

**CLASS AND POLITICS IN MALAYSIAN AND
SINGAPOREAN NATION BUILDING**

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Abstract

This study endeavours to deliver an alternative account of the study of nation-building by examining the subject matter eclectically from diverse standpoints, predominantly that of class in Southeast Asia which is profoundly dominated by ‘cultural’ perspectives. Two states in the region, Malaysia and Singapore, have been selected to comprehend and appreciate the nature of nation-building in these territories. The nation-building processes in both of the countries have not only revolved around the national question pertaining to the dynamic relations between the states and the cultural contents of the racial or ethnic communities in Malaysia and Singapore; it is also surrounded, as this thesis contends, by the question of class - particularly the relations between the new capitalist states’ elites (the rulers) and their masses (the ruled). More distinctively this thesis perceives nation-building as a project by political elites for a variety of purposes, including elite entrenchment, class (re)production and regime perpetuation. The project has more to do with ‘class-(re)building’ and ‘subject-building’ rather than ‘nation-building’. Although this thesis does not eliminate the significance of culture in the nation-building process in both countries; it is explicated that cultures were and are heavily employed to suit the ruling class’s purpose. Hence, the cultural dimension shall be used eclectically with other perspectives. This study, thus, attempts to unravel ‘the politics’ behind the nation-building policy in Malaysia and Singapore. The three main themes explored in this thesis are, how the nation-building projects in both countries are connected and personalised with class interests of their ruling elites; how state elections impact nation-building politics; and how nation-building policies are endorsed to build political loyalty or support among the ruled to the ruling elites. For these reasons, a host of data-gathering and references would be included, ranging from historical reports, scholarly works and newspaper clippings (online and printed materials). The researcher also conducted several field trips in Malaysia (in 2010 and 2015) and Singapore (in 2010). Throughout the trips, the researcher observed a number of local and national events, spoke to some members of the communities and non-governmental organisations, as well as interviewed a numbers of politicians, academicians and government servants.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.



Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor

17 August, 2017

Date

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Abbreviation

A*STAR	Agency for Science, Technology and Research
AMP	Association of Muslim Professionals
BN	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
CDAC	Chinese Development Assistance Council
DAP	Democratic Action Party
EA	Eurasian Association
GIC	Government of Singapore Investment Corporation
GLC	Government-Linked Corporation/Company
GRC	Group Representation Constituency
HDB	Housing Development Board
IPI	International Press Institute
ISA	Internal Security Act
JAIS	Islamic Department of Selangor
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCI	Ministry of Communication and Information
MDA	Media Development Authority
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MUIS	Singapore Islamic Council
NCMP	Non-Constituency Member of Parliament
NMP	Nominated Member of Parliament
NPPA	Newspaper and Printing Presses Act
NS	National Service NSP National Solidarity Party
NTUC	National Trade Union Congress
PA	People's Association
PAP	People's Action Party
PAS	Pan Malaysia Islamic Party

PMO	Prime Minister's Office
RP	Reform Party
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SDA	Singapore Democratic Alliance
SDP	Singapore Democratic Party
SMC	Single Member Constituency
SPH	Singapore Press Holdings
SPP	Singapore People's Party
TOC	The Online Citizen
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
WP	Workers' Party of Singapore (Workers' Party)

PART I : INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

Defining the Parameter

With regards to the proposal that independence should be handed over to the “Malayans”, who are these “Malayans”? This country was received from the Malays and to the Malays it ought to be returned. What is called “Malayans”, it is not yet certain who they are; therefore let the Malays alone settle who they are.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, President of UMNO, 26 August 1951.¹

Let us create one nation for all Singaporeans. We are a young country, and we share one future together. Let us build among ourselves a sense of belonging, a feeling of common identity and shared destiny. We have more in common with one another than with any other people in the world. Even though we belong to different races and worship different religions, let us feel instinctively that we are, first and foremost, Singaporeans. This is our home and here is where we belong.

Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister of Singapore, 15 February 1988.²

The taken-for-granted idea of social modernisation project of ‘nation-building’ conceals a central question, apart from its obvious conception of culture - that is the question of class. As the name suggests, ‘nation-building’ repeatedly projected by politicians and scholars as a political project in making the cultural content of the society in parallel with the territorial boundary of the state.³ It is a process of building a common national identity, for various purposes of social functionality including national integration of the people within a political periphery. In states where the culture of the society are more or less homogenous, for example those in East Asia (Japan, South Korea and China), the nation-building process

¹ Six years after giving this speech, Tunku Abdul Rahman became the first Prime Minister of Federation of Malaysia (then Federation of Malaya). Quoted by Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia: the making of a nation*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2002, p.1.

² Goh Chok Tong’s speech quoted in, Hussin Mutalib, ‘Singapore’s quest for a national identity: the triumphs and trials of government policies’, in Anne Pakir and Tong Chee Kiong (eds), *Imagining Singapore*, Marshall Cavendish, Singapore, 2004, p. 55.

³ See for example, Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2006.

seldom pose any immense predicaments. But in formerly colonised regions in Southeast Asia – particularly Malaysia, Singapore and Myanmar – which had a substantial influx of foreign labourers during colonial times and who later decided to settle down, often pose problematic and conflictual situations for post-colonial governments in the nation-building process. The new relationship between culture and politics engendered by the rise of nationalism⁴ and the nation-building process, invoked a set of national questions based on political inequalities among the communities in these ‘plural societies’.⁵ Nevertheless, the processes in themselves are ‘political’ - envisioned and put into practice by political elites, who may not always be ‘living for politics’ but also ‘of politics’. By ‘living of politics’ I mean the act on the part of the political elites to maximise and safeguard their personal and sectoral interests, including perpetuating their political regimes. Hence, the process of nation-building, as one of the tools of regimes in meeting their interests, should be examined more critically and cautiously rather than just descriptively. It does not only involve the question of political equalities in multi-ethnic or multi-national countries, but also social questions which are based on economic inequalities in the society, produced by the new structure of class which originated from the growth of capitalism.

By examining the subject matter eclectically from different perspectives particularly that of class; this study endeavours to present an unconventional account of the study of nation-building in Southeast Asia - which is heavily dominated by ‘cultural’ perspectives. Two states in the region, Malaysia and Singapore, are selected to capture the nature of nation-building in these territories. Malaysia is selected due to its status as a ‘host country’. Due to the political clout, historical significance, and the ‘indigenous’ status of the Malays, who also constitute the majority in Malaysia, the political and cultural domains of the country are heavily dominated by them. The Chinese and the Indians, on the other hand, are the minorities, considered in the past as “the immigrant race” in country. Despite their small number, the ‘non-Malays’, particularly the Chinese, hold substantial sway in the economy and politics, largely due to their early exposure to capitalism and congregation in many urban centres throughout Malaysia.

Singapore, on the contrary, is a settler country. It was founded by Stamford Raffles of the British East Indian Company in 1819 although it was controlled by the Johor-Riau

⁴ Rogers Brubaker, ‘National homogenization and ethnic reproduction on the European periphery’, in Marzio Barbagli and Harvie Ferguson (eds.), *La teoria sociologica e lo stato moderno: saggi in onore di Gianfranco Poggi*, Il Mulino, 2009, p. 202.

⁵ See, J.S Funivall, *Colonial policy and practice: a comparative study of Burma and Netherlands India*, New York University Press, New York, 1956.

kerajaan.⁶ Similar to the situation in Malaysia, the British island colony attracted thousands of immigrants from China, India and other regions in Southeast Asia. The massive immigration rapidly and radically transformed the cultural make-up of the island which was previously occupied by small numbers of local Malay fishermen. The Chinese later became the majority, constituting around three-quarter of the overall population, with the Malays and Indians forming substantial minorities. Despite the numerical dominance of the Chinese, the local political government of Singapore at the early phase (particularly from 1955 to 1965) adopted multi-racial ideologies and a bilingual policy due to the fact of the prevalent cultural diversity.

Then again, as proposed above, the nation-building processes in both of the countries have not only revolved around the national question, the dynamic relations between the states and the cultural contents of the racial and ethnic communities in Malaysia and Singapore. This thesis contends, the question of class - particularly the relations between the new capitalist states' elites (the rulers) and their masses (the ruled). More specifically this thesis perceives nation-building more as a project by political elites for various purposes, including elite entrenchment, class (re)production and regime perpetuation. The project has more to do with 'class-(re)building' and 'subject-building' than 'nation-building', though this thesis does not reject the significance of culture in the nation-building process in both countries of this study. In fact, as I shall explicate in the later chapters throughout this thesis, cultures were and are heavily used to suit the ruling class's purpose. Hence, the cultural dimension shall be used eclectically with other perspectives.

The Parameter of the Past Literature

Studies of nation-building in Malaysia and Singapore could be traced back to as early in 1960s, but they are restricted both in terms of number and also perspective. In fact, if we separate the study on nation-building process with the state political process, the figure would be even more limited. We can divide the studies into four categories: the studies on nation and nationalism in general, the studies on Malaysia, the studies on Singapore, and the studies that include the two countries in comparative perspectives.

⁶ Literally *kerajaan* in the Malay language means kingdom rather than government. The term is still in use in Malaysia in referring to 'government' due to British colonialist's influence.

The Studies on Nation Building in General

The number of studies in nation- or state-building are relatively considerable. Seminal scholars include Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Anthony D. Smith. Nevertheless, many of the theories on nation and nationalism established by them substantively revolve around the perspective; like influential classical theorists on the subject matter – Ernest Renan and Max Weber, of culture and sentiments.

“A nation,” Renan claims, is “a daily plebiscite”⁷ and also “a grand solidarity constituted by the sentiment of sacrifices which one has made and those that one is disposed to make again”.⁸ For Weber, “a nation is a community of sentiment”⁹. He notes that “one must be clearly aware of the fact that sentiments of solidarity, very heterogeneous in both their nature and their origin, are comprised within national sentiments”.¹⁰ Weber further argues that:

The idea of the “nation” is apt to include the notions of the common descent and of an essential, though frequently indefinite, homogeneity. The nation has these notions in common with the sentiment of solidarity of ethnic communities, which is also nourished from various sources.¹¹

Ernest Gellner emphasized the importance of creating a “high culture” within a political unit to nationalise the disparate citizens towards a common culture of a unified nation.¹² Anderson’s defined the nation as an “imagined political community”, “because, the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion”.¹³ He further contends that the nation is imagined “because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship”.¹⁴ In contrast to Gellner and Anderson, Smith contends that nations were

⁷ Richard M. Chadbourne, *Ernest Renan*, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1968, p. 101.

⁸ Ernest Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ excerpted in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1994, p. 17.

⁹ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1946, p. 179.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 173.

¹² Ernest Gellner, *Nation and nationalism*, 2nd edition, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006, p. 34.

¹³ Benedict, Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso Books, Brooklyn, 2006, p. 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

neither invented nor imagined, but then they are modern reconstruction of proto-nations with deeper histories.¹⁵ He insists that modern nations have premodern origins. A nation for him is “a named population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for its members”.¹⁶

Despite the overarching dominance of the concept and operation of class in Marxist theory, when it comes to the question of nation and nation-building, most Marxist thinkers and political-economic scholars are inclined to perceive nation further ahead from the perspective of culture and politics rather than class. Anderson noted that “since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms – the People’s Republic of China, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and so forth”.¹⁷ Even the prominent Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm has criticized that “Marxist movements and states have leaned towards becoming national not only in form but in substance, i.e. nationalist. There is nothing to suggest that this trends will not continue”.¹⁸

Marx and Engel saw the “modern nation” as the by-product of the rise of capitalism.¹⁹ For capitalism to work, a standardised and industrialised workforce based on common education and language is needed. As a result, a common consciousness and cultural “uniformization” based on the selected national language and education system amid a diverse population within the same political unit becomes possible which later might turn them a nation.²⁰ Lenin’s definition of nation is in line with the above conception that is “a historically evolved, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture”.²¹ He braced nationalism and the independence of colonised states for “closer unity” and the “fusion of nations”. This was planned explicitly as a means of building transnational solidarity among imagined transnational working class.²²

In practice, the “fusion of nations” however failed even when communists held power at the multinational level, such as in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The fall of

¹⁵ See, Anthony D. Smith, ‘The nation: invented, imagined, reconstructed?’, *Journal of International Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1991, pp. 353-68.

¹⁶ Anthony D. Smith, *National identity*, University of Nevada Press, Reno, 1991, p. 14.

¹⁷ Benedict, Anderson, *Imagined communities*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Some reflections on the “Break-up of Britain”’, *New Left Review*, vol. 105, issue of September and October, 1977, p. 13.

¹⁹ Ephraim Nimni, *Marxism and nationalism: theoretical origins of a political crisis*, 1991, p. 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²¹ Vladimir I. Lenin, *Marxism and nationalism*, Resistance Book, Chippendale, 2002, p. 197.

²² V.I. Lenin, *Collected works: volume 20*, Progress Publisher, Moscow, 2011, p. 34.

the Berlin Wall in late 1989, among other factors, is indicative of the weakness of communist internationalism and the persistence of nationally-based impulses for self-determination. In light of this development, Rogers Brubaker has highlighted how national identities among the different population were maintained during the Soviet era mainly through institutionalised practice, the application of practical categories (to classify the nationalities of the populations) and the ongoing political events.²³ The horizontal identity based on the idea of communist comradeship and as proletariat class were thus effectively undermined by the state and societal practices of cultural identification, as recapped by Hobsbawm.²⁴

The failure of Marxist movement and states to invoke internationalised class consciousness among the populaces does not mean that class analysis is ineffective in explaining social phenomena or that class operations are irrelevant and have been displaced by national politics. Glezerman asserts that “National relations cannot be understood independently and outside of class relations”.²⁵ Despite the division of population in nationalities and class have different social origins, the two cannot be considered in “isolation from each other”,²⁶ as the class structure of the state influences the political characters of the society. In the words by Szymanski, “nationalism is a product of class forces. Although different kinds of nationalism differ qualitatively in their effects, *all* serve some classes within a given racial or ethnic group as opposed to others”.²⁷

Berberoglu in 2000 pitched a forceful argument but provided only a very brief example of his theory’s application (just two pages)²⁸ in defending the use of a class analytical approach in studying nationalism. By utilising the historical development of politics in Palestine, Berberoglu concluded that the development of nationalist politics in the state is dynamically related to its class structure and interests (e.g. class struggles) in the society.²⁹ Berberoglu, nevertheless, widened the application of his theory in his later work ‘Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Class, State, and Nation in the Age of Globalization’.³⁰ The empirical focus of the book was on class analysis on national movement and ethnic conflict.³¹

²³ Rogers Brubaker, ‘Rethinking nationhood: nation as institutionalized form, practical category, contingent event’, *Contention*, vol. 4, no. 1, Fall 1994, pp. 3-14.

²⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Some reflections on the “Break-up of Britain”’, *ibid.*

²⁵ G. Glezerman, *Classes and nations*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979, pp. 7–8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁷ Albert Szymanski, *Class structure: a critical perspective*, Praeger, New York, 1983, p. 430.

²⁸ Berch Berberoglu, ‘Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and class struggle: a critical analysis of mainstream and Marxist theories of nationalism and national movements’, *Critical Sociology*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2000, p. 228.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Berch Berberoglu, *Nationalism and ethnic conflict class, state, and nation in the age of globalization*, Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, Lanham, 2005.

³¹ See, Part III, *ibid.*

The compilation of class analysis in ‘Headlines of Nation, Subtexts of Class: Working Class Populism and the Return of the Repressed in Neoliberal Europe’ edited by Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai provide multidimensional accounts on the conjuncture of nationalist politics and class dynamics in Eastern Europe.³² With the backgrounds of the fall of Soviet Union and the incorporation of the post-socialist Eastern Europe states since late 1980s to a neo-liberal based capitalist globalisation structured by Western Europe, a number of the contributing scholars examined the re-emergence of neo-nationalist politics in the light of growing displacements and repression of working class (and middle class) population in the context of Western capitalist neo-liberal policy and opportunist local political actors.³³ Petrovici’s case study on a multinational town of Cluj in Romania, discussed how the collapse of factories in the city have gravely affected its working class population. The dislocations of the workers, however have been utilised by local politicians, particularly by Funar, in capitalising the local Romanian nationalism against others especially the Hungarian national in Cluj.

Theodora Vetta in ‘Nationalism is back!’³⁴ and also ‘Revived Nationalism’³⁵ examined how a peaceful, working-class based, multiethnic municipality in Serbia, known as Kikinda, which opposed the radical socialist-nationalist party led by Milosevic and his war effort in Bosnia in 1990s, became nationalised in the mid-2000s and supported radical nationalist party since then. As the Petrovici’s case study in Cluj, foreign capital investment and accumulation in Serbia and Kikinda specifically, “has been part of a vast socio-economic dispossession and precariousness” on the part of the working class.³⁶ In this context, Vetta notes, “the Serbian Radical Party managed to capitalize on people’s disappointment, aggression, and fear in order to accumulate political power”.³⁷ The class consciousness among the population in Kikinda during the socialist era has been transformed to national consciousness with the rise of neo-liberal market expansion and its repercussions. The return

³² Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai (eds.), *Headlines of nation, subtexts of class: working class populism and the return of the repressed in neoliberal Europe*, Berghahn Books, Brooklyn, 2011.

³³ See, Don Kalb, ‘Introduction’, *ibid.*, pp. 13-16.

³⁴ Theodora Vetta, “Nationalism is back!’ *radikali* and privatization in Serbia’, in Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai (eds.), *Headlines of nation, subtexts of class: working class populism and the return of the repressed in neoliberal Europe*, Berghahn Books, Brooklyn, 2011, pp. 37-56.

³⁵ Theodora Vetta, ‘Revived nationalism versus European democracy: Class and “identity dilemmas” in contemporary Serbia’, *European Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 55, 2009, pp. 74-89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

and the revived nationalism in Serbia was captured by Vetta in the words of the then President Milosevic in 1990, “We came to the rally as workers, and left as Serbs”.³⁸

The class perspective on the studies of nationalism surveyed above prompts the researcher on the dynamic relationships between class and cultural politics which is one of the major processes adopted in explaining the nature of the nation-building policies in Malaysia and Singapore. Past studies which are based on class perspective, however, are limited in size (most are in the form of book chapters or journal articles), and also disciplinary (the edited book by Kalb for example, is of the social anthropological research). Most of their studies were based on the empirical evidences from post-colonial Eastern European states while my study focuses on the experiences of the two Asian states, which might offer some variations. Despite the fact that most of the past studies of class perspective have focused on the nature of nationalist politics its relations with the ongoing class struggles, the focal point of my study is inclined towards the unravelling of nation-building policies and its relations with the authoritarian regime maintenance and the interests of the ruling class in Malaysia and Singapore.

In conclusion, the studies of nation, nationalism and nation-building around the globe have until now been dominated by the cultural and ‘sentiments’ perspectives – with substantial influences from Weber and Renan. Interestingly, class analysis, which formed a part of the major social theories in social sciences and history, has been rarely utilised for the same subject matter as raised by Berberoglu. This created a big void in the academic corpus particularly on when and where the clash of ideas are always welcomed. Paradoxically, even a socialist leader and Marxist scholar like Lenin have to resort on cultural element when defining and explaining the concept of nation. The failure of socialist states to invoke a deep class consciousness among their working class population have further undermined the prowess of class analysis in the subject matter. A number of Marxist scholars, as I have surveyed in this section, have criticised the domination of bourgeoisie analysis (referring to the cultural approach). They highlight the importance of employing the class analysis to fully comprehend the subject matter. But their studies are restricted in size (in form of book chapters and journals) and are very specific in their focus. Some of their work strikingly appears to be poisoned with Marxist propaganda, seemingly to exaggerate the good of socialist ideal and the evil of capitalism.³⁹ As the result, while their class analysis and

³⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

³⁹ See for examples, Kalb, in ‘Introduction’, *ibid.*, and Berberoglu, ‘Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and class struggle’, pp. 219-220.

explanation in their subject matter are fascinating, but their overwhelming preoccupation as contemporary Marxist scholars have made their work to be somewhat ideological and rhetorical in nature.

The class analysis in this thesis, despite being a major theoretical approach, is used eclectically rather than ideologically. But in line with the above Marxist scholars, this thesis attempts to provide alternative account on nation-building, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore, through the lens of class. In other words, to treat nation building as class, in contrast to ‘national’ phenomenon, as most of nation building studies in Malaysia and Singapore have been done till date. Equated to the above work by the class analysts, this study is substantively wider and deeper in term of its analysis and explorations, with a different focus empirically based on the comparative case studies on modern Malaysia and Singapore across several political leaderships.

The Studies on Malaysia

K.J Ratnam’s work on the “Communalism and the Political Process in Malaysia” may be one of the earliest attempts in examining the state’s nation-making project. He sees communalism, both as a political ideology and social practice in Peninsular Malaysia, as the obstacle to that effort among the three main ‘races’. As the main political parties in the country were racially-based and racially-oriented, he reflected that the Alliance’s government, which was then led by Tunku Abdul Rahman (since early 1970s known as Barisan Nasional), had always had difficulties ‘straddling’ the differing interests of politically and racially-charged communities in the country.

Two and a half decade later, historian James P. Ongkili’s in his work in 1985, provides extensive research of Malaysia’s nation-building from post-war Malaya to the establishment of a new grand coalition of the ruling party, the Barisan Nasional (BN), by the second Prime Minister Abdul Razak Hussein in early 1970s. Despite the extensive nature of the work, it is too descriptive and to a certain extent, too simplistic. His argument that “a nation is born” simply due to the fact that Malaya has achieved independence on 31st August 1957, reflected the less sophisticated nature of that work.⁴⁰ Like Ratnam’s work too,

⁴⁰ James P. Ongkili, *Nation-building in Malaysia 1946 – 1974*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1985, p. 105.

Ongkili's account is more focused on explaining the challenges of racial division in Malaysia's nation-building, rather than the process itself.⁴¹

In 1996, Shamsul A.B. provides an interesting theoretical proposition, the 'nations-of-intent', in reflecting the state of national visions in Malaysia.⁴² For Shamsul, the government project to build *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian nation) as one of the objectives in the Vision 2020 was a recognition that the Malaysian nation was yet to be born. Shamsul saw that there are two levels of definition of the Malaysian forms of nation that is the "authority-defined social reality and everyday social reality".⁴³ Authority-defined is the macro-level state projection of the cultural content of Malaysia's nation-building, which is Bumiputera-centric as enshrined in a number of government policies and the Constitution.⁴⁴ The authority-defined projections are intensely contested at the everyday level of the vision of Malaysia, divided ideologically and racially. The Malay-based UMNO is struggling for the realisation of a Malaysian nation which is based on Malay dominance and culture. While PAS, the then UMNO's main opponent, is proposing for the promulgation of a nation-state based on the Islamic state ideal. On the contrary, another opposition party, one which is dominated by the Chinese, the Democratic Action Party (DAP, envisions an equivalent and secular nation, perhaps based on Lee Kuan Yew's *Malaysian Malaysia* ideology. To add to the complications of the challenging undertakings of the nation-of-intent in Malaysia, several parties in Sabah and Sarawak also preferred their distinctive projections of the nation, which were founded on the respective states' supremacy in politics (better federalism) and culture (instead of the culture of the Peninsular Malay-Muslim) of their respective societies. By picking on the ideologies of the ruling parties and political aspiration of the oppositions as the foundation of his argument; the contested characterization at the everyday intensity is in reality 'less everyday' and more elite-level by definition. By treating the societal contestation of the vision of the nation as equivalent to the elite contestation of and competition for powers, Shamsul's account ignored the peaceful social relations in Malaysia which is, after about 15 years later, recognised by himself as "social cohesion" through his later works.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ibid., Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.,

⁴² See, A.B. Shamsul, 'Nations-of-intent in Malaysia', in Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov (eds.), *Asian forms of nation*, Psychology Press, Hove, 1995, pp. 323-347.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 323-324.

⁴⁴ Bumiputera are literally sons of the soil (in Malay language) that comprised the Malays and those categorised as the natives in Peninsular, Sabah and Sarawak.

⁴⁵ Shamsul's works on the social cohesion in Malaysia are mostly in form of journalistic and journalism. See for examples, Shamsul A.B., 'We talk conflict, but we talk cohesion', *The Sun*, 2 April 2010, <https://www.academia.edu/1048156/we_talk_conflict_we_walk_cohesion; Shamsul A.B and Anis Y. Yusoff>.

In the 2000s and 2010s, the numbers of related studies on Malaysia's nation-building have increased extensively as many regarded that reflections on the process have been timely, particularly after four decades of Malaysian independence. Cheah's work presents a historical explanation of Malaysia's nation-building since the state's independence in 1957 to the early 2000s. His study was divided into four eras of Malaysian political leadership from Tunku to Mahathir. Despite the noticeable disparities in the state of nation-building between the four premiers of Malaysia, Cheah argues that the process has constantly gyrated around the "historic bargain" between the Malays/Bumiputras (sons of the soil) and non-Malays/non-Bumiputeras.⁴⁶ The historic bargain is defined by 'social transaction' or 'social contract' between the communities in Malaysia whereby the latter⁴⁷ - the immigrant communities - accepted the supremacy or dominance of the Malays/Bumiputeras in the country in exchange for citizenship conferred to them.⁴⁸ By focusing on the historic bargain, Cheah's work is partly similar to Ongkili's account,⁴⁹ though it is more analytical and wider as it includes the examination of the two premiers of Malaysia after Abdul Razak that is Hussien Onn and Mahathir Mohamad.

