYSIA CONCEPT

Nation-building process in Malaya and later, Malaysia, developed inconsistently in a few phases. The proclamation of independence on August 21, 1957, emphasized more on the birth of a nation with certain political boundaries, without fostering a united Malaya nation. The same could be said in the establishment of Malaysia in September 1963 that gave birth to a new nation, and not a nation of society that share similar cultural elements and a national identity. Hence the question, what are the mould and basis for a new nation to cultivate unity? From the American experience, the superior white community had proclaimed WASP as the foundation of their cultural and national identity, to unite the multi-racial society, based on their status as earliest settlers. This scenario is replicated in France, Indonesia (Suryadinata, 1999) and Thailand (Coughlin, 1960). The national identity is based upon the natives' or earliest settlers' traditions and immigrants are expected to assimilate the ideology, a situation that contrasts with the Malaysian experience.

In Malaysia, the Malay's status as the native inhabitants has been proven time and again in historical (Winstedt, 1961: 11), political (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2000: 33), language and arts (Asmah, 1988: 536-553) documents and studies. The facts and realities are well-understood by the Malays, but with the aim of maintaining harmony, efforts to form integration were accepted with a high tolerance and compromise among the natives. The status of the non-Malay communities have never been compromised, and through the policy of national integration their traditions are preserved, which is incorporated in the National Education Policy, National Language Policy, and National Culture Policy. The Malays' spirit of high tolerance is best expressed by the former Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Musa Hitam:

‘...in this country, a Malay continues being a Malay, a Chinese continues being a Chinese, and an Indian will always be an Indian’ (Gale, 1982: 184)

Even though the government has strived hard to integrate the society through various visions and ideologies, but it is still difficult to accomplish as ethnocentrism is still rife among the various ethnics. It involves politicians, academicians, associations, and even students. The inclination to preserve one's traditions has made history, vision and ideologies proposed by the country's leaders simply rhetorical in nature. The adversity was expressed by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (1991: 25), who, in presenting Vision 2020 in 1991, outlined the country's major challenge in nation-building, that is:

‘to create a Malaysian nation that is united and has similar aspirations, integrate at the territorial level and between ethnics based on equal rights and justice’

Even though fostering the belief might maintain the country's harmony, it has some implications, such as the fact that the national identity's fundamental is still glaringly absent, as mentioned by the second Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak. Other than that, the Malays' status as the natives of the land is still being questioned by the non-Malay community, especially regarding the Constitutional aspects of Malay Special Privilege (Article 153), Bahasa Melayu as the National Language (Article 152), and National Education Policy's reinforcement. Thus, the debate is, will the 1 Malaysia concept succeed in establishing the national identity principles in forming a united nation in multi-racial Malaysia?

3.1. Definition and Attributes of 1 Malaysia Concept

Based on Najib Razak's speech on 3 April 2009, the 1 Malaysia concept is founded upon the principle of 'People First, Performance Now' (*Rakyat Didahulukan, Pencapaian Diutamakan*) (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 2009: 8). The 'People First' principle easily translates into the agenda of putting the welfare of the people as the government's prime concern, so that the citizens are contented, comfortable and pleased with the elected government. Meanwhile, 'Performance Now' refers to the government's concern in producing high quality performance that would benefit the people. The principles were distinctly mentioned in the Prime Minister's speech, which also highlighted, 'This is the people's government, and we must understand their aspirations,' 'We must identify the people's deeds without any prejudice towards their race, social background or religion' and 'We must be compassionate to attend to the people's voice.

1 Malaysia is regarded as a new concept brought forth by Najib Razak, but from the aspects of the ideologies and aims of nation-building proposed, the platforms are similar to the ones developed since the early days of independence. The fundamental aspiration is to cultivate integration by reinforcing ties and cooperation between races, especially when faced with challenges. If the concept is accepted by every level of society, Malaysia can become a more developed and stable country economically, politically, socially, and legislatively. The concept is to encourage acceptance among ethnics that could lead to integration, which must be practiced by every community, so that the nation's progress could continue smoothly (Bahagian Penerbitan Dasar Negara, 2009: 9). To reinforce cooperation, eight values were proposed – culture of excellence, perseverance, humility, acceptance, loyalty, meritocracy, education and integrity. The values are to nurture understanding and respect between the ethnic communities. Through the ideologies, nation-building is developed by the government. However, the government has overlooked the obvious issue of disparity between the ethnics, as they come from different cultures and traditions – how is it possible to integrate them under one nation that shares a similar identity? Should the issue of the natives' right be ignored altogether?