Abdul Rahman Embong and Timothy Daniels put forward several sociological perspectives on Malaysia's nation-building. Abdul Rahman indicated that the Malaysian society should be no longer regarded as a plural society, as claimed by Furnivall. Due to the standardisation of the education system, modernisation and urbanisation, the spatial and economic-ethnic segmentations of Malaysians, particularly since 1980s, has been less rigid in contrast to the past, despite the resilience of cultural differences among Malaysians. For these reasons, he proposed that Malaysia should be conceptually and practically considered as a multi-ethnic society. Despite the intellectual insights, Abdul Rahman's work however is extremely unpretentious as it was intended to promote discussions rather than to provide a detailed account. In '*Building Cultural Nationalism in Malaysia: Identity, Representation and Citizenship*', American sociologist Timothy Daniels offers a deep sociological account of the process of nation-building in Malaysia at the inter-ethnic level (meso-level).⁵⁰ Daniels

Unity cohesion and reconciliation, Kuala Lumpur, Institut Terjemahan Negara Malaysia and Institute of Ethic Studies UKM, 2014.

⁴⁶ Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia: the making of a nation*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2002, p. 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.237.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴⁹ James P. Ongkili, *Nation-building in Malaysia 1946 – 1974*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1985, Chapter 7.

⁵⁰ See, Timothy P. Daniels, *Building cultural nationalism in Malaysia: identity, representation, and citizenship*, Routledge, New York and London, 2005.

scrutinizes the mechanism of identity negotiation among the ethnic communities and the government through various structural means, both in public and private places.⁵¹ His empirical study is extensive but by analysing the subject matter based on the dynamics at the inter-ethnic level, his conceptual framework and the unit of analysis is rather similar to Cheah's work. Nation-building studies by Daniels and Cheah were framed based on the inter-ethnic situation in Malaysia and their reconciliation process with the state for fuller recognition of their nationhood and citizenships rights.

In 2007, a number of Chinese intellectuals in Malaysia published their reflections on the roles and contributions of the Malaysian Chinese in Malaysia.⁵² They affirmatively proffered on how the minority group substantially facilitated in advancing the nation,⁵³ through various economic means,⁵⁴ ethnic cooperation,⁵⁵ and gender roles.⁵⁶ This wide-ranging study of 'subaltern' group has conveyed some intellectual balance against the dominant version which is Malay-based, but by seeing the nation-building process from the Chinese perspectives, their works are still confined within the racial paradigm that they had intended to balance.

Then, in 2008, a group of distinguished social scientists provided a concise intellectual account of Malaysian nation-building. Entitled *Sharing the Nation: Faith, Differences, Power and the State 50 years after Merdeka*, Norani Othman, Mavid Puthuchery and Clive Kessler lamented against a number of flaws in Malaysia nation-building process.⁵⁷ Puthuchery contends that by emphasising on group rights instead of individual rights in the perceived social contract in Malaysia,⁵⁸ the "important values associated with social justice, equality of opportunity and individual liberalism have not been

⁵¹ Ibid., Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 8.

⁵² Voon Phin Keong (ed.), *Malaysian Chinese and nation-building: before Merdeka and fifty years after*, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 2007.

⁵³ Danny Wong Tze Ken, 'The formation of Malaysia: Forging a nation-state from the crucible of colonialism', in Voon Phin Keong (ed.), *Malaysian Chinese and nation-building: before Merdeka and fifty years after*, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 2007, pp. 155 - 186.

⁵⁴ Emile Yeoh Kok-kheng, 'Identity and economic development in a multi-ethnic society: Malaysian Chinese and the making of the nation', in Voon Phin Keong (ed.), *Malaysian Chinese and nation-building: before Merdeka and fifty years after*, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 2007, pp. 187 - 222.

⁵⁵ Tey Nai Peng, 'Gender roles and nation-building: the social and economic transformation of Chinese women', in Voon Phin Keong (ed.), *Malaysian Chinese and nation-building: before Merdeka and fifty years after*, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 2007, pp. 339 - 368.

⁵⁶ Khoo Kay Kim, 'The making of Malaya 1946-1955: the fruits of ethnic co-operation', in Voon Phin Keong (ed.), *Malaysian Chinese and nation-building: before Merdeka and fifty years after*, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, Kuala Lumpur, 2007, pp. 129 - 154.

⁵⁷ Norani Othman, Mavis C. Puthuchery and Clive S. Kessler (eds.), *Sharing the nation: Faith, differences, power and the state 50 years after Merdeka*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2008.

⁵⁸ Mavis Puthuchery, 'Malaysia's "Social Contract": the invention & historical evolution of an idea', in Norani Othman, Mavis C. Puthuchery and Clive S. Kessler (eds.), *Sharing the nation: faith, differences, power and the state 50 years after Merdeka*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2008, pp. 1 - 28.

allowed to flourish in Malaysia. Instead, sectionally-divisive policies associated with group rights have dominated public policy-making”.⁵⁹ Kessler on his part highlights the trajectory of Islamisation of the Malaysian state during the Abdullah Ahmad Badawi years (2003 to 2009).⁶⁰ He put emphasis on how the state de-secularised the nation through Abdullah’s Islamic policy, the Islam Hadhari.⁶¹

With 25 chapters and more than 20 contributing authors, the *Multiethnic Malaysia: Past, Present and Future*, presents the most wide ranging account of the state of Malaysian society and nation-building.⁶² Involving many renowned scholars of the subject matter, including Johan Saravanamuttu, Edmund Terence Gomez, P. Ramasamy, Cheah Boon Kheng, Khoo Kay Kim, Lim Teck Ghee, Maznah Mohamad and Alberto Gomes (to name a few), the societal situation and the nation-building process of Malaysia have been discussed and analysed, from its historical roots to future prospects, together with various dimensions of economy, politics, social and cultural. Khoo illustrates the historical emergence of plural communities in the Malay Peninsular before the British intervention,⁶³ whereas Cheah enlightens the readers of the strain in race and ethnic relations in Colonial Malaya in 1920s and 1930s⁶⁴. Ariffin Omar explicates the struggle of ethnic unity in Malaya after the World War.⁶⁵ From the economic perspective, Johan Saravanamuttu provides some discussion in ‘The Great Middle Class Debate: Ethnicity, Politics and Lifestyle?’⁶⁶. He argued that in “many ways Malaysians remain parochial and inward-looking and somewhat conservative”, and also materially oriented, which explains “the continuing propensity to support the status quo”.⁶⁷ Maznah Mohamed deliberated on the relation between the politics of the New

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.26.

⁶⁰ Clive S. Kessler, ‘Islam, the state & desecularization: the Islamist trajectory during the Badawi years’, Norani Othman, Mavis C. Puthuchearry and Clive S. Kessler (eds.), *Sharing the nation: faith, differences, power and the state 50 years after Merdeka*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2008, pp. 59 – 80.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 61 - 75.

⁶² Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009.

⁶³ Khoo Kay Kim, ‘The emergence of plural communities in the Malay Peninsular’, in Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, pp. 11 - 32.

⁶⁴ Cheah Boon Kheng, ‘Race and ethnic relations in Colonial Malaya during the 1920s and 1930s’, in Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, pp. 33 - 44.

⁶⁵ Ariffin Omar, ‘The struggle for ethnic unity in Malaya after the Second World War’, in Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, pp. 45 – 58.

⁶⁶ Johan Saravanamuttu, ‘The great middle class debate: ethnicity, politics and lifestyle?’, in Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, pp. 141 - 154.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 152 – 153.

Economic Policy (NEP) and the state of ethnic relations.⁶⁸ She sees the real consequences of the NEP as the strengthening of an ethnic state in Malaysia instead of restoring social justice between the majority Bumiputera group and the minority non-Bumiputera group.⁶⁹ Gomez in his chapter, 'Ethnicity, Equity and Politics in Multiethnic Malaysia', explicates the positive impacts and negative outcomes of the NEP⁷⁰. While the policy promotes business partnership at the elite and middle class level, particularly between the Malay and the Chinese businessmen, the continuation of the policy Gomez argues, "has been the key factor for growing feelings of marginality and exclusion among non-Bumiputera".⁷¹ The policy has also created a 'crutch mentality and contributed to "serious wealth and income disparity within the Bumiputera community".⁷² Ong Puay Liu in 'Identity Matters: Ethnic Perception and Concerns' discusses the question of how the politics of identity and ethnicity at the national level has influenced the public debate at the everyday level.⁷³ As this generates problems to society, Ong circuitously suggested that the Malaysian nation should be based on, and projected as, "a nation of equal citizenships" rather than "a nation of unequal ethnics".⁷⁴

One of the leading economists in Malaysia, Muhammad Abdul Khalid offers an economic account of the state of Malaysian society. In his book, *The Colour of Inequality: Ethnicity, Class, Income and Wealth in Malaysia*, he sketches the alarming disproportion of national wealth despite the tremendous increase in national income since 1980s:⁷⁵ "the wealth gap in Malaysia is alarmingly high and extremely skewed".⁷⁶ Despite the class and economics element of his study, the focus is more "on the gap between the Bumiputera majority and the non-Bumiputera minorities".⁷⁷ Consequently, his study is more ethnically-based rather than class.

⁶⁸ Maznah Mohamed, 'Politics of the NEP and the Ethnic Relations in Malaysia', in Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, pp. 113 - 140.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 128.

⁷⁰ Edmund Terence Gomez, 'Ethnicity, equity and politics in multiethnic Malaysia', in Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, pp. 155 - 180.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 171.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 171 - 172.

⁷³ Ong Puay Liu, 'Identity matters: ethnic perception and concerns', in Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes and Azly Rahman (eds.), *Multiethnic Malaysia: past, present and future*, Strategic Information Research Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, pp. 463 - 482.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 478.

⁷⁵ See, Muhammad Abdul Khalid, *The colour of inequality: ethnicity, class, income and wealth in Malaysia*, MPH Publishing, Petaling Jaya, 2014.

⁷⁶ Ibid., see for example, in The Synopsis.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. xiv.

The Studies on Singapore

On Singapore, Raj Vasil's "Governing Singapore" of 1984,⁷⁸ and "Asianising Singapore: The PAP's Management of Ethnicity" of 1995 are amongst the earliest exertions in discerning the nature of Singapore's nation-building under PAP.⁷⁹ The two books should be seen as sequential works since the former covers the history of PAP struggle from 1950s to late 1970s, while the latter continues the historical account to mid-1990s. The books' arguments, despite being heavily biased and based on the perspectives of leading PAP leaders (including with Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong, Goh Keng Swee and S. Rajaratnam) – to the extent it could be regarded as the 'official' PAP account of Singapore's nation's building, they provide valuable sources for official references, apart from those in the public office and libraries. The first book provides the PAP's account on its "nature and role" in "establishing a multi-racial nation",⁸⁰ and the second describes the PAP's project in "Asianising Singapore" in the 1980s as the response of the state to the unwanted effects of liberal, Western influences over Singapore society.⁸¹

C.M. Turnbull has contributed extensive historical accounts on Singapore's society and politics. Even though it contained limited theoretically content, but the thesis benefited very much from the details provided in her book.⁸² In "*Ethnicity and Nationality in Singapore*",⁸³ Chew Sock Foon finds out, through his empirical research, that a "dual identification", that is "high ethnic and national identification could exist concurrently".⁸⁴ His study defies the "easily assumed that ethnic and national identification comprise incompatible loyalties in sovereign multi-ethnic states".⁸⁵ Out of the impact of social, political, economic and cultural forces in Singapore, he observed that many Singaporeans would not have any problem in their loyalty towards the state despite the presence of high ethnic identifications particularly among the minority communities.⁸⁶

In line with PAP's agenda in creating shared national values since the late 1980s, the Institute of Policy Studies published several intellectual accounts for the project called *In*

⁷⁸ Raj Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, Eastern University Press, Singapore and Petaling Jaya, 1984.

⁷⁹ Raj Vasil, *Asianising Singapore: the PAP's management of ethnicity*, Heinemann Asia, Singapore, 1995.

⁸⁰ See, Raj K. Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

⁸¹ See, Raj Vasil, *Asianising Singapore*, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

⁸² C.M. Turnbull, *A history of modern Singapore, 1819-2005*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2009.

⁸³ Chew Sock Foon, *Ethnicity and nationality in Singapore*, Center for International Studies Ohio University, Athens, 1987.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-145.

Search of Singapore's National Values.⁸⁷ In the introducing chapter,⁸⁸ Quah highlights the notion of “communitarianism” as the basis of Singapore’s national values as espoused by the then First Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong who himself was influenced by the idea (communitarianism) and work of George Lodge and Ezra Vogel.⁸⁹ Leo Suryadinata⁹⁰ in his account warns that “an inappropriate national ideology does more harm than good because it gives rise to divisive rather than unifying tendencies”.⁹¹ He also suggests that “the national values to be adopted in Singapore must take into account the multi-racial nature of its society”.⁹² Quah in one of his chapters (Chapter 4)⁹³ looks into “the impact of six selected government policies on the development of a national identity in Singapore”.⁹⁴ While imparting a constructive remark for the state nation-building effort, Quah cautioned that “the government must fine-tune those policies which have unintentionally raised the population’s level of racial consciousness”.⁹⁵

In 1992, a group of local scholars published their compiled work in *Imagine Singapore*,⁹⁶ discussing the various viewpoints in the process of Singapore nation-state building. Three of the works warrant some reflections here. The first is the work by Hussin Mutalib which briefly discusses Singapore’s multiracialism and meritocratic policies and the issues surrounding the execution of those policies,⁹⁷ particularly the treatment against the Malay community after 1965.⁹⁸ Lim Boon Tiong provides the economic perspective behind

⁸⁷ Jon S. T. Quah (ed.), *In search of Singapore's national values*, Institute of Policy Studies and Times Academic Press, Singapore, 1990.

⁸⁸ Jon S. T. Quah, ‘National values and nation-building: defining the problem’, in Jon S. T. Quah (ed.), *In search of Singapore's national values*, Institute of Policy Studies and Times Academic Press, 1990, Singapore, pp. 1 – 5.

⁸⁹ See George C. Lodge and Ezra Vogel (eds.), *Ideology and national competitiveness: an analysis of nine countries*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 1987.

⁹⁰ Leo Suryadinata, ‘National Ideology and nation-building in multi-ethnic states: lessons from other countries’, in Jon S. T. Quah (ed.), *In search of Singapore's national values*, Institute of Policy Studies and Times Academic Press, Singapore, 1990, pp. 24 – 44.

⁹¹ Quoted from Jon S. T. Quah, ‘National values and nation-building: defining the problem’, in Jon S. T. Quah (ed.), *In search of Singapore's national values*, Institute of Policy Studies and Times Academic Press, Singapore, 1990, p. 3.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Jon S. T. Quah, ‘Government policies and nation-building’, in Jon S. T. Quah (ed.), *In search of Singapore's national values*, Institute of Policy Studies and Times Academic Press, Singapore, 1990, pp. 45 – 55.

⁹⁴ Quoted from Quah, ‘National values and nation-building’, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Anne Pakir & Tong Chee Kiong, *Imagining Singapore*, 2nd Edition, Eastern University Press, Singapore, 2004.

⁹⁷ Hussain Mutalib, ‘Singapore quest for a national identity: the triumphs and trials of government policies’, in Anne Pakir & Tong Chee Kiong, *Imagining Singapore*, 2nd Edition, Eastern University Press, Singapore, 2004, pp. 54-80.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp.69-72.

the volte-face in the government's population policy from 1970s to 1990s.⁹⁹ By linking the economic imperatives with the size of the population, he explicates why the government had decided to cut the size of the population in 1970s but later in 1980s needed to reverse the policy when the population growth was greatly affected by such policy. The author, however, did not touch on the political dimension of the policy whereby the graduates, mostly Chinese, were allowed and given some incentives and rewards for having more babies when the policy was implemented in 1970s. Anne Pakir in her chapter 'English-Knowing Bilingualism in Singapore', recaptures the 'nationalisation' of English (since early 1960s) *vis-à-vis* Mandarin (since late 1970s) as the main languages in Singapore through the state's language policy and the education system.¹⁰⁰ The programmes were so effective that the number of English and Mandarin speakers in 1990 had increased more than two-fold than in 1980.¹⁰¹

Michael Hill and Lian Kwan Fee's book *The Politics of Nation Building and Citizenship in Singapore* provides a detailed sociological account of the process of nation-building in Singapore.¹⁰² The authors explore how the creation of national identity is made possible through the creation of new institutions. They see the education system holding great influence over the government projects of multiracial and multicultural Singapore. The authors also relates a number of other PAP's state policies and actions in achieving similar objectives, including housing and population, and the creation of para-political structures and the national ideology of shared values. Despite its wide ranging coverage of Singapore's nation-building, the work is less critical and omitted the crucial examination of the state policy of meritocracy which is the forefront ideology of Singapore since its independence in 1965.

The aspect of control is one of the main elements of PAP's state administration of the Singaporean society. As such, several studies have been undertaken in uncovering the control element in the state's nation-building project. Chua Beng-huat in *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*¹⁰³ discusses the PAP's ideological trajectories from authoritarianism to communitarianism.¹⁰⁴ Drawing on the different nature of Singapore's

⁹⁹ Lim Boon Tiong. 'The economics of population policy', in Anne Pakir & Tong Chee Kiong, *Imagining Singapore*, 2nd Edition, Eastern University Press, Singapore, 2004, pp. 188-209.

¹⁰⁰ Anne Pakir, 'English-knowing Bilingualism in Singapore', in Anne Pakir & Tong Chee Kiong, *Imagining Singapore*, 2nd Edition, Eastern University Press, Singapore, 2004, pp. 254-278.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.271.

¹⁰² Michael Hill and Lian Kwan Fee, *The politics of nation building and citizenship in Singapore*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995.

¹⁰³ Beng-huat Chua, *Communitarian ideology and democracy in Singapore*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

society from the West, he sees Singapore's progress towards democracy under the then new leadership of Goh Chok Tong could only be done through non-liberal, communitarian path.¹⁰⁵ Cherian George in *Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation* describes how the perpetuation of PAP rule is made possible through the material comfort and political control structured by the ruling regime to the populace in Singapore.¹⁰⁶ Under a relatively similar perspective, Carl Trocki in *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* discuss the nature of state control over the society and nation-building process in Singapore.¹⁰⁷ He elucidates how the middle class and the multi-racial society on the island are carefully managed by the government to the extent that the society is confronted with the issue of "intellectual and cultural sterility".¹⁰⁸

Barr and Skrbiš in their book *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity and Nation-Building Project* provides a critical and in-depth study of PAP'S nation-building project through the analysis of the interplay between elitism and ethnicity in the state's operation and policies.¹⁰⁹ Through the process of elite selection, training and formation of a ruling and administrative elite under the so-called meritocracy policy, Singapore's society are structurally organised and technocratic leadership is built and perpetuated. An in-depth study was made in the state's education system and the government structure in their explication of how elitism works in Singapore.¹¹⁰ They also unravel, in detail, the contradictions of said project by identifying the significance of ethnic, class, personal and gender factors in the nation-building project.¹¹¹

There are several studies on Singapore's nation-building dedicated to understand the situation of the Malay community. Tania Li's monograph, *Malays in Singapore: Culture, Economy, and Ideology* could be said to be the earliest detailed and dedicated work that attempts to explicate the social life of the Malays on the island.¹¹² By using an anthropological approach, she analysed how "cultural ideas and economic conditions shape not only the lives of individual Singapore Malays but also Malay households within the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Chapter 9.

¹⁰⁶ Cherian George, *Singapore: the air-conditioned nation: essays on the politics of comfort and control, 1990-2000*, Landmark Books, Singapore, 2000.

¹⁰⁷ Carl Trocki, *Singapore: wealth, power and the culture of control*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Preface.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: elitism, ethnicity and nation-building project*, Copenhagen, NIAS Press, 2008.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., see, Chapter 6 – Chapter 8.

¹¹¹ Ibid., see, Chapter 9.

¹¹² Tania Li, *Malays in Singapore: culture, economy, and ideology*, East Asian Social Science Monographs and Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1989.

community”.¹¹³ She contends that “differences in the cultural framework within which Malays and Chinese organize their economic lives, especially with regard to entrepreneurship, have put Malays at an economic disadvantage in Singapore since 1959, and supported the idea that Malays are culturally inferior which, in turn, has been a source of discrimination against them”.¹¹⁴ Lily Zubaidah Rahim’s work in *The Singapore Dilemma: The Political and Educational Marginality of the Malay Community*, which is based on her field study, observed the systematic downfall of Malay political power and socio-economics positions under PAP rule.¹¹⁵ She focuses on the role of the state, particularly in the marginalisation of the Malays in politics and education, apart from the political and ideological play of race - ostensibly the Malay’s cultural deficit – in justifying the backwardness of the community, as the systemic and structured constraints the progress of the Malays. In one of her latest works on the Malays in Singapore,¹¹⁶ Lily Rahim examines “the contradictions between the PAP government’s rhetoric of meritocracy and multiracialism and the reality of ethnic-based social and security policies”.¹¹⁷ She argues that the contradictions were “driven by the socio-political dynamics of Singapore’s authoritarian state, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew’s strongly ethno-centric worldview and the state’s subtle promotion of the PAP government as the guardian of Chinese interests in Singapore and the region”.¹¹⁸ She also found out that they were some “important similarities in the nation-building approaches” between Singapore and Malaysia while “acknowledging” their “dissimilarities”.¹¹⁹ Hussin Mutalib in *Singapore Malays: Being Ethnic Minority and Muslim in a Global City*¹²⁰ explored three fundamental aspects of the ‘Malay plight’ - the socio-economic, politics and culture. Grounded on an embedded study of the dynamic relations between the state and the non-state actor,¹²¹ he contended that the state is the primary source

¹¹³ See, Shamsul A.B., ‘Review on Tania Li’s Malays in Singapore: Culture, Economy, and Ideology’, *The journal of Asian studies*, vol. 49, no. 3, 1990, pp. 706–707.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹¹⁵ Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *The Singapore dilemma: the political and educational marginality of the Malay community*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1998.

¹¹⁶ Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *Singapore in the Malay world: building and breaching regional bridges*, London & New York, Routledge, 2009.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4. See also, Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* See also, Chapter 8.

¹²⁰ Hussin Mutalib. *Singapore Malays: being ethnic minority and Muslim in a global city*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2012.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-17.

of the plight,¹²² whereas the ‘minority syndrome’ (among the Malays), historical legacies and globalisation are the secondary causes.¹²³

Comparative Studies on Malaysia and Singapore

There are also several comparative studies of Malaysia and Singapore’s nation-building in the past. Stanley Bedlington’s *Malaysia and Singapore: The Building of New States* (1978) is the first serious attempt to study the subject matter.¹²⁴ The book provides descriptive reflections on the political processes and the major problems of the two new countries since their independence in mid-1970s.

Leo Suryadinata’s edited book of *Ethnic Relations and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia: The Case of Ethnic Chinese*, offers several accounts on Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia nation-building from the Chinese perspective.¹²⁵ Remarkably, the accounts on Malaysia are not focused on and from the Chinese per se, but include also the Malays and Indians as well. Even more so, the three ethnic-based accounts on Malaysia were written by the intellectuals from the three main races in Malaysia. Lee Kam Hing on his part¹²⁶ argues that “there is general acceptance of Mahathir’s vision of an eventual *Bangsa Malaysia* despite the fact that this *Bangsa Malaysia* is not defined”.¹²⁷ Although “all sides” of Malaysians “accept the need for integration”, “but there continues to be at least two different perspectives on how this is to be achieved”.¹²⁸ Lee did not straightforwardly define the “two different perspectives”, but we can surmise the two as assimilationist (based on the culture of the majority ethnic) and integrative (nation-building based on the idea of multi-culturalism) perspectives. Shamsul A.B in his contributing chapter discusses the authority-defined perspective on the construction of social categories of “Malay” and “Malayness” as well as “Chinese” and “Chineseness” in pre and post-independent Malaysia.¹²⁹ He balanced the

¹²² Ibid., Chapter 8.

¹²³ Ibid., Chapter 7.

¹²⁴ Stanley S. Bedlington, *Malaysia and Singapore: The building of new states*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1978.

¹²⁵ Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case of the ethnic Chinese*, Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, 2004.

¹²⁶ Lee Kam Hing, ‘Differing perspectives on integration and nation-building’, Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: The case of the ethnic Chinese*, Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, 2004, pp. 82-108.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 108.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Shamsul A.B., ‘Tex and collective memories: the construction of “Chinese” and “Chineseness” from the perspective of a Malay’, Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case*

discussion with the same process of construction at the “every-day, experiential level”,¹³⁰ capitalising on his own experience as a Malay on the idea of Chinese and Chineseness in the social context in Malaysia. P. Ramasamy focuses on the “marginalisation” of the Malaysian Indians as the state’s nation-building is based on “advancing Malay dominance” and “hegemony”.¹³¹ Out of the process of “urbanization, commercialization, and ethnic discrimination”, “Indians have become politically marginalized, economically deprived of opportunity, and culturally alienated’. He also argues that “Indian involvement in criminal activities has nothing to do with their particular cultural and ethnic disposition”,¹³² which often the regular stereotype is attributed by others to Indians, but due to the above processes. Singapore on the other side holds three intellectual accounts provided by Tan Ern Ser, Eugene Tan and Sharon Siddique. Drawing from survey data, Tan Ern Ser concluded that although ethnic relations in Singapore since 1990s is much “healthier” than in 1960s and before,¹³³ as long as “multi-culturalism continues to be promoted and practiced, it is likely that that the ethnic boundaries will remain, rather than be dissolved”.¹³⁴ Eugene Tan highlights the Singaporean Chinese dilemma of nation-building – revolving around the distinction between ethno-nationalism and multiracialism.¹³⁵ Sharon Siddique shared four decades of personal experience of Chinese as a Malay Singaporean. She observed the web of significance in the reproduction of Chinese identity through government involvement and ethno-religious celebration.¹³⁶ She also highlighted the positive progress on ethnic relations in Singapore through various cultural exchange and borrowings such as giving *hong bao* (red packets) during the Chinese New Year and *duit raya* (green packet) among the Muslims during Eid Mubarak.¹³⁷

of the ethnic Chinese, Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, 2004, pp. 109-144.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹³¹ P. Ramasamy, ‘Nation-building in Malaysia: victimization of Indians?’, Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case of the ethnic Chinese*, Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, 2004, pp. 145-167.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹³³ Tan Ern Ser, ‘Ethnic relations in Singapore: evidence from survey data’, in Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case of the ethnic Chinese*, Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, 2004, pp. 207-219.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹³⁵ Eugene K.B. Tan, ‘The majority sacrifices and yearnings: Chinese Singaporeans and the dilemmas of nation-building’, Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case of the ethnic Chinese*, Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, 2004, pp.168-206.

¹³⁶ Sharon Siddique, ‘An outsider looking in at Chinese Singaporeans’, Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia: the case of the ethnic Chinese*, Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) & Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, 2004, pp. 220-229.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

In 2005 a noted Southeast Asian historian Wang Gungwu edited a book entitled “*Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*” that combined the works of a number of leading scholars in the region.¹³⁸ In the opening chapter, Wang stressed the need for historians to reflect on the history of nation-building process in Southeast-Asian countries, especially after their independence.¹³⁹ But in doing so, he argued that the historians will be confronted with a twofold challenge between the contemporary and the national history.¹⁴⁰ On the Malaysian part, Milner provided his examinations of a number of historical accounts on Malaysia’s nation-building and framed them as “*Historians Writing Nations: Malaysia Contest*”. He meanderingly highlighted certain precautions to be taken against the reflections provided by the Malaysian historians. For instance, if they enjoy relationships with political characters, the written histories could be ideological rather than based on social realities.¹⁴¹ Tony Stockwell in his work identified the challenges of Malaysia independence (including Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak) and nation-building in the early years of its establishment.¹⁴² Describing the new Malaysia as just “a state without nation”, he commented that the Malaysian government was not only confronting with a divided society and divided loyalty, but also the threat of internal territorial separation, and external military attack from the neighbouring countries.¹⁴³ Albert Lau’s chapter “*Nation-building and the Singapore Story: Some Issues in the Study of Contemporary Singapore History*” is the only account of Singapore in the book.¹⁴⁴ Lau’s objective was not to provide a historical account of Singapore’s nation-building, but to underline several issues of writing history in Singapore due to the problems of incomplete documents, perspective and objectivity owing to the secretive and dominant nature of the PAP government in Singapore.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Nation-building: five Southeast Asian histories*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005.

¹³⁹ Wang Gungwu, ‘Contemporary and national history: a double challenge’, Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Nation-building: five Southeast Asian histories*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005., pp. 1-20.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Anthony Milner, ‘Historians Writing Nations: Malaysia Contest’, Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Nation-building: five Southeast Asian histories*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005, pp. 55-56.

¹⁴² Tony Stockwell, ‘Forging Malaysia’s and Singapore: colonialism, decolonization and nation-building’, Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Nation-building: five Southeast Asian histories*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005, pp. 191-220.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 209-212.

¹⁴⁴ Albert Lau, ‘*Nation-building and the Singapore Story: some issues in the study of contemporary Singapore history*’, Wang Gungwu (ed.), *Nation-building: five Southeast Asian histories*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005, pp. 221-250.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.242-245.

In another book “*Race and Multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*”,¹⁴⁶ a series of discussions on the practices of race and multi-culturalism in the two countries were made both at the governmental and every-day level. Seeing the significance of the post-colonial governments in Malaysia and Singapore in producing and reproducing race through its institutions, or what was regarded as racial governmentality,¹⁴⁷ Ting highlighted the discourse of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy) in the Malaysian historical textbook;¹⁴⁸ while Goh explored the impact of renewed relations between the governments of Singapore and China to the Chinese and Chineseness in Singapore.¹⁴⁹ At the every-day level, several accounts of increasing Malaysian and Singaporean multi-culturalism, largely due to the process of cosmopolitanism, are studied through observation of popular arts and culture. For instances, Antoinette stressed on the rethinking of the Malaysian identity through “the art of race”,¹⁵⁰ Tan observed the racial stereotypes in Singapore films,¹⁵¹ Gabrielpillai discussed the phenomenon of Singapore Indians in the quest for Chinese identity.¹⁵²

Of the dozens of scholarly works surveyed above, practically all except one analysed the subject of nation-building from the cultural perspectives. This development is surprising as class perspective is one of the most dominant intellectual perspective in Malaysia and Singapore. In fact, a number of Marxist or class scholars, particularly in Malaysia, have switched their intellectual discussion into cultural ones when they reflect on the process of nation-building. The only work providing some class or “elitism” perspective in the study of nation-building was by Barr and Skrbis in “*Constructing Singapore*”. The authors offer an in-depth study of the process of nation-building from bottom to top, analysing how elitism works in Singapore, while also providing some discussion on the cultural elements of the

¹⁴⁶ Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, Abingdon and London, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Daniels P.S. Goh and Philip Holden, ‘Introduction: postcoloniality, race and multiculturalism’, in Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, Abingdon and London, 2009, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Helen Ting, ‘Malaysian history textbooks and the discourse of ketuanan Melayu’, in Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, Abingdon and London, 2009, pp. 36-52.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel P.S. Goh, ‘Eyes turned towards China: postcolonial mimicry, transcultural elitism and Singapore Chineseness’, in Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, Abingdon and London, 2009, pp. 53-69.

¹⁵⁰ Michelle Antoinette, ‘The art of race: Rethinking Malaysian identity through the art of Wong Hoy Cheong’, Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, Abingdon and London, 2009, pp. 191-212.

¹⁵¹ Kenneth Paul Tan, ‘Racial stereotyping in Singapore films: commercial value and critical possibilities’, in Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, Abingdon and London, 2009, pp. 124-141.

¹⁵² Matilda Gabrielpillai, ‘The Singapore Indian woman: a symptom in the ques for Chinese identity’, in Daniel P.S. Goh, Matilda Gabrielpillai, Philip Holden and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Race and multiculturalism in Malaysia and Singapore*, Routledge, Abingdon and London, 2009, pp. 141-156.

state's nation building project. The book is one of the main guidance for this thesis. However, being a comparative study involving Malaysia and Singapore, this thesis would not venture on the same path and explore the same depth which had been undertaken by Barr and Skrbis. Instead, it seeks to achieve a wide coverage of the subject matter to uncover and appreciate the class elements of nation-building in both countries. It is redundant for this thesis to reproduce another in-depth account on the process of nation-building in Singapore as Barr and Skrbis have already produced detailed work. In addition, there will be noticeable variations in the theoretical perspective in this thesis from Barr and Skrbis's work.

Many of the studies above were conducted some time ago. There are some important variations of the state of nation-building in Malaysia after Mahathir (1981 – 2003) and in Singapore after Lee Kuan Yew (1959 – 1990). Thus, apart from providing a more recent and contemporary analysis on the state of nation-building in Malaysia and Singapore, some comparisons of the subject matter between the past and contemporary leaders will also be made.

Theoretical Perspective: Nation-Building as Class Phenomenon

From the perspective of Karl Marx, the human history is entangled in a dialectical struggle between two competing groups, the dominant and the dominated, which is motivated by the nature of the economic forces.¹⁵³ The economy does not only, in this perspective, divide the group into social classes (the upper class/elite and the lower class/masses), but also shaped the nature of the society. The current economic system of capitalism has given rise to two main classes, the bourgeoisie or capitalist – those who have control over the production, and the proletariat or the working class – those who provide labour for the production. The economy, thus, according to Marx, is the substructure or the foundation of the society.¹⁵⁴ The substructure is maintained and perpetuated by the superstructure, the non-economic forces. The state and the system of belief and values that are mainly controlled by the upper class constitute the central components in the superstructure.¹⁵⁵ Being economically powerful and politically significant, the upper class could influence, and to some extent, control the state

¹⁵³ See, Claudio J. Katz, *From feudalism to capitalism: Marxian theories of class struggle and social change*, Greenwood Press, Santa Barbara, 1989.

¹⁵⁴ Norman Levine, *Divergent Paths: Hegel in Marxism and Engelsism*, Lexington Book, Lanham and Oxford, 2006, p. 70

¹⁵⁵ Frank E. Manuel, *A requiem for Karl Marx*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 1995, p. 130.

according to their own class interest.¹⁵⁶ As a result, the upper class, being the dominant group, enjoys significant advantages in the capitalist system, resulting in class maintenance and reproduction, so as to get wealthier and becoming politically powerful than before. The role of the masses or the proletariat in the capitalist system is not entirely insignificant. In fact, they play a crucial role in a democracy, particularly in elections and civic movements. But their role in politics and access to power is notably limited. In the case of the Presidents of the United States, for example, almost if not all of the U.S Presidents and presidential candidates are of the upper class groups. The recent contest in the U.S. presidency in November 2016 was between political elite Hillary Clinton and business tycoon Donald Trump. This is one of the reasons why Marx had dismissed democracy as simply a bourgeoisie or capitalist democracy – a system ruled by the rich. But the masses are made to believe, by the superstructure (the state, media and the education system, to state a few examples), that their political system is popularly based although it is heavily shaped and structured by the elite.

In extending the capitalist rule and the above popular perception, it is essential to appreciate the theory of hegemony as developed by Antonio Gramsci.¹⁵⁷ Hegemony through Gramsci's lens is a continuous¹⁵⁸ process of constructing (and reconstructing) the worldview¹⁵⁹ of the masses (the ruled) in parallel with the elite (the ruler) in obtaining consent and legitimacy from the former to the latter.¹⁶⁰ The consent and legitimacy are attained through the combination of force and intellectual influence.¹⁶¹ Various institutions including the state structures and non-state agencies are used by the ruler in 'hegemonising'¹⁶² the ruled. This principally includes the activity of socio-political control¹⁶³ and the use of propaganda.¹⁶⁴ The enactment of laws, particularly with draconian elements,¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁶ Allen Wood, *Karl Marx*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p. 92.

¹⁵⁷ See, Antonio Gramsci (edited and translated by, J.A. Buttigieg), *Antonio Gramsci prison notebook*, Columbia University Press, New York and West Sussex, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and nation: the making of postcolonial Mexico and Peru*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1995, p. 6.

¹⁵⁹ See, Chantal Mouffe, 'Hegemony and ideology in Gramsci', in Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Gramsci and Marxist theory*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2014, p. 193.

¹⁶⁰ See, Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of the mass media*, The Bodley Head, London, 2008, Chapter 1.

¹⁶¹ Benedetto Fontana, 'Hegemony and power in Gramsci', in Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, *Hegemony: studies in consensus and coercion*, 2008, p. 100.

¹⁶² Ambalavaner Sivanandan, *Communities of resistance: writings on Black struggles for socialism*, Verso, London and New York, 1990, p. 23.

¹⁶³ M. Neocleous, *Administering civil society: towards a theory of state power*, MacMillan Press and St. Martin's Press, Houndmills and New York, 1996, p. 101.

¹⁶⁴ John Jenks, *British propaganda and news media in the Cold War*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006, p. 11.

and the use of the state-controlled (or funded) media are among the most popular tools for hegemony.¹⁶⁶ Through these acts, the civil space of the masses are not only made limited but dominated by ruling elite.¹⁶⁷ The domination allows the ruling elites to become the ‘hegemon’¹⁶⁸ who hold the capacity to impose their beliefs as the worldview of the society and the state.¹⁶⁹

In the context of Malaysia and Singapore, their modern political system was imposed on to them by the British. Their constitutions were enacted by the British, in accordance with the Westminster system, before the countries gained independence. But as the process of decolonisation in both countries took place during the Emergency (declared in 1948) which allowed the authorities to have excessive powers in combating communists and political opponents, the practice of ‘democracy’ or ‘politics’ inherited by both Malaysian and Singaporean state elites were more authoritarian in nature. In parallel with the security laws enacted to stem the spread of communism and avert a potential communist take-over of British interests in the colonies, the British cautiously and strategically forged an alliance with the local leaders they could trust in Malaya and Singapore. The English-educated and conservative elites were always the first choice to British when came to this.

In Malaya, the British favoured the English conservative elites in United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party. A number of UMNO leaders were given prominent positions in the colonial government since 1948, including cabinet ministers and state secretaries. At the same time, political dissidents were effectively checked and controlled by the colonial government, paving the way for UMNO to enjoy a landslide victory in the 1955 General Elections and form the interim government.

In Singapore, the British in 1957 made a pact with the leader of the English-educated group in the People’s Action Party - Lee Kuan Yew. Through this, Lee was not only able to control PAP leadership where more than ninety per cent of the party members were Chinese

¹⁶⁵ J. Rubongoya, *Regime hegemony in Museveni’s Uganda: Pax Musevenica*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York and Houndmills, 2007, p.13.

¹⁶⁶ See, Azly Rahman, *Thesis on Cyberjaya: hegemony and utopianism in a Southeast Asian state*, AuthorHouse, Bloomington, 2012, p. 227.

¹⁶⁷ H. A. Giroux, ‘Rethinking cultural politics and the radical pedagogy in the work of Antonio Gramsci’, in Carmel Borg, Joseph A. Buttigieg, Peter Mayo, *Gramsci and education*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Plymouth, 2002, p. 31

¹⁶⁸ David E. Spiro, *The hidden hand of American hegemony: petrodollar recycling and international markets*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1999, p. 9.

¹⁶⁹ James E. Combs, *Polpop 2: politics and popular culture in America today*, Bowling State University Popular Press, 1991, Bowling Green, p. 135.

speakers, it was also made possible for him to become the Prime Minister following the 1959 General Election. Lee would go on to stamp out considerable threats from his political opponents by way of Operation Coldstore in 1963.

The laws which were passed during the Emergency, such as the Sedition Act 1948, are maintained and used by the post-colonial government even after communism ceased being a threat in the late 1960s. In fact, the powers of the governments are occasionally increased as the nation progresses. With the enactment of the Internal Security Act (ISA) in 1960, thousands of political opponents to the ruling party of Malaysia, UMNO, were been arrested and detained by the government. Ten years later, the University and College University Act 1970 was introduced to control growing student activism. The freedom to expression was curtailed by way of the Printing Presses and Publications Act in 1984. Later on, when the internet had started to become a potential political risk to the ruling regime, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Act in 1998 was passed. More recently, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act or SOSMA was passed in 2012 along with a number of new security laws ostensibly to combat terrorism in Malaysia. During parliamentary debates on SOSMA, the government promised that the statute would not be used against political dissidents, in response to Opposition criticisms.¹⁷⁰ However, in 2015, SOSMA was used against political opponents,¹⁷¹ and in late 2016 against a civic leader of mass demonstration who had called for a change of regime.¹⁷²

In Singapore, the colonial government of Singapore in February 1963, together with the ruling party PAP, launched the infamous ‘Operation Coldstore’ which effectively crippled the position of the Opposition and thus securing the victory of the PAP in September that year. The steps and measures taken by the Malaysian authorities were also undertaken by the Singapore government, such as the enactments of the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in 1974, the Computer Misuse and Cybersecurity Act in 1993, and the Terrorism (Suppression of Financing) Act 2003. In one of the recent instances of the excessive use of power by the government, a sixteen-year-old blogger was detained for “praising the death of Singapore’s

¹⁷⁰ Zurairi Ar, ‘Putrajaya promised not to use SOSMA for dissent’, *Malay Mail*, 21 November 2016, viewed 1 March 2017, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/putrajaya-promised-not-to-use-sosma-for-dissent-lawyers-say>>.

¹⁷¹ Hilal Azmi, ‘High court rules against SOSMA use Khairuddin, Matthias’, *Astro Awani*, 18 November 2015, viewed 1 March 2017, <<http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/high-court-rules-against-sosma-use-khairuddin-matthias-81324>>.

¹⁷² Yiswara Palansamy and Ida Lim, ‘Maria released from SOSMA detention’, *Malay Mail*, 28 November 2016, viewed 1 March 2017, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/maria-released-from-sosma-detention>>.

first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew” and calling Lee “totalitarian” in 2015.¹⁷³ The teenager was detained by the police for 53 days.¹⁷⁴

The ownership of excessive state powers and force on the part of UMNO and PAP is one of the central reasons that have helped both parties to stay in power until the present (2017). With such powers, the political elites utilise and manipulate the political systems to ensure the perpetuation of their rule. The powers are also used for their other class interests, including self-enrichment. Malaysia is currently experiencing an economic slowdown since 2014. Subsidies were gradually and systematically reduced, and new tax regimes were introduced under the government’s economic rationalisation programmes to reduce government burden and burgeoning debts.¹⁷⁵ Yet, at the same time, the government continued to announce new mega-size developmental projects costing hundreds of billions ringgit in the name of progress and the people.¹⁷⁶ This agrees with the agenda of material development in the government’s nation-building project. In one of the government’s latest development announcement in 2016, the government revealed its plans to build a new railway to the East Coast (ECR) that would cost RM55 billion. Strangely, most of the cost is going to be borne by a loan from China – indicating the dire situation of the government’s financial standing. Even more peculiarly, according to Mahathir Mohamed, a former prime minister of Malaysia, the real cost for the project should not be more than RM35 billion.¹⁷⁷ The difference, as per Mahathir’s words, “will go to personal accounts”.¹⁷⁸ K.S. Jomo and Terence Gomez have written numerous works on how the state’s developmental and privatisation projects in Malaysia are devised by the ruling elites for itself and a source of large political funds for the ruling party.¹⁷⁹ In another scheme, this time through the state’s investment, the 1Malaysia Development Board (1MDB), *The Wall Street Journal* reported how the national funds were

¹⁷³ Emiko Jozuka, ‘Singapore teen blogger Amos Yee jailed over social media posts’, CNN, 29 September 2016, viewed 1 March 2017, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/29/asia/singapore-amos-yee-teen-blogger-sentence/>>.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Mikhail Raj Abdullah, ‘Government’s subsidy reduction to benefit rakyat in the long term’, Ministry of Domestic Trade, Co-operative and Consumerism’s web site, viewed 1 March 2017, <<http://kpdnkk.bernama.com/newsEn.php?id=975352>>.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Najib reiterates commitment to transform public transport, meets commuters’ needs’, *New Strait Times*, 17 October 2016, viewed 1 March 2017, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/10/180873/najib-reiterates-commitment-transform-public-transport-meets-commuters-needs>>.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Najib’s China trip’, 17 November 2016, viewed 1 March 2017, <<http://mahathir-mohamad.blogspot.my/2016/11/najibs-china-trip.html>>.

¹⁷⁸ ‘ECR-Najib Razak berhutang 100 kali ganda dari perbelanjaan sebenar-Tun Mahathir (Tun M) terkini 2016’, *Youtube*, 14 November 2016, viewed 1 March 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9UTkakqK8I>, KONVENSYEN PAKATAN HARAPAN:>.

¹⁷⁹ See for example, Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo K.S, *Malaysian political economy: politics, patronage, and profits*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and Melbourne, 1999.

channelled to the ruling party through 1MDB to help the party to secure a victory in the 2013 General Elections.¹⁸⁰ These matters would be examined in detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

In Singapore, similar practices exist, albeit done in a more subtle, strategic, and concealed manner. In the late 1980s to 1990s, as a result of the increasingly competitive global market, the Singapore government radically reduced its corporate tax to attract foreign investment into the island nation. Personal income tax, which affected the few, privileged groups of the population, was also significantly reduced. As a result, the national revenue was affected and the government introduced a new tax scheme in April 1994 – the Goods and Services Tax (GST), as a trade-off. The government argued that tax reform was necessary to maintaining Singapore's competitiveness, sustain long-term growth and boost job creation.¹⁸¹ But in contrast from the personal income tax, the GST affected all Singaporeans, including the working class, which constitute the majority of the population. Certain arguments were brought up by civic and opposition leaders, especially on the moral aspect in taxing the poor in the society. The calls were rejected by the government by repeating its justifications on the need of having such reform. Interestingly, just when the government was trying to find more funds for the national coffers through the GST, later that year, in November 1994 the government tabled a White Paper entitled “Competitive Salaries for Competent & Honest Government” in parliament.¹⁸² The White Paper recommended that salaries of Ministers and senior Civil Servants be pegged at 2/3 of the average income of the top 4 earners in 6 private sectors, instantaneously propelling Singaporean officials to becoming the highest paid government officials in the world. The Opposition slammed the increase and dubbed the increase as “Lee-galised corruption”. These issues, and others that display the dynamics of class relations and contentions in Singapore’s nation-state building, will be studied in greater detail in Part III.

¹⁸⁰ Tom Wright and Bradley Hope, ‘1MDB and the money network of Malaysian politics Prime Minister Najib Razak tapped wealth fund to ease ruling-party’s victory’, *The Wall Street Journal*, viewed 3 March 2017, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-money-network-of-malaysian-politics-1451355113>>.

¹⁸¹ ‘Restructuring the tax system for growth and job creation’, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Singapore, 2002, viewed 3 March 2013, <https://www.mti.gov.sg/ResearchRoom/Documents/app.mti.gov.sg/data/pages/507/doc/2%20ERC_Taxation.pdf>

¹⁸² ‘Competitive salaries for competent and honest government’, Parliament of Singapore, viewed 20 November 2015, <http://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/topic.jsp?currentTopicID=00064440-ZZ¤tPubID=00069727-ZZ&topicKey=00069727-ZZ.00064440-ZZ_1%20Bid003_19941103_S0002_T00021-motion%2B>.

Thus, if Marx regards the state in the West as merely a tool for bourgeoisie rule and a necessary evil for the proletariats,¹⁸³ in the Malaysian and Singaporean context as described above, there are certain variations to the composition in and relations between the state and business elites. In Malaysia, many members of the state elites are directly involved in business through the productions of various government resources, rents and projects. From the same scheme too, they enjoy strong relations with business elites and corporations who are also aiming for similar interests in the government's rents. Together with high-ranking government officials, the political and business elites practically constitute the ruling class in Malaysia. Jomo refer to them as the statist-capitalist class.¹⁸⁴ In Singapore, the connection between the three groups is also strong albeit through its meritocracy system.¹⁸⁵ In fact, unlike the salary of the political executive in most of other countries, the ministerial pay is pegged to the salary of the top business elites in the state. Moreover, the migration between the elites in the three sectors of the ruling elite is a common practice in Singapore's elitism and technocratic system.

Despite a gross misuse and exploitation of state powers by the ruling class, large number of the population in both countries continuingly supported the same political regimes in their respective states since late 1950s. Many of them have positive views to their governments and have steadily provided their consent to the ruling class. Hegemony, both through force and intellectual control, plays a major role in building the positive worldview to the ruling class among the populace. As described above, various laws and policies were enacted by both political regimes in controlling the populace, civil society, political oppositions and the dissenting views, while at the same time "manufacturing" realities mainly through the manipulation of the state structures. Through such activity of control and the production of propaganda by the state agencies, the masses were swayed away from the real facts and were made believe the 'authorised' reality sanctioned by ruling class. For many Malaysians and Singaporeans for example, race been made to believe by the governments as a tangible issue in contrast to economics. Consequently, through this misinformation and misrepresentation of reality by the hegemons, consent from the masses is achievable and the masses are continuingly (re)constructed by the ruling class to function as their 'political subjects' in contrast to 'nation' albeit with the growing force of modernisation. The class

¹⁸³ Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, p. 158.

¹⁸⁴ K.S. Jomo, *A question of class : capital, the state, and uneven development in Malaya*, Monthly Review Press & Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, New York and Adelaide, 1988, p. 243.

¹⁸⁵ Michael D., Barr, *The ruling elite of Singapore: networks of power and influence*, I.B. Tauris and Palgrave Macmillan, London and New York, 2014, Chapter 7.

consciousness among the masses is thus effectively contained as many were trapped with the “false consciousness”¹⁸⁶ mainly from culturally-based ideology making them to become a “class in itself” rather than a “class for itself”.¹⁸⁷ This “hegemonic bloc”¹⁸⁸ has made possible for the UMNO and PAP regimes perpetuation in the history¹⁸⁹ of post-colonial Malaysia and Singapore.

Nation-building, from this perspective, therefore does not resonate with the general literature which is dominated by cultural perspectives. In the Malaysian and Singaporean context, the class element is more than, or at least equally significant with, the cultural element in the nation-building projects. The practice of crony capitalism in Malaysia and elitism in Singapore, which favours the selected few, is a prominent example of class element presence in both states’ nation-building projects. Thus, rather than seeing nation-building in both countries as a cultural project of building the nation, this thesis views the processes as political projects to build the subjects for the new class rule in post-colonial Malaysia and Singapore.

Objective of the Study

Nation-building in Malaysia and Singapore should not be assumed as nation-building per se, or only as a cultural matter, as both are the frontage rather than the essence of the state’s social modernisation project. On the contrary, nation-building in these authoritarian countries should be understood as a subject-building process, political and class matter, and as the state elites and ruling regime’s project to maintain and perpetuate their rule. By using this perspective, we can critically appreciate and appraise the volte-face, contradictions and inconsistencies in the states’ nation-building policies as it is not cultural motive that drives the elites’ direction in their national vision, but more political ones. It could better explain why the PAP regime adopted some pro-Malay policies before the merger with Malaya, abandoned the policies right after the separation from Malaysia, and later moved to Sinicise Singapore in the late 1970s – which is departs from what they had preached since the

¹⁸⁶ David Croteau and William Hoynes, *Media/Society: industries, images, and audiences*, Pine Forge Press, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, 2003, p. 164.

¹⁸⁷ Jon Elster, *Making sense of Marx*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 346.

¹⁸⁸ Philip Smith, *Cultural theory: an introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford and Carlton, 2004, p. 40.

¹⁸⁹ Gerald A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's theory of history: a defence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2000, p. 76.

establishment of PAP in 1954. It also could explain why the Malay nationalists in the ruling regime of UMNO and BN in Malaysia, who were ostensibly willing to do and give anything in the name of the community, yet from time to time did things which go against their own community at large.¹⁹⁰ Kelantan, for instance, which is one of the Malay-majority states, has always been denied proper budgets and development projects from the federal government since 1990 when voters in the state continue to support UMNO's old rival – Pan Malaysia Islamic Party (PAS).¹⁹¹ As a result, the state of Kelantan is politically made poor by the UMNO-controlled federal government. Furthermore, during the Mahathir years (1981 - 2003), many Malay-majority seats in the parliament had been transformed to mixed seats, by increasing the number of Chinese voters through re-delineation as there was growing Malay dissatisfaction towards Mahathir's government which partly originated from two internal clashes within UMNO in the late 1980s and late 1990s. The federal government thus, in these two occasions, clearly made its decisions on objective political motives, rather than subjective emotions, in weakening the Malay-majority constituencies as they are not perceived, at that time and space of history, simply as 'Malays', but more importantly as 'voters'.