Therefore, the 1 Malaysia concept is very general, and does not exactly specify the fundamental principles of the national identity, which is just a replication of preceding leaders' visions. History has demonstrated that nation-building in Malaysia began with the formation of Malayan Union, which was deemed a failure from the beginning as it did not gazette the rights of the native Malays, abolished the Malay monarchy's sovereignty, and by according equal citizenship status to everyone. Peaceful demonstrations by the native people managed to convince the British to convert the status of the country to the Federation of Malaya in 1948, maintained the status quo and power of the monarchy and granting of citizenship was made more stringent (Lau, 1991: 130-144; Means, 1970: 52-53). The founding of Malaya provided the platform of nation-building through the emergence of a new political territory, but it was not an easy task as the proposal had resulted in some apprehension among the non-Malays who felt that their traditions had been neglected. Their angst included the reinstatement of the Malays' special rights in the Constitution, and the use of Bahasa Melayu as the medium of communication in education (Cheah, 1983: 87; Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, 2005: 38-39).

The differences in their goals and social background had resulted in a clash of ideas in the Malay communities, which are between *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (PKMM) and UMNO. PKMM advocated for the Malay elements to be given priority in the struggle for independence, such as insisting that the position of Defense Affairs and Foreign Affairs to be held by a Malay minister (Ramlah Adam, 1992: 108). As a result, the strive for independence and nation-building were rife with ethnic sentiments, as demonstrated by the UMNO, MCA and MIC that represented the government and the alliance of the left-wing faction, (PUTERA) and *All Malayan Council of Joint Action* (AMCJA). UMNO, under the leadership of Dato Onn pressed for the Malay values to be accepted as the fundamental values for Malaya. On the other hand, PUTERA and AMCJA had formed the people's Constitution that fostered cooperation among the people. However, they were still ethnic-based, as Bahasa Melayu was proposed as the official language and that citizenship must be Malay-based as well (Cheah, 1983: 89). The stress upon the Malay elements was due to their recognition of the Malays' status as the natives of the country. However, the stand was rejected by the non-Malay community, as it was perceived as a threat to their culture. With such deep-rooted ethnic sentiments, the study found that fostering unity among the people of this country was not easy to realize. It was due to the fact that the concept was formulated generally without any specific attributes that each party perceive it based on their own interests. There were those who perceived it as the *Malaysian Malaysia*¹

¹ The *Malaysian Malaysia* policy was introduced by Lee Kuan Yew under the *People's Action Party's* (PAP) movement when Singapore was still part of Malaysia. It aimed to create a just and transparent administration without prejudice towards any race. This policy was later implemented by the *Democratic Action Party* (DAP) in Singapore (Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud, 2001)

concept (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, April 2009), and those who viewed it as the means to threaten the status of the Malays as the indigenous inhabitants of the country. To understand just how far the concept could reinforce unity in the process of nation-building, an analysis on the implementation of National Language Policy and National Education Policy by previous premieres is provided. From there, a justification is put forth as the concept aims towards unity through the reinforcement of the National Education Policy.

3.1.1 1 Malaysia Concept in The Process of Nation-Building

Language issues and the National Education

Language is a major symbol that reveals the identity of an ethnic. It is not just used as a form of communication at the intra-ethnic level, but it is also inclined towards portraying an ethnic's internal values (Edwards, 1985: 17). Hence, the perseverance to defend one's language is natural, to ensure the continuity of their traditions. Among the principles in 1 Malaysia concept is the nationalistic principle that refers to patriotism in order to reinforce integration. In an effort to realize the goal, Tunku had formed the Alliance Party that is a collaboration of the three major ethnics of Malaya- Malay, Chinese and Indian. Meanwhile, Tun Razak proposed the National Principles and National Policy (Bahagian Penerbitan Dasar Negara, 2009: 18). One of the groundbreaking policies was the National Education Policy that aimed to foster integration through language and the national education system. The policy was also inculcated broadly through the 1 Malaysia concept (Bahagian Penerbitan Dasar Negara, 2009: 28).