Based on this premise, the nation-building projects in Malaysia and Singapore will be analysed, involving the process of revising and re-interpretation of past nation-building politics and policies and examination of contemporary history in the both countries. The study attempts to comprehend "the politics" behind the changing nation-building policy in both country. The main themes explored in this thesis are, how the nation-building projects in both countries are connected and personalised with class interests of their ruling elites; how state elections impacted nation-building politics; and how nation-building policies are enacted to build political loyalty or support among the ruled to the ruling elites. For these reasons, the main nation-building policies in Malaysia and Singapore will be scrutinised and examined eclectically, but mainly from the class perspective. Thus apart from the class theory, several other conceptual approaches such as 'situationalist' and revisionist will also be used pragmatically.

The decision to avail class perspective in approaching the subject matter is not to undermine or deny the merit of cultural approaches in the studies of nation-building. The

¹⁹⁰ 'Dr M: Malays now willing to kill for passage to heaven', *The Star*, 27 June 2014, viewed 13 October 2016, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2014/06/27/mahathir-mohamad-muslims-kill-to-go-to-heaven/>>.

¹⁹¹ See, Mohammad Agus Yusoff, *Malaysian federalism: conflict or consensus*, UKM Press, Bangi, 2006.

study aims to provide an alternative, if not complementary, perspective of the subject matter. The author is also hoping that, by doing this, the nation-building studies which are overwhelmingly dominated by cultural approaches, could be balanced and appreciated from other intellectual perspectives. It is peculiar to view a dearth of class and alternative perspectives in the studies of nation-building in the two countries, seeing that class perspectives are actually the dominant perspective in the studies of politics in both countries. In fact, even leading class analysis proponents in Malaysia, such as P. Ramasamy and Abdul Rahman Embong (see my reflections on their work at the early part of this chapter), were using cultural and ethnic perspectives when approaching the question of nation-building. This is probably due to the hegemonic, common-sense understanding that nation-building is purely a cultural matter and falls within the cultural domain. For these reasons, this thesis is undertaken to prove the otherwise and illustrate other possibilities. But this is not to say that the class analysis is superior to the cultural one in approaching the subject matter, or that the latter is wrong or insignificant. On the contrary, as mentioned earlier, the class perspective is used to provide an alternative and complementary understanding, thus balancing the theoretical dimension of nation-building studies, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore.

Methodology

The aspired intent of this study is to deliver an alternative perspective, particularly of class analysis (and eclectically with other perspectives), on the politics of nation-building in Malaysia and Singapore, which is predominantly echoed from the cultural dimension. For these reasons, a host of data-gathering and references would be included, ranging from historical reports, scholarly works and newspaper clippings (online and printed materials). This researcher also conducted several field trips in Malaysia (in 2010 and 2015) and Singapore (in 2010) in 2010. Throughout the trips, this researcher observed a number of local and national events, spoke to some members of the communities and non-governmental organisations, and interviewed a numbers of politicians, academicians and government servants.¹⁹² With the advent of internet technology, this thesis benefited much from internet research, particularly in obtaining online news reports for a contemporary analysis of Malaysia and Singapore.

¹⁹² Several interviews have been de-identified in accordance to Flinders University's ethic approval.

Malaysia and Singapore: A Brief Overview

Malaysia and Singapore are former British colonies in Southeast Asia. Peninsular Malaya achieved its independence in 1957 and was known as the Federation of Malaya. In 1963, with the inclusion of Singapore, North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sarawak, the federation is later known as Federation of Malaysia. Both of the ruling elites in Malaysia and Singapore had decided to remove Singapore from the Federation in August 1965.

Both states are practises the parliamentary system. The ruling coalition in Malaysia is known as the Barisan Nasional (BN) and in Singapore it is the People's Action Party (PAP). Both BN and PAP have never failed to be re-elected into power since 1955 and 1959 respectively.

The societies in the countries are multi-ethnic, where the Malays and the Chinese constitute the majority. The multi-racial character of the two countries is the by-product of colonial capitalism. Both countries are the top two economies in the Southeast Asian region.

The Organisation of the Study

In general, this study consists of eight chapters. This thesis is divided into four main parts. Part I is consists of two chapters: the introduction (Chapter 1) and the construction of a party-state system in Malaysia and Singapore (Chapter 2). Part II is the study of Malaysia and is also contained in two chapters. The first chapter (Chapter 3) is the analysis of the politics of nation-building in Malaysia from Tunku Abdul Rahman's administration until Abdullah Badawi. Then, in Chapter 4, analysis of the politics of nation-building under the current Prime Minister Najib Razak is made out. The analysis of Singapore's politics of nation-building is sketched in Part III which stretches over three chapters. The study of the Lee Kuan Yew years is in Chapter 5, Goh Chok Tong in Chapter 6 and Lee Hsien Loong in Chapter 7. Part IV is the conclusion (Chapter 8).

Conclusion

The nation-building studies of Malaysia and Singapore, as surveyed in this chapter, have too long been dominated by the cultural analysis. While there is nothing wrong with such a trend, it may hinder the thinking and reflecting on nation-building from a different perspective. This thesis strives to fill in the lacuna in the theoretical perspective of nation-building by appreciating and appraising the process not only as a cultural project, but more importantly, as a class project as well. The researcher humbly hopes that such an attempt would assist in the apprehending of the nation-building project from another theoretical dynamics – that is, of class.

CHAPTER 2

The Construction of the Party-State System in Parliamentary Democracies

As the name suggests, a “state-building” process can be conceptually differentiated from a “nation-building” project. The latter has more to do with the construction of a perceived obvious distinction in the cultural content (the nation) of a population within a political territory. Nation-building is a rather abstract project, subjective in nature and thus can be a long and arduous task for political leaders around the world. On the other hand, state-building is the process of making the physical infrastructure and power structures of a state - a political organisation within a sovereign political territory. The process is thus more direct and objective. In many cases, like the former colonial territories, the state structure precedes the existence of the nation. In fact, it is the state, such as in the cases of the United States (U.S.), Canada, and Australia, that make and remake the cultural content of its nation. In this sense, the state functions as political tool to build the nation. In the U.S., the state decided to shape its population based on the “melting-pot”¹ idea—nation-making based on the notion of cultural homogeneity in its population. In Canada and Australia, both states practice the politics of multiculturalism,² thus the characters of their constructed “nations” are much more heterogeneous. However, the Anglo culture is more supreme than other cultures in their political territories (in contrast to, for example, the French culture in Canada and the Aboriginal culture in Australia), as it was chosen to function as the integrative component and the lingua franca among the culturally different populations, besides the fact that it was also a byproduct of British colonialism in both states.

Nevertheless, state-building and nation-building can conceptually and practically be merged through the state’s nationalisation project, or, conversely, the state itself nationalises. The latter occurs when the political elite attempts to “nationalise” the character of the state, which could make the state into an ethnocultural one like the cases of Japan and Thailand. The former is often when the elites of a majority ethnocultural community control the state structure in a given political territory, using the state to nationalise their culture as the “national culture” in the country—such as in several Eastern European states including

¹ See, Nathan Glazer, and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the melting pot; The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1963.

² See, Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship: a liberal theory of minority rights*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995.

Romania (the Romanian ethnics against the Hungarians in the country), Hungary (Hungarians against Romanians) and Slovakia (the Slovaks against the Czechs).³ These are among the main notions behind the idea of “nation-state” —the hyphen equates the meaning of political organisation of sovereign territory with the cultural content of its population, leading to unification and division of states based on their perceived “national” similarities and differences. The unification of West Germany with East Germany and the separation of Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s are vital reference points.

This chapter’s analysis on state-building in post-colonial Malaysia and Singapore is principally based on the idea of separating state-building from nation-building, as explicated in the first paragraph. This is partly to appreciate the process of state-building in both countries more fully, as the examination of nation-building projects in Malaysia and Singapore will be done in the succeeding chapters. However, a full separation between the state-building process and the nation-building project in Malaysia and Singapore is rather unfeasible as both states are known for their ethnonational characteristics. The Malaysian state is dominated by Malay culture since its independence in 1957, whereas Chinese characteristics in the Singaporean state became much more salient since the late 1970s. Hence, certain parts of this chapter’s discussion will reflect these dynamics.

This chapter revolves around the nature and process of the state-building in Malaysia and Singapore. As the state has the “monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force”,⁴ regime change has been skilfully dodged by the ruling elites in Malaysia and Singapore through the use, exploitation, and manipulation of their states’ powers. The ruling elites in both states have successfully “occupied” and controlled government by merging the ruling-party structures with the state structures, thus enabling the creation of the party-state system in democratic countries. Despite their countries’ democratic organisation as laid out by their constitutions, the politics of the Malaysian and Singaporean governments since the late 1950s have evolved not towards democratisation, but more towards, if I might suggest, “authoritarianisation”, that is, the route opposite to democratisation. Authoritarianisation in Malaysia and Singapore, or their state-building processes, centred on creating a party-state system, enlarging the legal and extra-legal powers of the state-cum-ruling elite, and establishing the supremacy of the Executive. The main argument of this chapter is that the structure and function of the state in Malaysia and Singapore have been shaped and reshaped

³ Rogers Brubaker, ‘National minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands in the New Europe’, *Daedalus*, vol. 124, no. 2, Spring 1995, pp. 107-132.

⁴ Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge, Oxon, 2005, p. 78.

by the ruling elites in the direction of class rule, that is, towards the perpetuation of the ruling regimes.

The Post-Colonial Polities: Consolidation of the New Ruling Class, Emergence of the Party-State System and the Hegemonic Bloc

Many scholarly works on the Malaysian and Singaporean political systems incline to take the states' independence days, coinciding with the enforcement of their constitutions,⁵ as the foundational period of their analysis in characterising the nature of the states.⁶ Therefore, the historical relations and dynamism between the pre-independence and post-independence Malaysia and Singapore in terms of their legal-political practices does not seem well appreciated. While it is true the nature of the polities since their independence increasingly moved towards authoritarianism, it is somewhat simplistic to refer to the nature of the states as originally democratic based simply on the enactment of their constitutions. In fact, not only do the constitutions themselves confer certain authoritarian powers to the Executives, but the supremacy of the constitutions vis-à-vis the Executives' power is not beyond question as certain constitutional rights and provisions are subject to various laws that are essentially dictated by governments.

Therefore, although the constitutions do structurally recognise certain modern and democratic components in governance, their true nature is more ambiguous as they also preserve some components of the pre-independence authoritarian political structures and practices. During the British colonialism, authoritarian measures, through various state institutions, have been arbitrarily used to quell political challenges posed by opponents to the ruling elites, who discursively framed these dissidents as a threat against the states. The same system is inherited by the Alliance/BN and the PAP from the British - a power configuration that proved effective in preserving the colonial regime and its interests. In this context, certain democratic components provided by the newly-introduced constitutions upon

⁵ See, Federal Constitution of Malaya 1957 (Malaysia 1963) and Republic of Singapore Constitution 1965.

⁶ Harold Crouch, *Government and society in Malaysia*, Singapore: Talisman, 1996; William Case, 'Semi-democracy in Malaysia: withstanding pressures for regime change', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 6 no.2, 1993, pp. 183 – 205; Karl von Vorys, *Democracy without consensus: communalism and political stability in Malaysia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975; Thomas J. Bellows, *The People's Action Party of Singapore: the emergence of a dominant party system*, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, New Haven, 1973; Chan Heng Chee, *The dynamics of one party dominance: The PAP at the Grass-Roots*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1976; Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore politics under the People's Action Party*, Routledge, New York, 2002.

independence inevitably became highly-potential sources of political challenge and regime change. Thus the constitutions, which the British hoped would undergird fuller democracy in Malaya/Malaysia and Singapore, were gradually redefined by the ruling elites to reduce their “political threat” to these regimes. Simultaneously, these ruling elites pragmatically increased the powers of government and thus of themselves, along the course of political history in both states.

The above forms two major aspects of state-building in Malaysia and Singapore, which then served as the structural framework for their states’ nation-building projects. These political projects can be referred to as “authoritarianisation”, that is, the reverse route of democratisation. While the state authoritarianisation process has many dimensions, the three most important are:

1. the construction of a dominant party-state;
2. the production of a pervasive network of the quasi-political legal system as well as its enforcement agencies; and
3. the monopolisation and near-centralisation of the state powers by the Executive, thus overshadowing the supremacy of the constitution with the supremacy of the Executive.

These processes are not mutually exclusive but are interrelated, with parts of the processes taking place within the same period. State authoritarianism is one of the major contributors to the *Alliance/Barisan Nasional* (BN) and the PAP regimes’ political resilience in Malaysia and Singapore. Note that there are various similarities (as well as differences) of legal-political frameworks between the Federal Constitution of Malaysia and the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, as both were products of British colonialism and constituted the same political unit in 1963 before separation in 1965.⁷ Thus, despite some noticeable differences, they generally share many common features that this section will focus on. Nevertheless, details will be provided in certain aspects to demonstrate certain specifics of each state.

The colonisation and party-nisation of the structures of government and state by the ruling parties’ elites were among the first projects strategically undertaken by the Alliance

⁷ Singapore was also separated from Malaya from 1945 to 1963 (following the Malayan Union’s establishment) before it joined the Federation on 16 September 1963.

and the PAP once they assumed the executive offices in their respective states in 1955 and 1959. In Singapore, the “hostile”⁸ civil service was reconfigured by the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew’s PAP government through the “mental revolution”⁹ programmes, alongside the replacement and promotion of a group of “younger local men” as the new “stewards that have loyally served the political leadership, and remained in the service, albeit with new special financial perks”.¹⁰ These mental revolution programmes were implemented by the Political Study Centre for the Civil Service, established soon after the PAP came to government in 1959 to “enable the civil servants to learn something of the values and aspirations of the political leadership”.¹¹ In Lee’s opinion, the government and civil service cannot “think in different concepts and talk a different language” as both institutions “have vested interest in the survival of democratic state” and their tasks “for the next five years are the same”.¹² This clearly indicates the intention of Lee (and his group in the PAP) to render the civil service a partisan, subordinate, and loyal political tool for the PAP. As the power base of Lee’s group in the PAP was weak, Lee was pushed to reorganise his power base in the government structures—not only in confronting the external, but more importantly the internal challenges primarily posed by Lim Chin Siong’s group. In 1962, following the departure of Lim’s group and a majority of PAP members, as well as the shutting down of many of its local branches to *Barisan Sosialis*, Lee’s cabinet effectively functioned as the “Supreme Council” of the PAP, whereby party aspirations intertwined various agendas of the government. The government practically became the *de facto* organisation of the dominant party elites, utilising the party’s visions, plans, and political programmes as tools for the party to reach the people. This near-assimilation between party and government structures later saw the leaders’ positions in the party as essential overlaps with Cabinet positions.¹³ As supreme leader of the PAP, the secretary-general would be the Prime Minister. Most members of the party supreme council, the Central Executive Committee (CEC), occupied significant positions in the cabinet. This move was not only effective in building partisan and subservient civil servants, but also shielded Lee from any future pressure from his own party.

⁸ This is essentially the PAP’s perspective to some degree of the independence of some bureaucrats and institutions. See, for example, Chan Heng Chee, *The Dynamics of One Party Dominant: The PAP at the Grass-roots*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976, p. 20.

⁹ Seah Chee Meow, *Bureaucratic evolution and political change in an emerging nation: a case study of Singapore*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Faculty of Economics and Social Studies, Victoria University, Manchester, 1971, pp. 86-89.

¹⁰ Chan Heng Chee, *The dynamics of one party dominant*, p.22. Ibid., p. 202.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹² See, text of speech by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at the official opening of the Civil Service Political Study Centre, August 15, 1959.

¹³ Mauzy and Milne, *Singapore politics under the People’s Action Party* p. 40.

Accordingly, the “non-governmental” or actual part of the party essentially became more symbolic. It stayed alive primarily as a vehicle and political identity for the government to contest in elections.¹⁴

These same practices also occurred in Malaysia. Unlike the PAP however, the political parties, particularly UMNO, have remained important. Some national policies are first discussed by the parties before being presented to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet for consideration. In fact, it is common for the Prime Minister himself or a Cabinet member, as supreme leaders in the governing party, to announce the state’s programmes or plans in the annual party assembly.¹⁵ The “administrators” in the UMNO-led Alliance, led by a Malay prince, Tunku Abdul Rahman, did not face much difficulty in depicting the ruling party (and its supreme elites) as the state. After centuries of feudalism and colonialism with highly-centralised powers in the hands of the rulers, and with the practically powerless position of the *rakyat* (literally, “the subjects” or “the people”)¹⁶, the idea of a political boundary separating the ruling party and the state was alien to many sections of the populace, especially among the Malay ethnic majority in Malaya/Malaysia. Indeed, competitions for party positions, except for supreme posts at certain times, are very intense as they determine (though not always) the contestants’ eventual positions in the government.

Given the extraordinary powers conferred to the Executive through the Emergency Regulations and other draconian laws, alongside political practices inherited from colonialism and feudalism, the line differentiating the structure of governments/states from the organisation of the ruling elites/parties was already blurred to begin with. In this context, the development of democracy in these states is highly contingent on the willingness of the dominant party elites, and to a certain extent, the people at large, to realise such an ideal.¹⁷ The elites’ aspiration to maintain the status quo, including their powers and positions, have

¹⁴ See, Bellows, *The People’s Action Party of Singapore*, Chapter 2.

¹⁵ For example, the recent state ideology, 1Malaysia, was announced by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak in the 2009 UMNO Annual Assembly before it was brought to the Cabinet and the Parliament.

¹⁶ I have argued elsewhere that it is not quite right to simply equate the *rakyat* with the people, at least until the Mahathir years. In political terms, up to that period, *rakyat* was associated with being powerless, weak, and despicable in relation to the rulers. They were expected to show their undivided loyalty to their rulers by doing whatever was decreed to them, without question. Rather than the concept of “the people” with its connotation of power, *rakyat* better resembles the concept (or term) of “subject” or “follower”. Nevertheless, after the 2008 Malaysian General Election, the connection between the term *rakyat* and “the people” has gained much currency. In fact, the new opposition pact in Malaysia between PAS, PKR, and DAP adopted the name *Pakatan Rakyat* (the People’s Coalition) partly to acknowledge the greater role played by the people in determining the future of their nation-state. See Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, ‘Hegemoni dalam konstruksi budaya politik melayu: satu analisis’ (The hegemonic construction of the Malay political culture: an analysis), Unpublished Master Thesis, National University of Malaysia, 2007.

¹⁷ Interview with P. Ramasamy, Deputy Chief Minister II Penang, 29 June 2010,

led them to reverse the development of democracy, as democracy is perceived as a source of political challenge to their rule. The ruling elites' supremacy in the government structure, and the continued electoral successes of the Alliance/BN and the PAP since independence, have in time produced a dominant worldview that the ruling elites and the government are not only inseparable, but more importantly, constitute one and the same entity. Through this successful political project of party-state making, the ruling elites' positions are consolidated as the powers, interests, and operation of the states are virtually interconnected with and dictated by the elites.

This structural assimilation between the dominant party and the government/state brings certain profound repercussions. Firstly, public employment is discursively defined by the party-state as not only an employment with the state, but also with the party.¹⁸ Hence, government servants and governmental organisations are expected to be partisan in tandem with their original governmental functions, since the party is considered (or at least part of) the state. In the government-sanctioned hegemonic discourse, their loyalty to the state implicitly requires them to be loyal to the party, or at least to not openly oppose the party. Work professionalism, or political neutrality, of public servants and organisations is defined by the party-state as undivided support and obedience to the party or government-of-the-day (read: the dominant party elites).¹⁹ To preserve these practices, the upper echelons of government institutions tend to be conferred to loyalists,²⁰ especially in strategic institutions. Furthermore, every single government department—except, to a certain extent, the judicial branch—is placed under the power or direct order of the Prime Minister or a Minister. This relationship between the Executive and bureaucrats is virtually top-down, whereby bureaucrats (in Malaysia, they are usually called the *kakitangan* (hands and legs) of the government) usually have limited rights and have to follow the order from “above” without question. On the compliant character of the Malaysian civil service towards its political master, Saifuddin Nasution, the then Vice-President of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR, literally “People’s Justice

¹⁸ Interview with Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia Chief Opposition, 16 April, 2010.

¹⁹ Statement by HRH the Sultan of Pahang, Sultan Ahmad Syah, ‘Penjawat awam mesti berkecuali’ (Public servants must be neutral), *Utusan Malaysia*, 4 October 2011.

²⁰ Barry Wain, *The Malaysian maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in turbulence times*, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, 2009, Chapter 3.

Party”), remarked that the Malaysian police have a “weak heart” in disobeying any directions from “above”.²¹

To inculcate and propagate the “party-state” consciousness among civil servants in Malaysia, certain courses and examinations are made compulsory for staff training and job promotions. This is implemented by certain government training institutions such as the *Biro Tata Negara* (BTN, National Civic Bureau) in Malaysia and the Civil Service College in Singapore. This process requires public servants to know and to equip themselves with the ruling parties’ agenda and policies, as this “knowledge” will be tested in examinations for their employment confirmation and promotions.

In maintaining “party discipline” among public servants, rules are imposed to structure their loyalty or compliance to the party-state. Any public servant identified or “captured” as being involved with the opposition(s) is usually penalised by his or her department.²² This may include a show-cause letter, being summoned to the disciplinary board, warnings, harassments, being transferred out (especially to rural areas), or even contract termination and dismissal. The Mahathir administration (1981–2003) introduced an *Akujanji* (literally, “I promise”) that made it compulsory for every public servant to be loyal under oath effectively to the party-state, in light of growing challenges to the regime posed by the late-1990s *Reformasi* movement. The underlying myth justifying this action was that civil servants should be thankful to the party-state because it has “conferred” them the opportunity to work with the government and thus has contributed to their well-being. Being with or supporting the opposition, which is discursively constructed by the party-state as “the enemy of the state”,²³ is considered as an act of disloyalty and ungratefulness that warrants stern action.

Consequently and over time, government agencies have practically become the instruments of the ruling class, though their original role as public institutions for the people remains.²⁴ Thus, some government agencies play a dual role: they are not neutral state agencies that merely serve the people’s interest, but they also serve the interest of their political masters. In searching for suitable election candidates, BN has openly relied on

²¹ Saifuddin Nasution applied for a permit to conduct political talks in a district of Selangor in 2011. His application was rejected by the Chief of the Police of the District not because of any irregularity, but because he received an order from “above” to not allow Saifuddin and PKR to conduct such talks.

²² Interview with a high-ranking officer in the Ministry of Sports and Youth Malaysia, Bangi, 18 April 2010.

²³ Nadzri’s interview with Salehudin Ayub, Vice President of PAS, 8 April 2010.

²⁴ Nurul Izzah Anwar, Member of Parliament of Lembah Pantai, 4 Mac 2010.

information, intelligence, and analysis provided by the Police Department or its Special Branch, the Military Intelligence Agency, the Ministry of Information, and several other government agencies,²⁵ apart from party resources.²⁶ The Special Branch is expected to provide the party-state elites with pre-election as well as post-election intelligence and analyses on the prospects and performance of BN and the opposition in every electoral district.²⁷ This too is believed to be the practice of the PAP government in Singapore. Indeed, during election season, the Alliance/BN and the PAP blatantly utilise government properties and agencies in their campaigning programmes.²⁸ For example, the Ministry of Communication and Information's assets, such as television and radio broadcasting, are used arbitrarily to campaign for the ruling parties, with little or no space given to the opposition.²⁹ There is also a routine tendency for both ruling parties to announce certain government projects and distribute certain government allocations to voters during elections. Voters are also often reminded that if they do not support the ruling party, their future state allocations may be affected.³⁰ In the words of the current Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak, "If you help me (read: BN), I (read: the state) will help you".³¹ During the 1997 General Election in Singapore, the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong reminded the voters:

If they choose the People's Action Party, their neighbourhood will be improved. Their children will benefit from schemes, like the Edusave merit bursaries, and elderly will be taken care of. If they do not vote for the PAP, they will not get these programmes and their families and estates will be left behind while others progress.³²

The quasi-partisan role of some government agencies unavoidably causes certain biases as an agency may be rendered political in high-profile issues. The Attorney General's

²⁵ Interview with a special branch officer in Sabah, Kota Kinabalu, 21 July 2010.

²⁶ Khairy Jamaluddin, The UMNO Chief of Youth Closing Speech at UMNO General Assembly 2011, viewed 30 December 2011, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGU0LWUjHUI>>.

²⁷ Informal discussion with Special Branch Officer, Kuala Lumpur, 8 June 2010.

²⁸ Observation during the 13th Malaysia General Election, involving site visits in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Pahang, 25 April 2013 to 5 May 2013.

²⁹ Mark R. Thompson, 'Why democracy does not always follow economic ripeness?', in Yossi Shain and Aharon Klieman, *Democracy: The challenge ahead*, Mac Millan Press and St. Martin Press, Basingstoke and New York, 1997, p. 67.

³⁰ In reminding the voter of an electoral district to support the PAP in the 1997 Singapore General Election for their HDB houses' upgrading, the then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong stated, "In 20, 30 years' time, the whole of Singapore will be bustling away, and your estate, through your own choice, will be left behind. They become slums", viewed 30 December 2011, <<http://www.singaporedemocrat.org/telling.html>>.