The government's aspiration to uphold the status of Bahasa Melayu as the national language and to unite ethnic communities through the National Education Policy is not a new issue. Historically, the effort had begun as early as after the 1955 election, when the Razak Report 1956 was presented. After independence, it was discovered that political integration was still fragile, and one of the factors was the weakness of the education system in uniting the multi-racial society. One of the reasons was that the other ethnics, especially the Chinese, were persistent in establishing their own education system. Their migration to Malaya had taken place as early as 3A.D, due to either crisis in the homeland or brought in by the British to meet the demands for labor supply (Purcell, 1965: 24-25; Yen, 2000: 1). The strong ethnic sentiments had led to the establishment of Chinese classic school with the aim of maintaining ties with the motherland (Lee, 1986: 90-94). As a result, in the 1960s, the Rahman Talib Report recommended that most of Razak Report be accepted, apart from a few additions. The main aim of the reports was integration, like the Razak Report that suggested for a single education system based on Malaya's fundamental values, whether at the primary or secondary level (*Report of the Education Committee 1956, 1957*). However, the effort panned out due to the rejection by the non-Malay communities, especially the Chinese through the *Dongjiazhong*² Association which started since the 1950s. Their demand was for the Chinese to be allowed to complete their primary education in Mandarin (*Kuo Yu*), as voiced by the Jiazhong chairman,

‘The Barnes Report announced the eradication out of the Chinese education system, the Education Ordinance 1952 gave the death penalty as the verdict, and the Education White Paper 1954 aptly dug a grave for it...’ (Kua Kia Soong, 1990: 69).

Other than that, to foster integration, the government had enacted the Education Act 1961 that was based on the Razak Report and Rahman Talib Report. It focused on three main proposals – the standardization of the school system, national language to be used as the medium of instruction, and the curriculum and school examinations to be nationalized. Even though the act managed to phase out the English type schools by changing the medium of instruction to Malay, and fortified its use as the official language in Chinese secondary schools, but integration was still a long way from being successful. For the Chinese community, language and education are sensitive issues, as they feel that they might hamper the preservation of their Chinese traditions. Hence, the changes in the educational policy were viewed negatively by the community (Chandra Muzaffar, 1984: 361) as they felt that their language and Education were subjected to oppression (Tan, 2005: 206). They also accuse that it was an attempt to impose the Malay culture upon them (Comber, 2007: 81-83) even if it was not true.

² *Dongjiazong* is the abbreviated name that represents the merger of two major Chinese associations, that are *United Chinese School Committee Association* (UCSCA or *Dongzong*) and *United Chinese School Teachers' Association* (UCSTA or *Jiazong*) that was responsible in protecting the interests of Chinese vernacular schools. *Dongzong* is the main body that represents the Federal Association of Management Board (*Donglianhui*) that was established in 1954. *Jiazong* that represents the vernacular school teachers was formed in 1951. *Dongjiazong* is not a political party, but it is a **pendesak** group that oversees and evaluates the language and national education policies to ensure that they do not threaten the status of Chinese language and education system. For information, refer to Tan Yao Sua, (2005).

Hence, *Dongjiazhong* had sent a memorandum to the government to revise the policy, and demanded that the mother tongue be allowed to be used as the medium of instruction in the vernacular schools, and that public examinations should also use the same medium as the one used in the schools (Sia, 2005: 98-99). The act of endorsing the Malay and English languages as proposed in the Barnes report was vehemently rejected as it was deemed to be detrimental in preserving the Chinese culture. In reality, Chinese associations and societies (*Huatuan*) always went against government policies that they felt could jeopardize their traditions. As a precautionary step, the idea to establish Merdeka University, a university that uses Mandarin as its medium of instruction was proposed. It received full support from the Chinese political parties, MCA, Gerakan and DAP, but was rejected by UMNO as it went against the national education policy as enshrined in the Constitution. The objective was to set up a complete vernacular education system that offers jobs and job opportunities for Chinese students (Tan, 2005: 170-174). In response, the Chinese societies took the case to the High Court, but it was rejected on the grounds of preserving harmonious ethnic relations. The implication was that, the Chinese community's insistence in guarding its language and education made it more difficult for the government to promote unity (Haris Md Jadi, 1990: 194; Siti Mariam, 2006: 36).