³¹ Najib Razak's speech to the Sarawakian voters in the 2010 Sibuan By-Elections, 'Najib tells Sibuan: You help me, I help you', *Malaysiakini*, 12 May 2010, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/131646>>.

³² Quoted from Sumiko Tan by Jean Larson Pyle, 'Economic development, housing and the family: is the Singapore approach an appropriate model?', Irene Tinker and Gale Summerfield (eds.), *Women's rights to house and land: China, Laos, Vietnam*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder and London, 1999, pp.27-55.

Chamber, the Royal Malaysian Police, and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (formerly the Anti-Corruption Agency) in Malaysia have been criticised for their selective enforcement in certain politically-connected cases. Such cases include former Chief Minister of Sarawak Taib Mahmood's wealth and the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) scandal. The three agencies are criticised as impotent and unable to initiate any serious investigation into the powerful elites. When there are grounds for investigating a certain politician, critics' claim that the party-state elites decide "upstairs" whether they want the politician to be investigated and prosecuted.³³ Indeed, the police and the Anti-Corruption Commission have in several occasions have attempted to acquit the alleged politicians even before the NFC scandal was placed under investigation.³⁴ Another case involves the defection of Yong Teck Lee, former Chief Minister of Sabah (1996 to 1998), and his party, the Sabah Progressive Party (SPP), from BN several months after the 2008 General Elections. A few weeks after his defection, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) officers were despatched to probe his alleged malpractices during his tenure as Chief Minister—more than ten years before he left BN. In Singapore, moneyed corruption among the ruling class is rare, partly due to the PAP's own policy of anti-corruption (read: monetary), and partly because their political elites are well-paid at the highest rate in the world.³⁵

This structural party-state assimilation gives the ruling class pervasive influence over the governmental structure for various functions and at various levels. For the function of political control and surveillance, law enforcement agencies assist the party-state at the national and state levels. Para-political organisations, regarded by the ruling class as "the eyes and ears" of the government, have greatly backed the party-state at the local level. Important local-level organisations in Malaysia include the *Jawatankuasa Kebajikan dan Keselamatan Kampung* (JKKK, literally the Village Council for Security and Welfare) that

³³ Partly to maintain an image of justice and democracy, party-state elites would allow, or feel compelled, to allow an investigation to be initiated, but it is not unusual for there to be no further action. Rafizi Rahmad, the Chief Strategist of PKR who brought the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) scandal to the public, argued that—upon seeing the investigation officer from the Police Department—the police have good grounds to open an investigation, but it is up to those "upstairs", the political masters, to permit the police to proceed, viewed 20 January 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iujunPwBmE&feature=context&context=G26579b3FAAAAAAAAAABAA>>.

³⁴ In a press statement, the then Deputy Inspector General of Police Dato' Sri Khalid Abu Bakar said, "...up to now we did not find any element of breach of trust. Nevertheless, we are still conducting a full investigation". He made this statement several days after the police conducted a probe into the NFC scandal for alleged misuse of public funds amounting RM 250 million. See, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 22 January 2012, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/182896>>.

³⁵ 'Singapore pols top best-paid', 5 January 2012, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.news.com.au/world/leaders-salaries-sliced/news-story/c72a46254eebc283232c46f1f1ec9e3b>>.

are usually established at Malay residential areas, especially in villages or in rural areas.³⁶ The appointment of JKKK heads is political in nature. JKKK heads are usually UMNO heads of branches and/or the village headmen in BN-controlled states. To operate, the JKKKs receive funds from the state or federal governments; in fact, JKKK heads each receive a monthly allowance from the government. Besides welfare services, JKKKs perform various party functions, particularly public outreach on behalf of the party-state through social events.³⁷ More importantly, JKKKs conduct political surveillance and intelligence work in their areas. Such work includes determining the political leaning of individuals or households, whether white (BN supporters), black (opposition supporters) or grey (fence-sitters); identifying current issues affecting the locals; reporting on the opposition's activities and clout in their areas; and gauging their communities' approval of BN and of opposition leaders at the local and national levels. Such is the importance of these organisations that when BN for the first time lost four states in Peninsular Malaysia to the opposition (Penang, Perak, Selangor and Kedah) in the 2008 General Elections,³⁸ a similar organisation was established. Referred to as the *Jawatankuasa Kebajikan dan Keselamatan Kampung Persekutuan* (JKKKP, literally the Village Federal Council for Security and Welfare), this new organisation was set up primarily to preserve the JKKKs' functions. The JKKKs themselves were taken over by *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR)-nominated members since the power to appoint the head and council members is held by each state's Chief Minister. As their name suggests, the JKKKPs receive funding for their operations mainly from the federal government.

Para-political organisations in Singapore include the Citizen's Consultative Council Committees, Residents' Committees, People's Associations, and Management Committees of Community Centres. All are "linked to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as the nerve-centre".³⁹ They serve various party functions, such as being "middle persons" between the local community and the government, and mobilising local support for the government—not unlike BN's JKKK and JKKKP in Malaysia. However, they are actually government

³⁶ In more urban and mixed residential areas, the *Rukun Tetangga* (RT, literally the Neighbourhood/Residents Society) typically performs similar functions to the JKKKs.

³⁷ Interview with Nazri Aziz, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, 12 April 2010.

³⁸ The state of Perak was recaptured by BN about eleven months after the 2008 General Elections through the party-hopping of several PR assemblypersons into BN.

³⁹ Mauzy and Milne, *Singapore politics under the People's Action Party*, p. 43.

associations and thus have “served to blur the line between government and the party, which has not been discouraged by the PAP”.⁴⁰

Through their dominance over state structures, the party-state elites have gradually strengthened their power against the institutional and societal checks and balances. At the institutional level, the power of the state has been almost-monopolised and centralised into the hands of the Executive. At the societal level, democratic freedoms have been reduced to the point where public space and discourse are essentially dictated by the elites. A key component in the ruling class’s ability to consolidate its political position is the practice of “partisanship” or party discipline in the legislature. Every Alliance/BN and PAP Member of Parliament or Assemblyperson (in Malaysia) is required to support every single proposal put forth by the government in the legislatures. Refusal to do so would lead to punishment by the Prime Minister. Given that it is dominated by a compliant and partisan two-thirds majority (in Malaysia except in 1969, 2008 and 2013 General Elections), Parliament has effectively lost its significance as the highest body of law and decision-making. Indeed, owing to such practices, some critics dismiss Parliament as merely a “rubber stamp” institution for the Executive’s decisions. Given the Executive’s supremacy over Parliament, laws (or their sections) are enacted, repealed, and amended with the fundamental aim of empowering the Executive, particularly with regards to institutional constraints and societal challenges. Hence, the party-state elites rule with ever-increasing powers in the name of the law (its supremacy and fairness), even though parts of the law ostensibly contravene justice and democratic ideals. A situation of rule-by-law, rather than rule-of-law, is thereby established.

At the institutional level, virtually all government agencies are under the authority of the Executive, particularly the Prime Minister’s Department (in Malaysia) or Office (in Singapore). This includes agencies in charge of security, law and order, prosecution, finance, taxation, elections, and anticorruption. For example, the Election Commissions (ECs) have been repeatedly criticised for alleged bias against the opposition, especially concerning gerrymandering and malapportionment. Re-delimitations of electoral boundaries almost invariably advantage the ruling party. The secret behind such practices is that the ECs were never independent bodies, unlike their counterparts in other democracies. For instance, the immediate past Chairman of the Election Commission of Malaysia, Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Abdul Rasyid, stated that “the Election Commission only has half of the power or jurisdiction

⁴⁰ Ibid.

in administrating the state's election. Another half belongs to the police and several other government departments and ministries".⁴¹ Every election proposal made by the Commission, including the re-delimitation of electoral boundaries, must be submitted to the Prime Minister's Department (PMD) to amended and approved before being tabled to the Parliament for "stamping". Thus, Abdul Rahman contends, the "Commission should not be solely held responsible for any weakness or irregularity of the election system due to its lack of power" and independence in governing the state election.⁴² He added, "The EC does not make law, rather it is just following what is stated in the enacted law, as instructed. If the law is as stupid as cow, so is the institution (and its practices)".⁴³ In such an electoral system, the opposition not only contends against the dominant parties, but also against the regulatory system as a whole. Nonetheless, the opposition in Malaysia has won many seats and even controlled several states in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah (in the second half of the 1980s under *Parti Bersatu Sabah*), likely due to growing political divisions among the electorate.⁴⁴ Neither has Singapore's Election Department escaped allegations of submission to the ruling-party elites—for instance, the introduction of Group Representation Constituencies in 1988 clearly favoured the PAP over its opponents.⁴⁵

Therefore, in the strong-state model of "parliamentary democracy" in Malaysia and Singapore, the last bastion of constitutional integrity and democratic freedom is the judiciary. Although judicial powers have been curtailed by certain laws, the Malaysian judiciary was renowned for upholding justice before the Mahathir administration (1981 to 2003). Various rulings not in favour of the government have been made. While the independence of the judiciary was respected by the first three Prime Ministers of Malaysia—Tunku Abdul Rahman (1957 to 1971), Tun Abdul Razak Hussein (1971 to 1976) and Tun Hussein Onn (1976 to 1981) - the fourth Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamed, perceived judicial independence as working against democracy, as it continually bothered the affairs of his popularly-elected administration. In his words, judicial independence is "fierce" as they

⁴¹ Abdul Rahman Abdul Rashid, in a forum organised by the Kelantan State Government on 'Clean and Fair Election in the 13th Malaysia General Election: Reality of Illusion?' in Kota Bahru on 12 January 2012, viewed 18 January 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaAGpsMFVvw>>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Parti Bersatu Sabah (literally, "Sabah United Party") was one of the most influential opposition parties in the 1980s led by Datuk Dr Joseph Pairin Kitingan. Nevertheless, due to certain developments, PBS joined BN in the early 1990s.

⁴⁵ Jason Lim, 'The Political Opposition and Its Protracted Journey towards a Two-Party System', Jason Lim and Terence Lee (eds.), *Singapore: Negotiating State and Society, 1965-2015*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2016, Chapter 3.

“often bend over backwards to award decisions in favour of those challenging the government”.⁴⁶ A clash ensued between the Executive led by Mahathir, and the Supreme Court led by Tun Salleh Abbas (the then Lord President, now referred to as Chief Justice). Salleh Abbas was subsequently charged, before a Special Commission, with malpractice in discharging his duties as Lord President. He was found guilty and sacked in 1988. Five other senior judges who actively supported his cause were also penalised. Two were sacked while the others were suspended. After Salleh’s dismissal, some appointments to Lord President/Chief Justice appeared political or politically-linked. Tun Abdul Hamid Omar, one of the panellists in Salleh Abbas’s trial, succeeded Salleh Abbas immediately after the dismissal. Tun Mohamed Eusoff Chin, who succeeded Abdul Hamid in 1994, was criticised for having close relations with Mahathir. One of Mahathir’s former lawyers, V.K. Lingam, allegedly influenced Mahathir to appoint Tun Ahmad Fairuz Abdul Halim as Chief Justice in 2003.⁴⁷ In rather indirect recognition of the injustices faced by Salleh Abbas and his senior justices, Mahathir’s successor, Abdullah Badawi made ex-gratia payments to the judges in 2008.⁴⁸ The appointment of Zaki Azmi, a longstanding UMNO lawyer and Disciplinary Board Legal advisor, as Chief Justice in 2008 by Abdullah’s administration courted controversy as he had less than three years’ experience as senior justice. A candidate for Chief Justice may undergo tight political screening, and even a personal meeting or interview, before he or she is appointed to the post.⁴⁹

While Singapore has no such case of a Chief Justice being sacked by the Executive,⁵⁰ several top appointments in the city-state’s judiciary have been criticised for political or personal links. Among the most controversial is the appointment of Lee Kuan Yew’s old-time

⁴⁶ Mahathir Mohamed, quoted by Ho Khai Leong, ‘The Political and Administrative Frames: Challenges and Reforms under Mahathir Administration’ in Ho Khai Leong and James Chin (eds.), *Mahathir’s Administration: Performance and Crisis in Governance*, Times Book International, Singapore, 2001, p. 14.

⁴⁷ In the V.K. Lingam scandal, a lawyer, believed to be V.K. Lingam, was caught on a mobile-phone video camera, allegedly talking to senior justice Tun Ahmad Fairuz on influencing the then Prime Minister Mahathir for his elevation (and that of several others) to the top positions in the judiciary. See, ‘Malaysian Bar: V.K. Lingam no longer a lawyer’, *The Star*, viewed 20 November 2015, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/11/20/vk-lingam-disbarred/>>.

⁴⁸ ‘Zaid presents ex-gratia payment to Salleh, Azmi’, *The Sun Daily*, 20 June 2008, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.thesundaily.my/node/165254>>.

⁴⁹ Tun Abdul Hamid Mohamad, the former Chief Justice of Malaysia (2007–2008), stated in my personal interview with him that he was called by the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, before he was appointed by the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong* (the King) as Chief Justice on the advice of the Prime Minister. During the meeting, one of the questions asked was “I heard you are Anwar’s man, aren’t you?”. One of the landmark judicial decisions made by Abdul Hamid while in service was when he acquitted Anwar Ibrahim of sodomy in 2004. Putrajaya. 7 August 2010.

⁵⁰ Other than Salleh Abbas, there are only two cases in the world where Chief Justices have been dismissed: Pakistan in 2007 and Fiji in 2009.

friend Yong Pung How as Chief Justice—the highest official in the judiciary that, in a democracy, checks the powers of the Executive, then helmed by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew himself. Yong’s sudden appointment to the highest judicial post was shocking as he had no experience in the judiciary prior to his appointment. In fact, he was serving Lee’s government in the Executive body and in government-linked companies since 1982.⁵¹ In asking Yong to become Chief Justice in 1989 (Lee was looking for a new Chief Justice at that time), Lee’s own words were, “I hope your answer will be yes because you have done nothing for Singapore!”⁵² When Yong replied asking what then is he supposed to do, Lee stressed, “Become Chief Justice! Just clean up the whole thing, you know what to do”.⁵³ As the nature of Yong’s appointment clearly contravened the legal dictum of “*not only must justice be done, it must also be seen to be done*”,⁵⁴ the judiciary’s complaisance to the Executive during Yong’s tenure from 1990 to 2006 is unsurprising. After all, Lee Kuan Yew was one of Yong’s “oldest friends” and former “boss”, and the one who personally appointed him as Chief Justice. Before his appointment, Yong had “done nothing for Singapore [read: PAP]” and was expected to “clean up the whole thing”.⁵⁵ Under Yong’s lordship, the courts became an effective tool in weakening the opposition, largely through defamation suits and libel cases. During Yong’s administration and even to date, the PAP has never lost a defamation action against their opponents.⁵⁶ In the words of American academic Christopher Lingle in his article, *The smoke over parts of Asia obscures some profound concerns*⁵⁷ the government has “relied upon compliant judiciary to bankrupt opposition politicians”.⁵⁸ After publishing these reflections in the *International Herald Tribune*, both Lingle and the paper were sued by Lee Kuan Yew. Lee won the case; the publisher was ordered to pay almost \$700,000 in damages to Lee.⁵⁹ Among the PAP’s biggest contemporary opponents who have

⁵¹ Yong Pung How, ‘How I became Chief Justice’, *The Straits Times*, 20 March 2016, viewed 22 March 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/how-i-became-chief-justice>>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *R v Sussex Justices*, Ex parte McCarthy ([1924] 1 KB 256, [1923] All ER Rep 233).

⁵⁵ Yong Pung How, ‘How I became Chief Justice’, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jonathan Woodier, *The media and political change in Southeast Asia: karaoke culture and the evolution of the personality politics*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham and Northampton, 2008, p. 226.

⁵⁷ Christopher Lingle, ‘The smoke over parts of Asia obscures some profound concerns’ *International Herald Tribune*, no 7, 1994.

⁵⁸ Christopher Lingle, 1994, quoted in Stephan Ortmann, *Politics and Change in Singapore and Hong Kong: Containing Contention*, Routledge, London and New York, 2010, p. 72.

⁵⁹ ‘Paper to Pay \$214,285 in Singapore Libel Case’, *The New York Times*, 29 November 1995, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/11/29/world/paper-to-pay-214285-in-singapore-libel-case.html>>. See also, Garry Rodan, *Transparency and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Asia: Singapore and Malaysia*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004, p. 32.

been politically crushed through this modus operandi are J.B. Jeyaratnam in 2001⁶⁰ and Chee Soon Juan in 2006.⁶¹ Due to such action, Jeyaratnam lost his membership in Parliament, while Chee was effectively barred from contesting in the election. So successful was this new PAP formula in overpowering its opponents that the use of draconian laws against political dissenters since 1990 has steadily declined. This pragmatic move also keeps the Executive from criticisms of misusing the state's powers to quell opposition, by placing the responsibility of their intolerance⁶² of opposition in the hands of the perhaps more-than-willing judges who are expected to do something for the PAP.

The appointment of the Prime Minister's personal friend as Chief Justice, as mentioned above, reflects the personalisation of state structures since the 1970s by the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his role in building an elitist-technocratic governing system in Singapore since independence. As the political obliteration of the opposition via Operation Coldstore in 1963 saw the total absence of the opposition from 1966 to 1981, the PAP based their legitimacy on the notion of an effective, technocratic government in Singapore. Popular legitimacy was not possible because in most general elections, the PAP were returned to power on nomination day, as the majority of its seats were left unopposed—a scenario partly created by the PAP themselves, via manipulation of the political system to ensure their re-election to power.⁶³ Thus, an effective and efficient government that was administered by technocrats and elites, and that delivered material growth, constituted the validity of PAP rule.⁶⁴ In this sort of governance, politics is considered “harmful” to society. The no-nonsense technocrats should not be burdened with unnecessary pressures and irrational politics;⁶⁵ rather, they should be left to govern the state impartially based on their “scientific” knowledge and “rationality”.⁶⁶ This hegemonic principle, propagated by Lee and

⁶⁰ Jeyaretnam Joshua Benjamin v Lee Kuan Yew [2001] SGCA 55, *Singapore Academy of Law*, 22 Aug 2001, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.singaporelaw.sg/sglaw/laws-of-singapore/case-law/free-law/court-of-appeal-judgments/21757-jeyaretnam-joshua-benjamin-v-lee-kuan-yew>>.

⁶¹ ‘GE2015: ‘Just keep going, don't give up’, Chee Soon Juan's 13-year-old daughter tells SDP chief’, *The Straits Times*, 13 September 2015, viewed 14 September 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/ge2015-just-keep-going-dont-give-up-chee-soon-juans-13-year-old-daughter-tells-sdp-chief>>.

⁶² Souchou Yao, *Singapore: the state and the culture of excess*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, Chapter 2.

⁶³ Robert Garner, Peter Ferdinand and Stephanie Lawson, *Introduction to politics*, 2nd ed, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *Singapore in the Malay World: building and breaching regional bridges*, Routledge, London and New York, 2009, p. 63.

⁶⁵ Lee Morgenbesser, *Behind the Facade: Elections under Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia*, State University of New Press, Albany, 2016, p. 146.

⁶⁶ Michael Barr, ‘Beyond Technocracy: The culture of elite governance in Lee Hsien Loong's Singapore’, *Griffith Asia Institute*, Paper No. 6, 2005, p. 3, viewed 15 April 2016, <https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/18232/regional-outlook-volume-6.pdf>.

PAP elites, justified his government's policies including the "systematic depoliticisation" projects "of a politically active and aggressive citizenry" through rigid political and societal control,⁶⁷ while at the same delivering material progress to the population.⁶⁸ Lee and the PAP successfully delivered their promises of progress, bringing Singapore from third world to first. Consequently, domestic opposition against his administration effectively waned and became rather unwarranted among the populace,⁶⁹ though many may have felt rather uneasy with the overzealous life regulations enacted by Lee's government, such as the "scientific" "Stop at Two" policy (a policy to discourage uneducated parents from having more than two children, as part of government efforts to deal with overpopulation problem in the 1960s).⁷⁰

In the 1970s, Lee rather openly embarked on "talent scouting" for his government,⁷¹ ostensibly to energise the government with the "new blood"⁷² and to address the "problem of succession".⁷³ The problem of succession partly originated from Lee's policy of depoliticisation, which rendered the natural creation of leadership through open politics difficult. Beyond recruiting new leaders, or talents, to the government, Lee's leadership renewal projects were a tactical move to check challenges from within, thereby tightening his grip on the government and sustaining his rule as Prime Minister. He was cautious not to pick those leaders with political qualities and oratory skills, such as labour-union leaders or student activists. In the 1950s and early 1960s, union leaders and student activists were key sources of political leadership and posed great challenges to the government, including Lee's government of 1959. Lee sought "talents" with "technocrat" rather than political qualities, including high academic merits, spectacular management records, and strong loyalty to the state (read: PAP) and to himself. Therefore, Lee's talent-scouting involved headhunting the top guns (or potential top liners) in the business and public sectors (and later involved leadership recruitment from the armed forces). The scouting was done by Lee himself on recommendations from his close allies in the PAP. Goh Chok Tong, Lee immediate successor in 1990, "described Mr Lee as a "worrier" who single-mindedly planned for leadership

⁶⁷ Chan Heng Chee, *Singapore: the politics of survival, 1965-1967*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1971, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁸ Johan Fisher, 'The political economy of the Muslim market in Singapore', in Juanita Elias and Lena Rethel (eds.) *The Everyday Political Economy of Southeast Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, p. 101.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Michael Haas (ed.), *The Singapore puzzle*, Praeger, Westport and London, 1999, p. 175.

⁷⁰ 'Ageing S'pore population not due to 'Stop at Two' policy', *Asia One*, 15 September 2011, viewed 14 September 2015, <<http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110915-299574.html>>.

⁷¹ Mauzy and Milne. *Singapore politics under the People's Action Party*, p. 126.

⁷² Lee Khoo Choy, *Diplomacy of a tiny state*, 2nd ed., World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 1993, p. 21.

⁷³ Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Crucial Years*, Marshall Cavendish, Singapore, 2012, p. 59.

succession”.⁷⁴ Goh noted that “Mr Lee had cut short the political careers of his old colleagues [for the leadership renewal process], which had been painful for him”.⁷⁵ The candidates were rigorously and cautiously examined by Lee himself, and only a few were finally accepted. Once accepted to succeed leadership in the Executive, they will be set to contest in the elections before being appointed to the cabinet.

Goh Chok Tong, Lee’s immediate successor in 1990, was introduced to Lee by his close friend in the PAP. Goh’s outstanding record in Neptune Oriental Lines attracted Lee. Goh was accepted as a candidate for the leadership renewal project in the mid-1970s after arduous tests. He was listed as a candidate in the 1976 general election, then was appointed to the Executive. In the Executive, Goh was continually monitored and groomed personally by Lee before he was made Deputy Prime Minister in 1985, then Prime Minister in 1990. Goh admired Lee and always regarded him as his mentor.⁷⁶

The ascendancy of Lee’s first son, Lee Hsien Loong, was much more spectacular with Lee Sr.’s personal influence⁷⁷ and intervention. Following two opposition members’ triumph to Parliament in the 1984 General Elections, Lee Sr. declared that he would step down as Prime Minister. All the remaining Central Executive Committee members, except Lee Kuan Yew himself, resigned from their posts on 1 January 1985.⁷⁸ This move created a leadership vacuum, part of which Lee Hsien Loong was set to fill. After short but remarkable years in the army, the then newly-appointed Brigadier-General Lee Hsien Loong abruptly left the force in September 1984. Less than four months later, he was fielded as a PAP candidate in the General Elections held in December that year.⁷⁹ Following his victory, he was appointed as Minister of State (Deputy Minister) by Lee Kuan Yew in 1985, while Goh was appointed as Lee Kuan Yew’s first deputy. A year later, Lee Jr. became a member of the Central Executive Committee and the PAP’s Youth Chief. His father appointed him as a full cabinet minister in 1987. Throughout this period, Lee Sr. structured the cooperation between Goh and

⁷⁴ Goh Chock Tong’s account in, ‘Mr Lee Kuan Yew would always be my teacher, says Goh Chok Tong in eulogy’, *The Straits Times*, 29 March 2015, viewed 30 March 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mr-lee-kuan-yew-would-always-be-my-teacher-says-goh-chok-tong-in-eulogy>>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See for example, Michael Barr, ‘Beyond technocracy: The culture of elite governance in Lee Hsien Loong’s Singapore’, Griffith Asia Institute, Paper No. 6, 2005, and Michael D. Barr, *The ruling elite of Singapore: networks of power and influence*, I.B. Tauris and Palgrave Macmillan, London and New York, 2014.

⁷⁸ Chan Heng Chee, ‘Singapore in 1985: managing political transition and economic recession’, *Asian Survey*, vol. 26, no. 2, February 1986, p. 160.

⁷⁹ ‘Lee Hsien Loong to leave the army’, *The Straits Times*, 1 September 1984.

his son in various Executive functions, such as in the Economic Committee set up in 1985 to revive Singapore's economy. In late 1990, on the day Lee Sr. stepped down as Prime Minister, Lee Jr. was appointed by Lee Sr. as Deputy Prime Minister in Goh's cabinet. Lee Sr. appointed himself as Senior Minister to provide "guidance" for the new leadership—essentially to check Goh's powers, to prolong his interests to stay in power, and to safeguard the continuation of his legacy, particularly his son, in the government.