Thus, the effort to establish 1 Malaysia through the national education system might see a repeat of the old script, especially with the present effort of integrating the primary schools is still lagging from the actual target. This view is echoed by Khoo Kay Kim, members of Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) and Barisan Nasional (BN) who believe that the objective of integration would be met if the education system adheres to the 1 Malaysia concept. This is because the children in vernacular schools are separated with the national school students since young. In the early days, the establishment of the schools was to ensure that the children did not forget their roots – learning about their motherland. However, now that they are Malaysian citizens, the national type schools should be phased out slowly (Arkib, 29 Oktober 2010). The proposal was rejected by several parties, especially by MCA, MIC and *Dongjiazhong* Association who felt that vernacular schools would not threaten unity among the community. This belief contrasts with the experience of nation-building in other countries as the existence of various school systems definitely hampered the process of nation-building.

According to Kayveas, to produce a united Malaysian nation through the national education system, the leaders must be firm in making a decision. In fact, history has shown that the society could accept the decision as the government has never marginalized the non-Malays. This view is supported by Tun Dr Ismail, as he felt that the non-Malays would only respect the Malay community's special rights through might and authority (Kuala Lumpur CRO, II Ogos 1961, CO 1030/1149). To improve ethnic relations, the 1 Malaysia concept should firmly outline the fundamental principles of the national identity. History has shown that the Malay culture should form the backbone of the identity, as voiced by Tun Abdul Razak.

‘...our ancestors who occupied this land had left behind a national culture that is valuable and rich in legacy. Thus, it is just that we accept the notion that national culture that is being developed and planned must be based on the region's natives' culture. However, we should also consider applying some foreign traditions that have been introduced to us for a period of time, so that we can learn from beneficial and refreshing elements that could determine the shape of our culture in the future. However, in the quest of developing and deciding the shape of our National Culture, we must not forgo the fact that we are a multi-racial society’ (Abdul Latif, 1982: 16).

Hence, the 1 Malaysia concept should emphasize on the Malay supremacy as advocated by previous leaders. Choosing the Malay elements as the foundation of national identity does not mean that other cultures will be marginalized, as it has never been a practice of the government. However, it is important to stress here that the act should be considered as an appreciation to the Malays as the natives of the country. It is hoped that the harmonious relations among Malaysian ethnics would continue if every community understands the history and ancestry of the country's nation-building process.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Nation-building has turned into a political agenda to inculcate unity and reduce conflicts between ethnics. Unity is achieved through the development of an ideology or a national policy to form an identity that could be shared and used to improve one's loyalty towards the country more than to one's ethnic. However, with the strong affinity towards their ethnic, it is quite an impossible dream to achieve. Based on the experience of nation-building in other countries like France, Russia, America, Nigeria and Indonesia, even if there was a standard national identity based upon the majority natives' culture, but there were still glitches as there were communities that find it hard to accept the ideology. The implication is, integration would face problems if the government's agenda appeared to be marginalizing the minority ethnics.

If this prejudiced feeling is still allowed to prevail in the society, then the 1 Malaysia concept will never be realized. However, if the aspiration is to develop an integrated society that is founded upon the concepts of one language, one education system and one culture; the government must outline the fundamental principles that will be channeled towards the establishment of 'One Society'. The verification must be based upon the history of Malaya, by implementing the native Malays' cultures as the backbone of the nation's culture, without any ethnic prejudice. As for the minority community, the national principles should be accepted entirely and with tolerance in order to meet the objectives of realizing the 1 Malaysia concept. The prejudiced feelings should be eradicated as history has shown that since the independence, the non-Malays have successfully maintained their traditions, which is practically unheard of in countries like France, Russia, America, Nigeria and Indonesia. Thus the spirit of tolerance and reverence towards each other is seen as the most important aspect in ensuring that the 1 Malaysia concept would thrive successfully.

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