But as in the case of Yong's appointment as Chief Justice, the Prime Minister's role in personalising control over the state structures was not only confined to the executive body, but extended to almost all top government officials in the public sector and in government-linked companies. Lee's "talent scouting," or fielding his own men in the state structures for his political control and personal gain, was noticeable in the 1970s. However, this practice had really begun much earlier, that is, right after he became Prime Minister. Take for instance the appointment of Yang di-Pertuan Negara, also known as the President of Singapore. It was Lee who invited Yusof Ishak to be the Yang di-Pertuan Negara in 1959, ostensibly "to dispel the "Third China" image of Singapore, and to emphasise the multiracial character of Singapore".⁸⁰ Lee was then trying to win the heart of the then Prime Minister of Malaya for his merger plan.⁸¹ Lee also painstakingly persuaded Benjamin Sheares, a doctor with no formal experience when he was appointed by Lee, to stay for a third term as the second President.⁸² The third President, Devan Nair (from 1981 to 1985), was Lee's oldtime friend. Nair was tasked with establishing the PAP's branch in Malaysia in the 1960s, now known as Democratic Action Party (DAP). The fourth President, Wee Kim Wee, had served Lee's government for many years in the public service prior to his appointment in 1985. Tan Boo Teik, one of Lee's loyalists, was made Attorney-General in 1969. With his overzealous efforts in defending Lee's government by taking action against Lee's political opponents,⁸³ Tan held the same position until 1992.

Besides fielding their own men in the state structures, it is a regular practice for the Prime Ministers of Malaysia (particularly Mahathir) and of Singapore to strengthen their states' powers by enacting new laws and amending existing ones. Certain quasi-political laws

⁸⁰ Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore*, Resource Press, Singapore, 1996, p. 183.

⁸¹ Lee was in fact, also considering Tunku's own brother, Tunku Ya'acob for the same position but at last chose Yusof. See, *ibid*.

⁸² Peter H. L. Lim (ed.), *Chronicle of Singapore, 1959-2009: Fifty Years of Headline News*, National Library Board, Singapore, 2009, p. 155.

⁸³ Hussin Mutalib, *Parties and politics: a study of opposition parties and PAP in Singapore*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 2003, p. 143.

akin to the Emergency Regulations are skilfully promulgated in the interest of the state as well as in the interest of the ruling class. When the 1948 Emergency was declared over by the Malaysian government in the 1960s, the Internal Security Act (ISA—among other provisions, it allowed detention without trial for an indefinite period) was introduced to perform almost-similar functions to the ERs, as the communist threat to security was still perceived to be present.⁸⁴

At the same time, certain security laws enacted by British were still enforced, such as the Sedition Act. In response to growing sources of political opposition post-independence, new laws of similar functions were gradually introduced in Malaysia and Singapore. Firstly, the Banishment Act 1959 preceded the introduction of ISA in 1960. One by one, quasi-political laws were enacted to shut off political challenges; these laws were made possible by historical changes. For example, when the student movements peaked in the early 1970s, the Razak government responded with the introduction of the University and University College Act (UUCA) 1971 that criminalised a student's participation in politics and in political parties. When the Internet became a potent source of opposition in the late 1990s, coinciding with the *Reformasi* era in Malaysia, Mahathir's regime countered with the enactment of the Multimedia and Communication Act in 1998. Singapore's PAP government has taken a similar route. As the media, particularly international news agencies, constituted the few voices critical of Singapore's government, Lee's administration enacted the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act in 1974. The act has encouraged self-censorship among media journalists and editors as it requires an annual permit for their operation from the Communication Ministry.⁸⁵ Furthermore, this Act has made applications to publish new newspapers difficult and political as the power for licensing is conferred to the Minister of Communication.⁸⁶ Such a pervasive and ever-extending network of legal-political control through draconian laws curtails opposition politics and structures civil obedience. These laws and their enforcement agencies thus constitute the ultimate defence for the ruling class in domestic politics.

⁸⁴ The Internal Security Act (ISA) was used against those believed to be communists, to have communist links, to be communist sympathisers, or anyone or any organisation perceived as a potential threat to the national security. After the worldwide breakdown of Communism in 1989 to 1991, the ideological justification of the "communist threat" to serve the purpose of detention without trial to the political prisoners was no longer relevant. Thus, the application of ISA since then was usually in the name of preserving the national security, public order, or racial unity. In Singapore since 1990, no political prisoners have been detained under the ISA as the regime seems to prefer another method of political control, that is, defamation suits.

⁸⁵ See, James Gomez, *Self-censorship: Singapore's shame*, Think Centre, Singapore, 2000.

⁸⁶ Francis T. Seow, *The media enthralled: Singapore revisited*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder and London, 1998, p. 20.

In sum, these laws are partly political in nature, with purposes identical to those of the British ERs but with legal-political coverage extending to almost every source of political opposition; while the enforcement agencies are often headed by party-state loyalists. Such a political situation akin to the Emergency era reemerged in post-colonial Malaysia and Singapore. In this context, societal consent is obtained through arbitrary and selective use of legal force to control political opposition. Such laws do not merely increase the power of the state and the ruling elites at the expense of the people's freedoms; they also redefine the states' constitutions and political systems towards a greater level of authoritarianism. This is one part of Gramsci's "hegemonic bloc" theory, in which popular obedience is achieved through use of force, and on how political regimes can resist change from below.⁸⁷

Consequently, the public space is essentially seized and dictated by the party-state elites. This severely affects the activity of the political opposition and reverts the growth of civil society, citizens' freedoms, and democratic rights. Freedom of expression among the public and the opposition on political issues and on matters that the government deems sensitive (such as ethnicity, religion, and to a certain extent criticism against the government) is strictly restricted. Opposition periodicals are constrained in their publication and circulation through licensing and permit regulations.⁸⁸ The party-state owns and controls almost all prime media, causing a "total black-out" of political opposition from media coverage and access. Each society must be registered under the Societies Act and must submit an annual report to the Registrar of Societies to maintain its active status. Any society that is not registered or unsuccessful in obtaining the Registrar's approval is deemed illegal and may face legal action by the state if it continues to operate.

On the democratic freedoms of expression and assembly, an assembly initiated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or the opposition, especially on a large scale, would be less-than-tolerated by the party-state elites—the political masters of the bureaucrats. The subordination of the police forces to their political masters is evident in this respect. When such a large-scale assembly is led by the opposition(s) or independent NGO(s), it would generally be arbitrarily disallowed (by not issuing the police permit) and thus considered as

⁸⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971, pp. 94-6.

⁸⁸ For example, the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs limits the publication of *Harakah* periodicals (and other opposition media), the official mouthpiece of PAS, to twice a week and only to PAS members. Under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's administration (1981 to 2003), *Harakah* was once only allowed to be published twice a month. Similar restrictions with the same modus operandi applies to opposition periodicals in Singapore.

illegal, warranting the use of force if the organiser is still adamant on convening the demonstration. This kind of assembly would typically be framed by the authorities and the prime media as a “riot”, as an attempt to create “chaos”, “public disorder”, and to compromise “national security” or “racial unity”, long before the assembly takes place.⁸⁹ A public rally, dubbed “Bersih 2.0” (now there is Bersih 5 in 2016), was held in Malaysia on 9 July 2011 to press the government for a “free and fair” electoral system. Wielding its power apparatuses, the government responded rather harshly to the rally by shooting water cannons and tear gas at the crowd. More than 1,500 protestors were detained, including prominent opposition leaders. Several days before the rally, a group of Bersih activists were detained under the Emergency Ordinance simply because they wore the yellow Bersih t-shirts, which were deemed unlawful by the police since the rally and the organisation were considered illegal. On its part, the prime media painstakingly—by quoting statements made by BN politicians, pro-government academicians, and their own political commentators—sought to demonstrate that such an event was equivalent to chaos that would adversely impact national security.

On the other hand, if an assembly is organised by the party-state leaders or the politically-connected leaders and/or organisations, not only it would be allowed most of the time, but the police often generously dispatch its personnel to maintain order and security at the procession. The police would rather audaciously act in concert with the party-state elites, sometimes prematurely, to brand the assembly as “peaceful” even when the assembly clearly incites interethnic disunity. Such an assembly would be effortlessly promoted on the national scale, primarily through the prime media to encourage mass participation. In 2010, the UMNO-linked Malay rights organisation, *Perkasa*, conducted a national-scale public assembly dubbed “Wake-Up, Malays.” This assembly was supposedly to unite the Malays in Malaysia against the growing “attacks” from, and the “power” of, the non-Malays since the 2008 General Elections. At the end of 2011, a massive assembly was proposed by the party-state organisations to gather one million Muslims from across Malaysia, dubbed *Himpunan Sejuta Umat*⁹⁰ or simply *Himpun*, supposedly to protect and empower Islam and the Malay-Muslim community against perceived Christian “threats”. Two significant cases were invoked to justify such an event: alleged Christian proselytization in Selangor, and the use of the name of “Allah” in referring to God by the Christians and churches in Sabah. While the

⁸⁹ See, for instance, ‘Bersih 2.0 is a dirty political agenda, says DPM’, *The Star*, 24 June 2011.

⁹⁰ Literally, an Assembly of One Million Muslims.

allegation in Selangor was never backed up by sound evidence to date, the case in Sabah was a longstanding practice among the Christians with no major problems prior to Home Ministry's decision to forbid its usage in 2010. Although the risk of inciting ethno-racial tensions was high in both these events, the Wake-Up Malays and the *Himpun* rallies were afforded extensive space by the police, partly because they were organised (or supported) by the party-state or politically-connected organisations. The subordination of legal enforcement, in this case, the police, has inevitably led to certain "double-standard" decisions in discharging duties. In party-state-linked events, the police have acted as the "protector"; in opposition-linked events, the police have been criticised for acting as the "oppressor".⁹¹

If speeches or statements made by politicians (particularly those from the opposition), influential members of the public, or NGO representatives go beyond certain undefined limits, the persons or the organisation as well as the press that aired their views are prone to be harassed, investigated, charged, arrested, or even detained without trial by the authorities. If the ISA is invoked, the authorities have no obligations to justify the detainment—in fact, it almost cannot be challenged in court due to constraints imposed by the Act, except regarding its technicalities.

In the case of Singapore, the mass arrests of opposition members and political dissenters in the 1963 Operation Coldstore contributed greatly to the decline of the opposition and politics as a whole.⁹² Later, when the party-state regime opted for the use of defamation suits⁹³ against its critics, the climate of fear among the populace to express, or to assemble to express, their dissenting views against the government was evident.⁹⁴ This was before the development of citizen-based online media and social networking, which have gained more prominence in the second half of the 2000s.⁹⁵ The risk of penalty under quasi-draconian laws or civil suits to be heard by party-compliant judges was perceived by many as too high for the

⁹¹ In my observation at a book launch by Pakatan Rakyat of Selangor and Strategic Information Research and Development, entitled "The Road to Reform: Pakatan Rakyat in Selangor", Tricia Yeoh, the book's editor and political aide to the Selangor Chief Minister, Khalid Ibrahim, reminded the audience about the role of the police in protecting instead of terrorising democracy and the people. Petaling Jaya, 27 September 2010.

⁹² From the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, Singapore had no opposition member in Parliament.

⁹³ The two most famous cases of Singaporean political opposition's bankruptcy through state defamation suits are J.B. Jeyaratnam of the Worker's Party and Dr Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party. Both were the strongest critics of the government in their times.

⁹⁴ See for instance Michael D. Barr, 'Harmony, conformity or timidity?: Singapore's overachievement in the quest for harmony' in Julia Tao et. al., *Governance for harmony in Asia and beyond*, Routledge, London, pp. 73-102.

⁹⁵ The number of Internet users in Singapore has increased dramatically since its introduction in early 1990s. Although online news sites in Singapore begun their operations since mid-1990s, it was only a decade later, particularly under Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2004 to date)'s administration, that they started to gain prominence.

too little voice that they could articulate in public, particularly in contrast to the mass media owned and controlled by the party-state. Reflecting the climate of fear among Singaporeans, J.B. Jeyaratnam, a prominent opposition politician once said, “People coming here see Singaporeans walking around smiling and think, ‘No, we can't see any fear’. But fear lurks under the surface, and it is very real”.⁹⁶

This strict political control, alongside strategic cooption tactics by the PAP government with key civil-society leaders (such as the cooption of the leader of the Association of Muslim Professionals, Yang Razali Kassim),⁹⁸ considerably stifled civil societies’ ability to champion social issues and influence public opinions. Although this situation favours the party-state elites, these elites have increasingly lost touch with the people, such that they have become less popular since the 1980s.⁹⁹

Partly due to this undesirable situation, the Goh administration was driven to find a platform to obtain Singaporeans’ opinions for the continual survival of the party. Accordingly, Goh launched “Singapore 21 Committee” in 1997, led by Teo Chee Hean, “to consult Singaporeans about what kind of Singapore they wanted, what vision of Singapore they had for the future”.¹⁰⁰ Mauzy and Milne suggest that “active citizenship” is the most central of the five thoughts aspired to by Singaporeans in the nationwide consultation.¹⁰¹ An outcome of the consultation was the Speaker’s Corner, modelled after London’s Hyde Park. The speakers may speak on any matter, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. daily, but must not provoke racial or religious tensions, and, as implicitly understood, the government’s antagonism. This effort was criticised as merely symbolic yet important to the development

⁹⁶ J.B. Jeyaratnam, quoted in Sebastien Berger, ‘Worldwide: Few dare to raise their voices at the Singapore Speakers’ Corner’, 28 August 2004, viewed 1 January 2012, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/singapore/1470434/Worldwide-Few-dare-to-raise-their-voices-at-the-Singapore-Speakers-Corner.html>>.

⁹⁸ Peter Preston, *Singapore in the global system: relationship, structure and change*, Oxon and New York, 2007, p.141.

⁹⁹ Although the first Singaporean Prime Minister (1959-1990), Lee Kuan Yew discharged himself from the premiership post in 1990 and thus became one of the longest-serving elected Chief Executives in the world, he had not retired from the Cabinet and politics. He retained his position as Member of Parliament and creatively established a new cabinet post, the “Senior Minister”. In fact, he stayed in his old office that was designated for the Prime Minister during his time. Critics argued that he still held fundamental executive power and that Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong was the seat-warmer before being succeeded in 2004 by Lee Kuan Yew’s eldest son, Lee Hsien Loong, who had been Deputy Prime Minister in Goh’s Cabinet. While Goh now became Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew once again innovatively introduced a new post for himself, namely “Minister Mentor” that would give “guidance” and expert political-economic “forecast” to the new Prime Minister and “his” Cabinet. The poorest electoral support received by the PAP since it assumed Executive power in 1959 in the 2011 General Elections, compelled Minister Mentor Lee and Senior Minister Goh to completely retire from cabinet posts several weeks after the election.

¹⁰⁰ Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne. *Singapore politics under the People’s Action Party*, p. 165.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., The other four main thoughts in the report are “Strong Families”, “Every Singaporean Matters”, “Opportunities for All”, and “The Singapore Heartbeat”.

of Singapore's democracy as certain controls still applied. The speakers must be Singaporean citizens and must register themselves at a police station. They are not immune from the law and can be sued for libel or defamation if they went significantly "out of bound".¹⁰² Public demonstrations are not allowed.¹⁰³

Apart from getting "feedback" from the people, the provision of this space can be construed as a tactical move by the party-state regime to organise "oppositionism" and criticism in a special compound that can be closely watched and controlled, rather than if assemblies were to take place elsewhere. It could also function as a "safety valve" for the regime by allowing the citizens to release their dissatisfaction on certain issues. However, fear and lack of trust among the public towards the government have prevented the space from being more democratically functional. By that time, the growth of the Internet and of online media in Singapore meant that Singaporeans could easily and anonymously air their views with less legal-political risk. Singapore's economic progress, especially until the mid-2000s, as felt by most Singaporeans may indicate not only their busy daily schedules, but also some "comfort"¹⁰⁴ with the current conditions, leading them to support the PAP or to become politically apathetic.

Thus, as I have argued and demonstrated, through these pervasive, ever-extending networks of legal-political control, the public spaces in Malaysia and Singapore are practically seized and dictated by the party-state elites. Through the above processes and practices, these elites have been placed in a supreme and vastly influential position to mould the consciousness of the masses and the "public opinion" of the majority of the populace. With extremely high political control, the sole "legitimate" source of worldviews is the one sanctioned by the government. Indeed, with such regulation and the lack of alternative media in the "open market", especially before the growth of Internet in the 1990s, the government-sponsored public discourse became hegemonic and was commonly uncritically accepted by many sections of society. As it was virtually the only media accessible to all, the news

¹⁰² "Out-of-bound" or "OB markers" is the term used by the government since 1994 to remind the opposition and citizens of the boundary of their political commentary. However, the boundary was never clearly defined. On Lee Kuan Yew's definition on OB markers to his parliamentarians, "If your interest is to improve Singapore, you do not worry about OB markers. As simple as that. It is when your intention is to twist your Minister's tail, to show that you are smart, that risking it ... But in our society, face is important. So we will try, when you twist my tail, I will tweak your ear". *Parliamentary Debates Singapore*, vol. 70 no. 14, May 6 1999, col. 1655.

¹⁰³ In December 2005, fifty people protested against the Internal Security Act. The organisers were later questioned and warned by the police. See, Mauzy and Milne, *Singapore politics under the People's Action Party*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁴ Cherian George, *Singapore: The air-conditioned nation: essays on the politics of comfort and control 1990 - 2000*, Singapore, Landmarks Books, 2000, Chapter 1.

covered by the prime media was once (and still is, to certain sections) taken as the “absolute truths” by many.

Through these structures, hegemonic discourse and knowledge are produced to influence the consciousness of the populace and thus manufacture consent amongst them. Opinions or criticisms from opposition politicians and civil society were effectively framed by the government as “deceitful”, seeking to divert the people from the real “reality” as dictated to them repeatedly by the government, almost in every time and at every facet of their lives.

Through these dominant structures also, the everyday worlds of the populace are significantly influenced by the party-state elites. These include the discussion of everyday issues and their opinions on those issues. Ethnic perception and racial sentiment were somewhat influenced by the politics from “above” as ethnicity is one of its main components. The Singaporean government’s grip on the everyday affairs of its populace went even further by partly dictating the private lives of the populace—for instance, the number of children they should have, whom they should marry, and what language they should use at home.

In term of politics, through their hegemony, the Alliance/BN and the PAP managed to convince a large part of the populace about the need for strict regulations as societal pluralism was perceived as unstable and conflict-prone, while communists, terrorists, and political extremists posed national-security threats. Full democracy was pictured as dangerous and too liberal, potentially affecting the countries’ social fabric. It was dismissed as a “Western culture” and thus not suitable for Asians who desired “consensus over conflict”, especially in the people’s relation to government. Asians were considered somewhat immature to uphold such practices. Democracy should be guided by the state with certain values sanctioned by the authorities. Mahathir, the fourth and longest-serving Malaysian Prime Minister to date, and Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore were the main proponents of the concepts of “Asian Values” and “guided democracy”, whereby certain values were selectively picked (and others ignored) essentially to justify their authoritarian rules.

Through this authoritarian state-building—in particular, the party-nisation and the intensification of the state’s power—the ruling elites consolidated their positions to the detriment of democratic space and freedoms. Consequently, state structures have effectively become instruments of the party-state elites’ political governance and control, over their

original function as public agencies. This is crucial for regime perpetuation in Malaysia and Singapore. These authoritarian political structures have functioned as the hegemonic obstacle against regime change. Nevertheless, these structures not only function as the party-state elite's apparatus for power-maintenance, but also as a tool to colour the state's cultural component—the nation-building projects—which will be discussed in rest of this thesis.

The above processes of “authoritarianisation” have changed the “political configuration”¹⁰⁵ of the ruling class throughout the Alliance/BN and PAP rules. In post-colonial Malaysia, under Tunku's administration (1957–1970), the Alliance was governed by the ruling elite based on a more-or-less equal partnership between the three component parties. This era's elite pack,¹⁰⁶ although described by Arend Lijphart as “consociational democracy”,¹⁰⁷ was less of a democracy given its party-nisation of the state and the implementation of draconian laws, such as the enactment of Banishment Act in 1959 and the ISA in 1960.¹⁰⁸ These processes later enabled the establishment of a party-state system in Malaysia. The Alliance's poor performance in the 1969 General Election subsequently sparked the May 13th riot and allowed the “second generation leaders”¹⁰⁹ in UMNO to take control from Tunku. They reorganised the Alliance into a grander coalition known as *Barisan Nasional* (BN) by incorporating all opposition parties in 1971 except DAP, which refused to join. In this new reorganisation, the power configuration was changed to a BN-led government, in which UMNO held an unequal, higher position vis-à-vis the other component parties. When Mahathir came in 1981 with his power monopolisation projects¹¹⁰ that gathered various state powers into hands of the Prime Minister, the power configuration of the ruling class was once again changed—this time to the system of a Prime Minister-led *Barisan Nasional*. The personalisation of the state powers in the hands of the Prime Minister brought Malaysia to a fuller level of authoritarianism, which some characterise as rule-by-one or a dictatorship,¹¹¹ a system defined by Milne and Mauzy as “Malaysian politics *under Mahathir*” (to connote the extraordinary power grip in Malaysia under the then Prime

¹⁰⁵ In-Won Hwang, *Personalized politics: the Malaysian state under Mahathir*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2003, p. 345.

¹⁰⁶ See, G.P. Means, *Malaysian politics*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1976.

¹⁰⁷ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in plural societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977, pp. 150-3.

¹⁰⁸ See, William Case, *Elites and regimes in Malaysia: Revisiting a consociational democracy*, Monash University Press, Clayton, 1996.

¹⁰⁹ G.P. Means, *Malaysian Politics: the second generation*, Oxford University Press Singapore, 1991.

¹¹⁰ See for example, the “incremental authoritarianism” situation under Mahathir, Harold Couch, *Government and society in Malaysia*, p. 96.

¹¹¹ See Mahathir's own confession of being a dictator, ‘Dr M: I was a dictator’, *The Malay Mail*, viewed 28 March 2016, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dr-m-i-was-a-dictator>>.

Minister).¹¹² The power configuration after the Mahathir years (he retired in 2003) has not changed much, but has actually strengthened, particularly under the era of Najib Razak since 2009 (examined in detail in Chapter 4).

The power configuration of the ruling class in Singapore underwent a rather similar trajectory towards personalisation of the state powers from 1959 to the mid-1980s, but under the same man, Lee Kuan Yew. When Lee rose to power in 1959, there was a “balance of power” situation, whereby the top administration was controlled by Lee’s English-educated faction, while the Left Chinese-educated faction controlled the grassroots. To Lee, such “balance” was dangerous to his position as he could be toppled by the Left. With his control over the government, he quickly transformed the state towards a party-state system to secure his position in the government and to evade political pressure from the party, which was under the control of the Left. Lee also embarked a project of unification of Singapore with Malaya since taking power, knowing that Tunku would be an intolerance to the Left, thereby letting Tunku do the dirty work of crushing his opponents for him. When Tunku’s announcement of his “Malaysia Plan” in May 1961 was strongly supported by Lee’s faction, a split in the PAP ensued,¹¹³ something predicted by Lee himself. With the “removal” of the Left which later formed a new party in July, the position of English-educated elites in the government and the PAP was strengthened. Throughout the 1960s, the Singaporean elite’s governance was rather equal among the English-educated pioneers in the PAP (later known as the Old Guards), although Lee held the leading position.¹¹⁴ With Singapore’s separation from Malaysia and the disappearance of the opposition, the politics and government of Singapore in the second half of the 1960s were effectively dominated by the PAP.¹¹⁵ But in the 1970s, through Lee’s pragmatic leadership renewal policy, many members of the Old Guard were strategically replaced by new ones like Goh Chok Tong, Tony Tan, and Ong Teng Cheong under Lee’s patronage. Consequently, the state powers have been steadily consolidated into Lee’s hands. This was evident in many of Lee’s personal policies since the late 1970s, including the “sinicisation of Singapore” (discussed in detail in Chapter 5).¹¹⁶ With the retirement of all the remaining of the Old Guards in 1985 except Lee,¹¹⁷

¹¹² R. S Milne and Diane K. Mauzy. *Malaysian politics under Mahathir*, Routledge, London, 1999.

¹¹³ A. J. Stockwell (ed.), *Malaysia*, The Stationery Office, London, 2004, p. 601.

¹¹⁴ See, Kevin Tan and Peng Er Lam (eds.), *Lee’s Lieutenants: Singapore’s Old Guard*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1999.

¹¹⁵ Reflected by Milne and Mauzy in their book, *Singapore politics under the People’s Action Party*, Routledge, London, 2002.

¹¹⁶ Michael Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: the beliefs behind the man*, Curzon Press, Richmond, 2000, Chapter 5.

¹¹⁷ Chan Heng Chee, *The dynamics of one party dominance*, *ibid.*

“Singapore” practically “belonged” to Lee,¹¹⁸ whereby the government was based on a “one man rule” and one man show.¹¹⁹

In conclusion, the power monopolisation projects by the top executives in post-colonial Malaysia and Singapore may have produced a new and different political dictum from that of the West. The Western political system is famous for its concepts of “supremacy of the Constitution” as in the United States and “supremacy of the Parliament” in the United Kingdom, a system which made possible by the practice and evolution of liberal democracy. However, in Malaysia and Singapore, the real dictum of politics, as I have detailed throughout this chapter, can be best defined by the notion of the “supremacy of the Executive”, which has been constructed through the practice of “illiberal democracy”.¹²⁰ In Singapore, authoritarianism is constructed and re-constructed by its elitist-technocracy rule; in Malaysia, the same system is defended by ethnocracy surrounding the projects of UMNO’s dominance.

Hegemonic Breakdown and the New Politics

The hegemonic position, according to Antonio Gramsci, is not permanent but a contested one.¹²¹ Certain developments in society could lead to the breakdown of the hegemonic regime, or its replacement by others. Globalisation and the advancement of information and communication technology in recent decades have transformed the social and political landscape in many parts of the world, including Malaysia and Singapore. Globalisation has made the world economy more competitive and has caused some multinational corporations (MNCs) to move their operations to countries with skilled or semi-skilled labour at a lower cost of production. Malaysia and Singapore are considerably affected by this development. In both countries, some MNCs have moved their operations to China. To counter the impact of globalisation, the Singapore government started bringing in more foreign labour and professionals to make its economy more competitive in terms of cost as well as expertise.

¹¹⁸ See, R. S., Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, *Singapore: the legacy of Lee Kuan Yew*, Westview Press Boulder, 1990.

¹¹⁹ According to Diamond, Lee was proud of his “strict one man rule”. Walter H. Diamond, *One of a kind: learning the secrets of world leaders*, Syracuse University Press, 2005, p. 176.

¹²⁰ See for example, Fareed Zakaria, *The future of freedom: illiberal democracy at home and abroad*, W. W. Norton, New York, 2003.

¹²¹ Philip G. Cerny, ‘Dilemmas of operationalizing hegemony’, in Mark Haugaard and Howard H. Lentner (eds.), *Hegemony and power: consensus and coercion in contemporary politics*, Lexington Books, Langham, 2006, p.67.

Known as the “Foreign Talents Policy” (FT policy), this policy has affected the state’s economy and society in various ways. On the one hand, it has increased the level of Singapore’s economic effectiveness and retained its position as the most industrious country in Southeast Asia, and among the best in Asia. Singapore’s gross domestic product demonstrated stable growth, usually more than double that of neighbouring countries. This sudden, massive migration has also increased demand for housing accommodation, food, and transportation, to state a few. The property industry enjoyed a significant profit out of the appreciation in property value; whereas restaurant owners, hawkers, and taxi drivers benefited much with the escalating customer numbers.¹²² On the other hand, it posed setbacks in both the economic and social conditions of the populace. For instance, wage stagnation since the early 2000s, and even salary cuts to certain sections of the labour force. Rising demand for property brought an increase in price and rental. It is common nowadays for Singaporean (as well as Malaysian) couples to combine their thirty-year or more loans to buy an apartment. It is also common for many young or married couples to rent a room (usually a master bedroom) as they cannot afford to rent more decent accommodation. In this case, the house owner who rents out one or more of his/her bedroom(s) not only to make money, but more importantly to cope with the rising cost of living, is pushed to stay in the common rooms or the living room.¹²³ There are cases where house owners partition their flat houses into two to rent out the other half. There are also cases where Singaporeans must leave their accommodation as they cannot afford to pay the rent or the monthly instalments. Apart from the rising living costs, the social conditions of the populace are impacted. The surroundings have become very crowded; the people have to “compete” in using the increasingly-packed public transportation.¹²⁴ Social pluralism has become much more complex.¹²⁵ Thus, the idea

¹²² In an informal chat with a taxi driver in Singapore, he explained that he and most of his friends really welcome the FT policy as it has remarkably increased their client numbers. Although he admitted that the cost of living became higher due to the policy, it has been offset by the growing demand for their services. Singapore, 28 August 2010.

¹²³ This situation occurred at the accommodation I rented while doing the field research in Singapore in 2010.

¹²⁴ The everyday experiences of Singaporeans in using public transport seem to have become much less comfortable recently. During the peak hours on weekdays and certain times during weekends, it is not unusual for the people to have to wait for more than one Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) train—the most effective and affordable mode of transport—to pass by, before they can board the already-packed train. Although the number of trains has been increased, it has not changed the situation much as there are too many users. The seats available in these trains are also very limited, perhaps to accommodate the growing number of passengers. It is not uncommon to see some people, usually schoolchildren, sitting on the train’s floor in their journeys to or back from schools.

¹²⁵ Most of the new “talents” are from Malaysia, China and South Asia. While many Malaysians do not have much problem to assimilate into Singaporean society due to Malaysia’s cultural, social, and geographical proximity to Singapore, some talents from other countries face problems in interacting with Singaporeans chiefly due to language barriers. This aspect has affected Singaporeans as some work in industries that require communication such as transportation services (especially bus and taxi) and retail businesses.

that “Singapore is an air-conditioned nation” should be revised as the level of comfort for substantial parts of its populace has been gravely affected.¹²⁶

In Malaysia, particularly since 2011, the cost of living has markedly increased, particularly due to the property boom and the rising costs of raw materials. Certain sections of the labour force, particularly in the manufacturing industry, also face the problem of stagnant wages. More and more urbanites are forced to live in relatively far outskirts of the cities to save money for other living needs. Distance of between thirty and sixty kilometres (some even further) from home to workplace, with increasingly heavy traffic, has become normal. Some are also working part-time jobs, as is encouraged by the party-state elite, just to get by in the pressing economic circumstances.

The advancement of information and communication technology (ICT) has changed some societal characteristics. As the news and information on the Internet in Malaysia and Singapore are not easily controlled, many sections of society are now exposed to alternative media like online newspapers, forums, blogs, and political websites, in addition to social media like Facebook and WhatsApp. Many Malaysians and Singaporeans are gradually becoming new sets of society based on knowledge, defined by their life relations to ICT. The use of ICT in the latest general elections—2013 in Malaysia and 2015 in Singapore—was so widespread among all quarters of the populace that the elections can be dubbed the smartphone elections. Indeed, the populace in Malaysia and Singapore have practically become “smartphone societies”, whereby smartphones form an integral part of daily life. Many no longer read printed newspapers but subscribe to online media, to the extent that the notion that online media is alternative media no longer holds water. In fact, it is currently print media that is “an alternative” among the societies in both countries.

Recently, a new kind of media, referred to as the “new social media” has gained prominence in Malaysia and Singapore. This media, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, has become part of daily life for many sections of society. Through this media, ideas and information can be exchanged with many people at remarkable speeds, virtually at all places and all times. Many also use social media to make statements and give comments to micro- and macro-level issues surrounding their lives. Ad hoc political groups, such the Anti-GST Group, are established through Facebook to make political demands and exert political

¹²⁶ Cherian George, *Singapore: the air-conditioned nation: essays on the politics of comfort and control, 1990-2000*, Landmark Books, Singapore, 2000, Chapter 1.

pressure.¹²⁷ Through extensive use of WhatsApp, many Malaysians and Singaporeans can have discussions among their families and friends at their convenience, from everyday matters to political and economic issues.

This development has enabled a new kind of social movement—one that is less structured, but organised in an ad hoc manner using social media for a certain agenda. Social media has proved to be an effective tool of social mobilisation, especially in Malaysia. For example, the supporters and demonstrators of the *Bersih 2.0* rally on 9 July 2011 were essentially mobilised through these media. As the reach is not only national, but also global, Malaysian civil society for the first time managed to organise a global-scale movement to press the government for reform (in this case, of the electoral system), from Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta to China, the Middle East, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This movement has captured the worldwide attention for its cause, as well as for the regime's response to demonstrators in Kuala Lumpur. Nevertheless, the regime has finally somewhat recognised the *Bersih 2.0* demands and has thus set up a Parliamentary Select Committee to review and suggest certain changes in state's electoral system to Parliament.

These developments also influence the behaviour of the political opposition. After long decades of failure to establish prominence in national-level politics, the opposition is now seen as more mature in their decisions and actions. While opposition parties previously contested among themselves as well as the dominant party in elections, this may have become history in the contemporary politics of Malaysia and, to a certain extent, in Singapore. The opposition parties realised that competing against a grand coalition or party like the BN and the PAP required them to unite or at least coordinate their political causes. Ethno-racial and religious tones have been lowered down, whereas more universal issues—such as good governance, societal welfare, and better economic and social conditions—started to gain prominence in their ideologies and actions. With this mind-set—previously almost unthinkable, particularly between PAS and DAP in Malaysia—a “meeting point” to connect the opposition parties and their causes was found. With dire economic and social issues, rising living costs, advancement in ICT, and the emergence of new social media and of new social movements, the cooperation between opposition parties in Malaysia and Singapore started to feature more prominently. In the 2008 Malaysian General Elections,

BN's two-thirds majority in Parliament was denied for the first time. In the 2013 General Elections, the opposition parties managed to repeat the result, though they failed to capture the federal office. The PAP's performance in the 2011 General Elections were also strongly affected by these developments. Its popular vote in the election was the worst in its election history, and the opposition for the first time won one five-member Group Representative Constituency (GRC) and one constituency. This landmark electoral result ended Lee Kuan Yew's political eminence in Singapore. Just a week after the election, Lee and Goh Chok Tong decided to retire from the cabinet.¹²⁸

Since 2008 General Elections, BN can be said to be no longer a hegemonic regime, but remains dominant and powerful. Indeed, under recent developments under the Najib Razak administration, examined in detail in Chapter 7, the political system has been redefined, from rule-by-few to rule-by-one. Najib Razak has pragmatically cooperated with PAS in seeking to increase the jurisdiction of the sharia courts. With PAS's separation from the opposition coalition, BN stands a better chance of winning the next election; although a new party established by Mahathir and Muhyiddin Yassin (Najib Razak's ex-Deputy Prime Minister) known as BERSATU (United) have joined the opposition.¹²⁹

Although the PAP remains dominant, its hegemony is now not as solid as before. In this situation of new politics—defined by the development of universal issues and ideals across ethnic and religious sentiments; better cooperation within the opposition and with civil society; the growth of ICT; and new media, new social media, and new movements—almost every affair of the state is being watched, discussed, commented on and criticised by many sections of society. The political space is progressively becoming the site of contestation. The supreme authority of the party-states in dictating the state and the form of the nation is questionable. Political opposition, civil society, and society as a whole have begun to play greater roles in shaping the political and cultural landscapes of the state. The state's power in nation-building projects are no longer solely owned by the government, but are increasingly shared by “non-governmental” forces. Accordingly, nation-building in Malaysia and Singapore has become a more contested process, thus making it more interesting, although still taking within the authoritarian structures. The hegemonies of BN and the PAP, indeed, are under great strain as society and the state are now in transition.

¹²⁸ ‘Singapore MM, SM to leave’, *The Asia One*, 14 May 2011, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110514-278883.html>>.

¹²⁹ ‘PPBM officially signs agreement to join Pakatan Harapan’, *The New Straits Times*, viewed 13 December 2016, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/12/196556/ppbm-officially-signs-agreement-join-pakatan-harapan>>.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the historical and political processes of state-building (and its political systems) in Malaysia and Singapore do not simply originate from their independence days, but also draw from British colonialism, and to a certain extent in Malaysia, include the feudal system prior to British presence in Malaysia. In consolidating and maintaining the dominant parties' and the elites' political prominence, the state structures have been reconstructed and manoeuvred partly to serve the interest of the ruling elites, thereby enabling the construction of the party-state system in the parliamentary democracies of Malaysia and Singapore. These post-colonial projects of state-building have bolstered an effective and hegemonic bloc against regime change to date. Nevertheless, following recent developments, the hegemonies of BN and the PAP are under fundamental challenges, thus making the process of nation-building, which will be discussed in the following chapters, more vibrant as the public space has increasingly become more contested sites in both countries.

Consequently, as I have noted in the previous section, the power monopolisation projects by the top executives in post-colonial Malaysia and Singapore have produced a new and distinct political dictum from the West. While the Western political system is famous for the ideas of "supremacy of the Constitution" and "supremacy of the Parliament", the political practices in Malaysia and Singapore can be best defined by the notion of "supremacy of the Executive". In Singapore, such authoritarianism is constructed and reconstructed by its elitist-technocratic rule harnessed by Lee Kuan Yew; whereas in Malaysia, the same system is defended by its ethnocratic rule surrounding UMNO's continued dominance in the country (discussed in detail in the next chapter).

PART II : MALAYSIA

CHAPTER 3

The Politics of Malaysian Nation-Building Policy: From Tunku to Abdullah

In Chapter Two, it has been detailed how the elites of the Alliance/*Barisan Nasional* (BN) and the People's Action Party (PAP) amalgamated themselves with the structures of the state to skilfully manipulate the latter in maintaining its status quo. Through this practice, the support given to the parties are effectively structured and this contributed to the parties' continuing dominance in Malaysia and Singapore effectively. Accordingly, feudalism (in Malaysia) and colonial authoritarianism during the pre-independence era where the distinction between the ruling elite or organisation and the state/government is blurred had re-emerged in a modernised form, which is the 'party-state'. Under this new form of political system based on popular authoritarianism or "electoral authoritarianism",¹ the ruling positions are not achieved through the use of physical force, but rather through hegemony where the ruled internalise the views of the ruling elites, thereby consenting to the regime.²

This chapter will examine the nature of nation-building politics and policies in Malaysia, from Tunku Abdul Rahman's to Abdullah Badawi's administration. Najib's administration is examined in the next chapter. Not only will state nation-building in Malaysia under the ruling of its past five Prime Ministers be reflected upon, the four main spheres of nation-building will also be analysed, namely Malaysia's public sector, education system, national language as well as its economy. The development of these four spheres are interrelated to questions pertaining to class and nation as projected in the 1957 Malaysia Federal Constitution, the introduction of the New Economic Policy and Malaysia development since the early 1970s and the nature of politics and elections in multiethnic Malaysia. The main undercurrent of nation-building policies in Malaysia, as argued in this chapter, is the ruling elites' pragmatism in maintain its class rule and interests as opposed to a genuine ethno-nationalist struggle.

¹ Andreas Schedler, 'The logic of electoral authoritarianism', Andreas Schedler (ed.), *Electoral authoritarianism: The dynamics of unfree competition*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder and London, 2006, p. 7.

² See, Antonio Gramsci, Joseph A. Buttigieg (trans.), *Prison notebooks*, vol. 2, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992.

The Politics of Nation-Building Policy: From Tunku to Abdullah

The inter-ethnic character, or more specifically inter-elite rule, of the Alliance/BN, was evident during Prime Minister Abdul Rahman's reign (1957 – 1969). The British-educated prince of Kedah shared his liberal-ethnonationalist (centre-right) political views with other British-educated capitalists in MCA and professionals in MIC and these were later manifest in various laws and policies. Despite UMNO's ascendancy in the Alliance and in Parliament, the Tunku did not neglect the positions of the non-Malays. The Tunku also recognised the important roles played by the non-Malays in the Malay(si)an economy. He had steadfastly held on to the belief that the non-Malays should be left to manage the economy (in his view they were more apt and better suited for this sector), whilst the Malays should be the ones to control the nation's politics.³ However, to warrant harmony and integration amongst different ethnic groups, the Tunku saw that it was essential that the non-Malay elites be given comparable political powers in the party-state. As such he bestowed upon the non-Malays senior positions within his Cabinet such as the position of Minister of Finance. It was no secret that the Tunku's administration practised "backdoor" bargaining and compromises,⁴ wherein ethno-racial elites in the Alliance secretly meet to discuss and to attempt to reconcile issues considered to be "too sensitive" to be discussed in the cabinet, in Parliament or within their respective parties. This practice has been dubbed by his critics as the "kitchen cabinet".⁵ This elitist structure seemed to have been successful in curbing extreme politicisation of ethno-cultural issues and unnecessary ethnically charged sentiments by clandestinely expressing "ethnic demands and dissatisfactions" through a "proposer channel",⁶ which in turn produced a more balanced outcome ("win and win situation") due to the rather equal positions amongst the elites in the Alliance. As a result, neither completely ethno-racial nor multi-ethnic policies were produced. Instead, this birthed dynamic inter-ethnic policies wherein ethno-racial identities were not only prioritised, but also served as a basis for policy-making. The Malays assumed central positions with their culture prioritised, however the non-Malays and their identities were not compromised. This style of political accommodation

³ Alan Thomas Wood, *Asian democracy in world history*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2016, Chapter 5.

⁴ Dan Slater, *Ordering power: contentious politics and authoritarian leviathans in Southeast Asia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, p. 117.

⁵ Deborah A. Johnson and Anthony Milner, 'Westminster implanted: the Malaysian experience', in Haig Patapan, John Wanna, Patrick Moray and Weller, *Westminster legacies: democracy and responsible government in Asia and the Pacific*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 91.

⁶ Tunku Abdul Rahman, *Contemporary issues on Malaysian religions*, Pelanduk Publications, Petaling Jaya, 1984, p. 201.

influence by Tunku's personal views is evident in the various issues pertaining to nation-building in Malaysia which were then crystallised in the Federal Constitution as well as various policies namely that of citizenship, language, education and religion.

Although Tunku's "middle ground approach" was perceived as a 'win-win situation' as it strived to prioritise each and every ethnic community in Malay(si)a, the same was criticised by some parts of society as inadequate in meeting their demands and resolving their dissatisfactions.⁷ Some even dismissed the approach as merely being symbolic.⁸ Just as some Malays (including those associated with UMNO) regarded the government's efforts in prioritising the Malays, their culture and interests as inadequate,⁹ similarly, many non-Malays felt that their interests were being marginalised in the interests of the Malays.¹⁰ Tunku's administration was therefore marked with a relatively high-level of structurally based ethnic tension (conflict between 'ethnic organisations' over certain national policies), especially with regards to ethno-national issues. Nevertheless, the ability of the Alliance to win the 1959 and 1964 elections managed to temporarily silence Tunku's critics, particularly those within UMNO for it seemed that the Tunku had successfully predicted that elite-based inter-ethnic bargaining contributed to the Alliance's political success. However, when the infamous May 13 riots (a politically driven sectarian violence) erupted following the failure of the regime to win two-third majority and its loss of many seats at state level in the 1969 General Election,¹¹ UMNO ethno-nationalists swiftly took the opportunity to oust Tunku and blamed the regime's failure on his "soft" or "pro-Chinese" approach and his liberal economic policies which they considered to have substituted the interests of the Malays with those of the non-Malays.¹²

The narrative that Tunku had failed to "protect the interests of the Malays" and thereby contributed to the poor performance of the Alliance during the 1969 General Election

⁷ Ozay Mehmet, *Development in Malaysia: poverty, wealth and trusteeship*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2011, p. 102.

⁸ Khadijah Md. Khalid and Poh Ping Lee, *Whither the Look East Policy*, UKM Press, Bangi, 2003, p.113.

⁹ Earl Drake, *A stubble-jumper in striped pants: memoirs of a prairie diplomat*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto and Buffalo, 1999, p.89.

¹⁰ Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia: the making of a nation*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2002, p. 80.

¹¹ In the 1969 General Election, the Alliance experienced significant losses in the more developed states in the Peninsular. It also lost in the state of Penang and almost lost control of Selangor. Many seats in the state of Perak were also lost.

¹² Lorraine Carlos Salazar, *Getting a dial tone: telecommunications liberalisation in Malaysia and the Philippines*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2007, p. 56.

was an effective one.¹³ Certain UMNO ethno-nationalists claimed that poor economic conditions experienced by most Malays were due to the Chinese dominating the economy.¹⁴ The claims were made in spite of overwhelming dominance of the country's wealth by the Europeans.¹⁵ According to these narratives, Tunku's failure to intervene only prolonged the situation and thus spawned dissatisfaction and unrest amongst the Malays. Accordingly, not only did these accusations seemed to have justified the Tunku's Deputy, Abdul Razak's speedy take-over, but it had also seemed to justify the corrective measures taken in an effort to revamp the party-state and the nation as a whole.

The rise of Razak in 1969/70 marked the beginning of a new kind of political regime and order in Malaysia. Granted, Razak's political regime aimed to re-define Malaysia's vision as one that leaned towards Malay dominance.¹⁶ At the political level, a temporary emergency executive council known as *Majlis Gerakan Negara* (MAGERAN – National Action Council) led by Razak was established in light of the proclamation of a state of emergency days after the May 13 riots.¹⁷ Parliament was suspended (until early 1971), until then MAGERAN assumed the government's role to restore order within the nation. For the sake of national interest and political stability, Razak executed active negotiations with almost all opposition parties by inviting them to form a coalition.¹⁸ A new coalition was established by Razak in 1971 known as the *Barisan Nasional* (BN-National Front) which incorporated almost all political parties in Malaysia during that time, with the exception of DAP. Unlike the Tunku's administration, the other parties (other than UMNO) found themselves to be structurally organised by the hegemonic UMNO (the targets partu in the coalition which holds state power). The elites of UMNO dominated executive position in MAGERAN and later the Cabinet when Parliament was restored in 1971. MCA leaders on the other hand were consigned to less important positions.¹⁹ It was not long before Razak's cabinet became increasingly Malay and *Bumiputra* dominated and it was during this time that

¹³ Osman Bakar, 'Islam and political legitimacy in Malaysia', Shahram Akbarzadeh and Abdullah Saeed, *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, Routledge Curzon, Oxon and New York, 2003, p. 142.

¹⁴ Robert Hopkins Miller, *Vietnam and beyond: a diplomat's Cold War education*, Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock, 2002, p. 189.

¹⁵ Mei Ling Sieh Lee, *Ownership and control of Malaysian manufacturing corporations*, UMCB Publications, 1982, pp. 96-101.

¹⁶ Joseph Chin Yong Liow, *Piety and politics: Islamism in contemporary Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, p. 32.

¹⁷ Zakaria Ahmad and Suzaina Kadir, 'Ethnic conflict, prevention and management: the Malaysian case', in Kusuma Snitwongse and Willard Scott Thompson (eds.), *Ethnic Conflicts in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2005, p. 42.

¹⁸ Habibah Yahaya and Fadillah Yakin, *Cuisine of the premiers*, ITNM, Kuala Lumpur, 2009, p. 45.

¹⁹ Senior executive post, like the Minister of Finance, was then (and to date) held by UMNO leaders.

several ultra-Malay nationalists such as Mahatir Mohamad, who would later be the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, started to emerge.²⁰

Having secured a strong foundation of power through the establishment of BN, Razak's regime began to draw up a set of grand nation-building policies in various sectors whilst faithfully upholding the interests of the Malays and restoring the prestige of the Malay community on the crafty pretexts of furthering interracial unity and harmony and national development.²¹ Razak's New Economic Policy (NEP) is one of the fundamental plans that defined the character and set the sail of BN's nation building efforts and developments since 1970 until this very day.²² Although it is indisputable that the policies largely benefitted Malaysians, it remains questionable whether the NEP was mainly catered to the Malays, given that the Malays are economically the weakest compared to the Chinese and the Indians.²³ To this end, various agencies had been established and huge monetary allocations were made by the state for the sake of changing the "fate" of the Malays in their own country.²⁴

The NEP made significant impacts on the transformation of the ethno-economic structure of the nation. Amongst these impacts are the economical growths experienced by the Malays, their increased involvement in the capitalist economy, rapid urbanisation and the increase in the size of the Malay middle-class in the country.²⁵ However, whilst the NEP might have been successful in closing inter-ethnic gaps in various aspects, the policy has nevertheless widened existing intra-ethnic gaps, particularly within the Malay community. At the implementation level, the flawed structuring of the distribution system means that the policy looks at one's status and social political networks, not merely just one's ethnicity. As such, had the policy been purely ethnicity-based, the Malays will largely and as a whole benefit from the policy. However, since the system favours certain elite groups within the

²⁰ Tun Mahathir Mohamad (then Dato') and Tun Musa Hitam (then Dato') were among the *ultra-Malays* within UMNO regarded by some of their critics. Both of them were the strongest critics, within UMNO, during Tunku administration.

²¹ Ooi Keat Gin, *Southeast Asia: a historical encyclopaedia, from Angkor Wat to East Timor*, vol. 1, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, Denver & Oxford, 2004, p. 56.

²² Although the NEP was originally planned to be carried out for twenty years (i.e. until 1990), the application of the policy was continued through the enactment of new policies and executive directives after 1990.

²³ P. Sloane, *Islam, modernity and entrepreneurship among the Malays*, MacMillan and St. Martin, Houndmills and New York, 1999, p. 6.

²⁴ Zawawi Ibrahim, 'Anthropology human insecurities: narrating the subjugate discourse on Indigenes of the de-territorialized landscape of the Malaysian nation-state', in Paul J. Carnegie, Victor T. King, Zawawi Ibrahim, *Human insecurities in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Springer, Singapore, 2016, p.30.

²⁵ For further details on the creation of the Malay Malaysian middle class, see Abdul Rahman Embong, *State-led modernization and the new middle class in Malaysia*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2002.

Malay community, the benefits are not equally distributed.²⁶ Some Malays regard such situation as “*yang ramai dapat kuah, yang sikit dapat nasi*” (the elite reaps the most benefits whilst the masses benefit little).

Under Razak’s governance, intense nationasalisation projects based on Malay cultures took place in almost every part of the public sphere. Malay language was elevated to become the national language and was also promoted as the “language of unity”.²⁷ It has also been regarded as one of the core identities of Malaysia. It is “the soul of the Malaysian nation” (as per the Malay slogan *Bahasa jiwah bangsa*). English-medium schools were gradually replaced with national schools which adopted the Malay language as the medium of instruction.²⁸ The Malay language is also made a mandatory subject in all national schools²⁹ and is a subject which would greatly affect one’s chances of continuing his/her studies and gaining employment in the country, particularly in the public sector. Vernacular schools (which uses Mandarin or Tamil as the medium of teaching) at the secondary level (high schools) had also been gradually converted as national schools although schools at the primary level are preserved.³⁰ The Malay language soon started to be actively and increasingly used in Parliament as well as for official government affairs. Road signs, business signboards, public advertisements are increasingly “Malaysianised” and certain names of streets and places built during the colonial times were altered to Malay names, supposedly to reflect “a new Malaysian identity”.³¹

Overzealous efforts to assist the Malays and nationalising their cultures to promote inter-racial unity by the state only heightened inter-ethnic tension and differences in Malaysia. Many of the non-Malays are of the opinion that the NEP and the programmes introduced to achieve its objectives are discriminatory to them.³² Their exclusion from the policy only provoked and sustained their ethno-cultural consciousness and identities.

²⁶ Janet Tai Landa, *Economic success of Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia: identity, ethnic cooperation and conflict*, Springer, Heidelberg, 2016, p. 5.

²⁷ Cheah Boon Kheng, *Malaysia: the making of a nation*, p.87.

²⁸ Harold A. Crouch, *Government and society in Malaysia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 160.

²⁹ Cheah, *Malaysia: the making of a nation*, ibid.

³⁰ Crouch, *Government and society in Malaysia*, ibid.

³¹ Yat Ming Loo, *Architecture and urban form in Kuala Lumpur: race and Chinese spaces in a post-colonial city*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2013, Chapter 5.

³² Zainah Anwar, ‘Government and governance in multi-racial nation’, in John W. Langford and K. Lorne Brownsey (eds.), *The changing shape of government in the Asia-Pacific region*, The Institute for Research in Public Policy, South Halifax, 1988, p.107.

The unexpected death of Razak in 1976 saw one of his cousins, Hussein Onn (1976 – 1981) assuming the premiership. Hussein might be seen as rather unprepared to lead due to the unanticipated death of Razak - his style of governance was largely monotonous and basically just carried on the policies enacted by the Razak's government almost without any major changes. He also only just returned to politics with the support and encouragement from Razak several years earlier. Hussein was credited by the ruling regime as the “Farther of Unity” due to his somewhat relaxed and tolerant style of leadership, in particular his relationship with the non-Malay leaders within BN.

However, Hussein's “failure” in the internal power struggle within UMNO saw the rise of Dr Mahathir Mohamed (1981 – 2003) as the fourth Prime Minister. Once regarded by the opposition as “Malay-ultra” and the strongest critic of the Tunku's regime,³³ Mahathir was placed in the right position to realise his political beliefs. His twenty-three years of rule was marked by numerous socio-political events which laid diverse and profound changes in the country's nation-state building and history. With huge electoral supports earned throughout his administration which he personally regarded as the mandate of his leadership,³⁴ Mahathir gradually took radical steps in re-shaping the character of BN Malaysia as the party-state. Since assuming the premiership, he had ventured beyond the Prime Minister's constitutional constraints and individually monopolised the powers of the state as highlighted in Chapter 2.

During Mahathir's leadership that spanned over a period of more than two decades, UMNO has been divided twice. The first was in 1987 which saw Mahathir's opponents, led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, establishing a splinter party based on Malay nationalism, but without Mahathir, known as the *Semangat 46*. He made a pact with the opposition parties in challenging BN during the 1990 General Election. The second split happened after Mahathir sacked his deputy, Anwar Ibrahim in 1998 which saw the establishment of another splinter party in April 1999, the multiracial *Parti Keadilan Nasional*.³⁵ The splits in UMNO also meant splits of Malay support to UMNO. As majority of the Parliament seats are of Malay-majority constituencies maintained through the 1974 electoral boundaries redelination

³³ Karminder Singh Dhillon, *Malaysian foreign policy in the Mahathir era, 1981-2003: dilemmas of development*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2009, p.27.

³⁴ Throughout his premiership, Mahathir-led BN never failed to be re-elected as the federal government with two-third majority in the Parliament.

³⁵ The party is later known as Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) after its merger with Parti Rakyat Malaysia in 2003.

exercise,³⁶ the splits could affect and threaten the electoral winnings of Mahathir-led BN. In the 1999 General Election, *Keadilan* made a pact with PAS and DAP.³⁷ Together they won many Malay-majority seats in the urban areas.

For these reasons, Mahathir who was previously known for his Malay ultra-nationalism had pragmatically planned for a new strategy in winning the support of the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese since early 1990s. By then he knew that he could not rely solely on the Malay votes if he intended to remain in power. Accordingly, he embarked on a new, much more open policy to woo the support of the non-Malays and thus increasing his political support. In February 1991, not long after the 1990 Election, Mahathir launched a new grand vision of Malaysia nation-building – *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020). Mahathir believed that it was “the way forward” in Malaysia’s strive to attain full status as a developed nation-state in the future.

By the year 2020, Malaysia can be a united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.

Mahathir Mohamed, 28 February 1991.³⁸

In this nationalist blueprint, Mahathir highlighted “nine central strategic challenges” in achieving the vision with the quest of building a united *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian nation) as the first and foremost challenge.³⁹

The first of these is the challenges of establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny. This must be a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership made up of one `Bangsa Malaysia` with political loyalty and dedication to the nation.

Mahathir Mohamed, 28 February 1991.⁴⁰

³⁶ Greg Barton, ‘Islam, society, politics and change in Malaysia’, in Jason F. Isaacson and Colin Lewis Rubenstein (eds.), *Islam in Asia: changing political realities*, 5th ed., Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London, 2009, p. 130.

³⁷ The pact was known as Barisan Alternatif (BA). In 2001, DAP exited BA and the pact was later dissolved in 2004.

³⁸ Mahathir Mohamad, *Malaysian Business Council – The Way Forward*, 28 February 1991, Speech Collection Archives of Chief Executives, viewed 1 April 2015,

<<http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=mahathir&id=537>>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

This attractive, inclusive and new multiracial vision of the nation was very much anticipated especially by the non-Malays since Lee Kuan Yew's idea of "Malaysian Malaysia" and after two long decades of the state's practice of the Malay preferential policy. With regard to the relationship of Mahathir's government with the non-Malays, although there were certain disagreements over various issues of nation-building, Mahathir had managed to reduce their frustrations through the enactment of certain policies and practices. Some of the non-Malay elites and some of those of the business class in urban areas as well as rural areas had greatly benefited from the establishments of "Ali-Baba" cooperation.⁴¹ As the name suggests, the cooperation is between the well-connected Malay elite with the Chinese contractors and businessmen. The Malays are the project seekers, who seek and acquire lucrative development projects from the party-state whilst the Chinese capitalists are the contractors. Through the NEP, the government offered numerous developmental projects worth hundreds of billions of ringgits. However, it was difficult for the non-Malays to directly benefit from this co-operation as the co-operation is supposedly aimed to improve the socio-economic condition of the Malays.⁴² Notwithstanding, certain well-connected non-Malays, despite the innate constraints imposed by the co-operations, were able to obtain direct development contracts from Mahathir's government (as discussed in the next session).

Mahathir's liberal policy on the privatisation of education institutions at tertiary level since the late 1990s has allowed many non-Malay children, especially from the middle-class families, opportunities to study at local universities at a much cheaper cost.⁴³ Prior to this policy, aspirant non-Malay middle-class families were frustrated at the government for providing insufficient places at public universities for non-Malays which left them little choice but to send their children abroad to pursue higher education. Their frustrations were also heightened by the imposition of racial quota and ethnic preferential policy in the process of admission to public universities which was perceived as excessively favouring the Malays. Thus, the government's initiatives in encouraging foreign universities to open up branches

⁴¹ Henry Wai-Chung Yeung, *Transnational corporations and business networks: Hong Kong firms in the ASEAN region*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998, p. 152.

⁴² Interview with Mohd Faizal Daud, Chief of the Education Bureau of UMNO Kelantan, Bangi, 15 August 2015.

⁴³ *Regional outlook: Southeast Asia, 1998-99*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1998, p. 9.

and allowing the establishment of private universities in the country had somewhat lessened the non-Malay grievances in respect to this aspect.⁴⁴

In maintaining its relevancy and symbolic role as the representative and the protector of the ‘Malaysian Chinese’ in light of the growing popularity of DAP amongst the Chinese community, MCA, particularly through its Bureau of Complaint (MCABC), had somewhat re-invented itself as an effective political broker for the Chinese. By maintaining close ties with government agencies and sources of significant political funds, various issues faced by the Chinese in particular at the individual level managed to be resolved. This also included minor problems such as transferring the complainant’s children to the preferred school; poor household waste management, drainage system and road conditions at their housing estates; scholarships issues;⁴⁵ and last but not least issues revolving loan sharks (known as “ah longs”).⁴⁶ The ability of MCA during the Mahathir years to effectively resolve such problems did not only boost its image as a reliable organisation within the Chinese community but also contributed to increased positive perceptions towards the BN government.

The need for Mahathir’s reign to please the Chinese voters led to a collation of Chinese-based non-governmental organisations – known as the Malaysian Chinese Organization Elections Appeals Committee (SUQIU) - which presented a seventeen-point proposal to the Mahathir-led government several months before the 1999 Election.⁴⁷ SUQIU was calling for the abolishment of Bumiputera and Non-Bumiputera status in favour of a system based on needs.⁴⁸ Mahathir admitted to the situation and said that BN “had no choice” but to agree to the proposals in order to win the votes of the Chinese.⁴⁹ During the election, Mahathir’s reign was continued with more than two-third majority and he later materialised part of the SUQIU proposals. However, this was done as more of a symbolic

⁴⁴ See, Francis Loh Kok Wah, ‘Where has (ethnic) politics gone? The case of the BN non-Malay politicians and political parties’, in Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *The politics of multiculturalism: pluralism and citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 2001, pp.188-196.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Loan-Sharks or locally referred to as “Ah Long” are illegal money-lending agencies which imposes high interest rates upon its debtors. Despite that, many Malaysians feel compelled to borrow money from these agencies especially during pressing situations as these agencies are easily accessible and offer quick-cash compared to the conventional financial institutions which are usually laden with bureaucratic red tape. Due to the exploitative and manipulative lending systems devised by the Ah Longs, many debtors fail to complete the repayments. These Ah Longs would usually hire gangsters who use violent, indecent and inhumane methods to force the debtors (and/or their families) to repay their debt.

⁴⁷ Khoo Boo Teik, *Beyond Mahathir: Malaysian politics and its discontents*, Zed Books, London and New York, 2003, p. 126.

⁴⁸ Hamzah Ali, *The politics of meritocracy in Malaysia*, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California, Unpublished M.A Thesis, 2003, p. 69-70.

⁴⁹ Khoo, *Beyond Mahathir*, ibid.

gesture by his administration, including his support in the establishment of *Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman* in 2001. He also announced some quota for non-Malays in the matriculation programmes and the MARA Junior Colleges (MRSM) in 2002 which previously had been made exclusive for Malays and Bumiputeras.⁵⁰ The supposedly ethnic quota for the enrolment of a student in the public universities was also abolished and replaced with a new system based on merits.⁵¹ Whilst most non-Malays welcomed the initiatives, Indian leaders in MIC on the other hand were worried about the abolishment of the quota system as they felt that it might affect Indian representation in the public universities. This initiative was not well received by Malay nationalists and the Malay community at large. In a move to appease the Malays, Mahathir promised to set up more public universities and MRSMs in the future to accommodate more Malaysia despite arguing for healthy competition in the education system in Malaysia.

Therefore, apart from improving government policies so that they cater to all races Mahathir's administration also carried out re-delineation exercises before the general elections in order to alter certain Malay-majority constituencies to create constituencies that are more equally represented by the three main races.⁵² This was not unlike Tunku's accommodative style of administration. The strong support of BN from the Chinese during the 1999 General Election, as a result of the politics of patronage played by Mahathir to the non-Malays, had enabled Mahathir's regime to win more than two-third majority⁵³ which also later contributed to Abdullah's landslide victory in the 2004 General Election.

Despite his renewed approach towards the non-Malays, Mahathir was in no sense abandoning the interests of the Malays interests. He was a political man who was pragmatic in preserving his objectives. Thus, the Mahathir years also saw various new and refined policies being introduced. Although he admitted that the NEP played a significant role in restructuring the society in particular the Malay community, he contended that the NEP was still unable to produce a Malay business class and Malay millionaires. Thus, by streamlining NEP and introducing privatisation policies, certain well-connected Malay individuals were

⁵⁰ 'Move to allow non-Malays in Mara, and matriculation is criticized', *Malaysiakini*, 18 June 2002, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www-random.malaysiakini.com/news/11816>>.

⁵¹ 'Despite meritocracy, lawmakers say university intake 'not level playing field'', *The Malay Mail*, viewed 13 September 2013, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/despite-meritocracy-lawmakers-say-university-intake-not-level-playing-field>>.

⁵² Milne, R. S., and Diane K. Mauzy. *Malaysian politics under Mahathir*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 115.

⁵³ Khor Yuke Lim, Beh Chun Chee and Lim Lai Hoon, 'The old and new Chinese language press with special reference to the 12th General Election', in Lee Hock Guan and Leo Suryadinata (eds.), *Malaysian Chinese: recent developments and prospects*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2012, p.149.

made millionaires by owning and/or heading giant corporations previously owned by the government and/or receiving contracts, funds, loans and/or land worth millions of ringgit from the government in the name of 'development'. Accordingly, the business and class elements of the political parties within BN particularly UMNO became even more significant as the party increasingly become an apparatus for class (re)production. The memberships of UMNO, from the top to the grass roots, gradually have material values.⁵⁴ Those in the top ranks are usually appointed as members of the cabinet and thus have access to various government contracts and projects in their ministries. Due to weak enforcement of the law, it is common for the ministers to award the contracts to politically well-connected persons including family members, friends, UMNO leaders and corporations.

Another fundamental element of Alliance/BN nation-building which is correlated to the party-state role as symbolic representatives and protectors of their respective communities is the production and maintenance of the structure of dependency. Largely through the Alliance/BN's government monopolisation of the state power, the national wealth (material assistances, developments, etc.) is manipulated by the government in such a way that it would influence, discipline and force the people to channel their support to the party-state. One of the manifestations of this element is the practices of politics of development. This practice has become more apparent during Mahathir's years. The works of Loh and Yusoff clearly revealed how Mahathir's administration, at the federal-state level slashed budgets and froze many development projects in the state of Sabah and Kelantan when both states were controlled by opposition parties.⁵⁵ During my personal interview with Mahathir, he personally "abstained"⁵⁶ from the petroleum royalty payment to Terengganu⁵⁷ when the state was controlled by PAS from 1999 to 2000,⁵⁸ ostensibly to "avoid the misuse the fund for PAS's political purpose".⁵⁹ But after some tremendous pressure, Mahathir finally allocated a portion of "special funds" to Terengganu known as "wang ehsan"⁶⁰ to give the impressi

⁵⁴ Interview with Mohd Faizal Daud, Chief of the Education Bureau of UMNO Kelantan, Bangi, 15 August 2015.

⁵⁵ Francis Loh, 'Sabah and Sarawak: The Politics of Development and Federalism works', *Kajian Malaysia: Special Issue*, 1997; Mohammad Agus Yusoff, *Malaysian Federalism: conflict or consensus*, UKM Press, Bangi, 2006.

⁵⁶ Interview with Mahathir Mohamad, the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, 11 May 2010, Putrajaya.

⁵⁷ Khoo Boo Teik, *Beyond Mahathir: Malaysian politics and its discontents*, Zed Books, London and New York, 2003, p. 126.

⁵⁸ Khai Leong Ho and Ung-Ho Chin, *Mahathir's administration: performance and crisis in governance*, Singapore, Times Books International, 2001, p. 52.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mahathir, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Wang ehsan literally mean in Malay gratuity or good-deed fund; Chan Chee Koon, 'Re-thinking healthcare and the state', in Ooi Kee Beng and Goh Bang Lee (eds.), *Pilot studies of a new Penang*, Socio-economic and

to Terengganu and Malaysians at large that his administration is generous even to the opposition-controlled states and that the *rakyat* in return should be thankful for that. Accordingly, state developments under the opposition-controlled states were effectively decelerated by the Mahathir's administration and thus strengthening the state's propagated notion that only BN that was capable of bringing development to the country.⁶¹ Proud of the self-serving idea, Mahathir once stated that the PAS-control Kelantan state "would be much prosperous if it was continuously ruled by *Barisan Nasional*".⁶²

In October 2003, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi succeeded Mahathir. Abdullah is a graduate in Islamic Studies and the grandson of influential Islamic preacher Sheikh Abdullah Badawi Fahim. His charming, gentle and Islamic personalities coupled with the fact that he is scandal free prior to his premiership, has won him the hearts of many leaders in UMNO including Mahathir. About three months before he assumed office, Abdullah publicly announced that he would "steer Malaysia in his own way". Several months after he held the position of the Fifth Prime Minister of Malaysia, he embarked on an operation to "cleanse" his administration, which was akin to Mahathir's early policy. He dismissed two of his ministers who were accused of being involved in corruptions as a show of good faith.⁶³ That initiative along with his more open style of leadership and successful efforts in recovering the economy from the late 1990s recession has won him and BN the highest ever votes in the coalition electoral history since the 1955 Malayan General Elections. In the 2004 Malaysia General Election, Abdullah's BN not only managed to take back Terengganu from PAS, but nearly wrested Kelantan- PAS traditional stronghold - as well. In Parliament, BN largely controls the House by commanding more than three quarters majority. Abdullah was also known for his initiatives in establishing the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) and Judicial Appointment Commission (JAC) in 2009 in his purported efforts to improve Malaysia's good governance.

Although the political structure of authoritarianism remained unchanged under Abdullah,⁶⁴ his gentle and mellow personality had more or less spurred a more open political

Environmental Research Institute and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Penang and Singapore, 2010, pp. 129-146.

⁶¹ Mohammad Agus Yusoff, *Malaysian Federalism: conflict or consensus*, UKM Press, Bangi, 2006, p. 322.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ One of them was the Minister of Federal Territories, Tan Sri Isa Samad who was found guilty by UMNO Disciplinary Board for practicing money politics during the 2004 UMNO Election.

⁶⁴ Despite introducing certain reforms such as the establishment of MACC, such changes are superficial as both institutions are still directly under the control of the Prime Minister.

atmosphere as compared to the previous regime. Anwar Ibrahim who was imprisoned for misuse of power and acts of sodomy in 1999 was released by the Court of Appeal in 2004 during Abdullah's administration. Although Abdullah had every opportunity to put Anwar back behind bars or at the very least delay his freedom by instructing the Attorney General Chambers (AGC) to file for an appeal in the Federal Court, a move that would have most probably been taken by his immediate predecessor without hesitation, he did not do so. Anwar later became the biggest threat to Abdullah's regime. Anwar had even publicly declared to take-over the country's leadership on 16th September 2008 through party-hopping. Anwar's declaration had caused tremendous unrest to the regime, but Abdullah still refused to use his powers and position to contain Anwar and his threats. In fact, several months before the 2008 General Elections, Anwar, a number of civil rights associations and the political oppositions had organised a massive rally known as *Bersih* (literally means clean in Malay) demanding the government to conduct a free and fair election. Thousands of people had gathered in Kuala Lumpur in support of the cause. The government responded aggressively towards the protestors, but no one was caught under the Internal Security Act (ISA) 1960.

Abdullah's regime, however, was not completely far off from using the ISA and other repressive laws in containing external challenges to his administration. On certain occasions, such as the 2007 *Hindraf* rally,⁶⁵ the ISA and the Police Act were used by government to suppress the movement. Despite the establishment of MACC, Abdullah's administration was criticised for the intervention of his son-in-law, Khairy Jamaluddin, dubbed as the "Young Turks" and "the Fourth Floor" (Khairy's office),⁶⁶ in his government. His administration had awarded his son's controlled company Scomi with lucrative government contracts⁶⁷ worth hundreds of millions of dollars. He also played a pivotal role in the 'controlling' of the judiciary on the meteoric rise of a long time UMNO lawyer, Zaki Azmi⁶⁸ as the Chief Justice in October 2008. Zaki had just joined the judiciary for about a year (in September 2007) before his appointment as Chief Justice. Prior to that, he had only served the judiciary for

⁶⁵ The Hindu Rights Action Force or Hindraf movement is a class action taken by some politicised Indians against the Malaysian government.

⁶⁶ 'Yes, the 'fourth floor boys' have returned', *Malaysia Today*, 2 July 2009, viewed 1 April 2016, <<http://www.malaysia-today.net/yes-the-fourth-floor-boys-have-returned/>>.

⁶⁷ William Case, 'Malaysia in 2007: high corruption and low opposition', *Asian Survey*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2008, p. 51.

⁶⁸ 'Umno lawyer tapped as Federal Court judge', *Malaysiakini*, 5 September 2007, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/72014>>.

three months when he was appointed as the President of Court of Appeal in December 2007, the second most senior position in the Malaysian judiciary.

In line with his Islamic beliefs and principles, in 2004 Abdullah proposed a new concept of governance based on ten pre-selected Islamic principles which he referred to as the *Islam Hadhari* (the Civilised Islam).⁶⁹ It was an effort made by Abdullah to redefine the governance of the nation-state based on “moderate Islamic paradigm”⁷⁰ to “secular paradigm”.⁷¹ The impact of such an attempt was rather minimal and generally dismissed by the critics as merely “symbolic” and a move to break “the monopoly of Islamic politics by PAS”,⁷² thereby showing the Malays that UMNO/BN was not any less Islam than the influential Islamic party. *Islam Hadhari*, however, reiterated the idea of the primacy of Islam and the Malay-Muslim’s way of life as a major cultural component of the nation. Abdullah’s administration, overall, was comparable to Hussein on the grounds that he principally continued the policies of the previous administration without enacting any fundamental or major changes.

The Nation-Building Policy 1957 - 2009: Ethnicity, Class and the Regime Maintenance

The division of labour according to ethnicity initiated by the British during colonialism have brought about fundamental changes and racial inequalities in the process of modernising the Malay(a)sian society. Whilst the rise of capitalism in the territory has invoked new social issues that concern economic inequalities in an increasingly capitalist society, the rise of nationalism brought by decolonisation (and independence) has called upon national questions which revolves around political-cultural (status) inequalities.⁷³ These are the unsettled and

⁶⁹ The ten principles are: Faith and piety in Allah, Just and trustworthy government, A free and independent people, A vigorous pursuit and mastery of knowledge, Balanced and comprehensive economic development, Good quality of life for the people, Protection of the rights of minority groups and women, Cultural and moral integrity, Safeguarding natural resources and the environment, and A strong defence policy. Speech By Prime Minister Dato’ Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on “Islam Hadhari” at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, India on 21 December 2004, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=paklah&id=2912>>.

⁷⁰ Abdullah Md Zain, *New Straits Times*, 10 August, 2004.

⁷¹ Mohamed Sharif Bashir, ‘Islam Hadhari: concept and prospect’, 3 March 2005, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.islamawareness.net/Asia/Malaysia/hadhari.html>>.

⁷² Speech by Prime Minister Dato’ Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on “Islam Hadhari”, *ibid*.

⁷³ See, Rogers Brubaker, ‘National homogenization and ethnic reproduction on the European periphery’, in Marzio Barbagli and Harvie Ferguson (eds.), *La teoria sociologica e lo stato moderno: Saggi in onore di Gianfranco Poggi*, Il Mulino, 2009, p. 202.

unsettling dilemmas of nation-building building faced by the Alliance/*Barisan Nasional* (BN) government which had ruled the state since the country's independence up until this very day. Alliance/BN party-state in its nation-building projects, do not attempt to build a just and equitable nation which would "proudly and loyally" identify themselves in response to the territorial organisation of the state without forgetting their traditional ethnic cultures and origins. Moreover, as part of the configuration of the Alliance/BN's regime maintenance, the party-state also seeks to produce a nation that would recognise themselves as being one with the political organisation of the government-cum-ruling party. Ethnicity, class and politics (regime maintenance), therefore, constitute the prism that characterises the Alliance/BN Malaysia as authoritarian in nation-building which will be the subject of examination in this section.

Constitutional provisions in relation to Malay special privileges and the nationalisation of the Malay culture clearly indicate that the Alliance/BN party-state has recognised these inequalities as fundamental issues to be addressed in the nation-building process. However, the inter-ethnic nature of Alliance/BN party-state and the racially- played up social situations in Malaysia (especially in the Peninsular) seemed to have evaded the government. Moreover, the hegemony of Malay nationalism over Malaysian nationalism and the Malays' influential claim over their rightful status as the original inhabitants of the land raises two distinct questions pertaining to Malaysian nation-building, which are economic and political-cultural inequalities, to be consolidated and addressed together in the direction of Malay dominancy. This is in spite of the fact that the Constitution (and the State), recognise the interests of the other races. Article 153 of the Federal Constitution provides that the "reservation of quotas in respect of services, permits, etc., for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak"⁷⁴ in relation to the "legitimate interests of other communities" shall be safeguarded.⁷⁵ The apparent purpose of the provision is to "advance the Malay's economic status" as many of them "are economically underprivileged".⁷⁶ The truth is that it was meant to be a "temporary" measure to correct the imbalances created by colonial capitalism during the British era.⁷⁷ However, the provision has been misunderstood, misused and misquoted by many Malay nationalists and the *rakyat* is frequently made to

⁷⁴ Article 153, Federal Constitution of Malaysia 1957.

⁷⁵ Article 153 (1), *ibid*.

⁷⁶ Interview with K.J. Ratnam, a former professor at Universiti Sains Malaysia, 14 May 2010.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

believe that Article 153 is a permanent scheme to advance the Malays' economic standing owing to their status as the "definitive race or nation in the state".⁷⁸

Despite the "trade-off" neither fully satisfying the Malays nor the non-Malays, Tunku and his counterparts in the Alliance consider the compromise a fair deal in the ethno-racially divided society. In fact, the political accommodation, power sharing and ethnic bargains had proven to be the Alliance's winning formula in the 1955, 1959 and 1964 General Elections. However, the temporary inclusion of Singapore with its influential leaders in PAP, particularly its Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had caused some tensions between several ethnically-based organisations. Lee's idea of a "Malaysian Malaysia", directly challenged the hegemonic notion of Malay supremacy.⁷⁹ Lee's idea was thus met with aggressive responses from many Malay nationalists within and outside of UMNO. They considered Lee's vision as 'dangerous', a 'threat to the national security and harmony' and an open challenge to 'Malay rights'.⁸⁰ The Malay nationalists also channelled their dissatisfaction to the Tunku's administration which was perceived as 'too soft/weak' in dealing with the Chinese and; too tardy and inefficient in effectively upholding the status of the Malays and its culture.⁸¹ For example, they deem that the importance of *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) and the education system has strayed far from what was originally intended since the country's independence.

Finally, in the 1969 General Election, the Alliance was constricted by two forces of nationalisms. On one hand was the growing PAS/PMIP-led Malay nationalism and on the other hand was DAP, GERAKAN and PPP's multiracial nationalism. However, the Alliance stood steadfast in its Malay-based inter-ethnic approach which allowed the party to win the 1969 General Election. However, its performance in the elections was the worst since the 1955 election. The Alliance only secured 49.3 per cent of the popular votes and merely commanded a simple majority in Parliament.⁸² It lost in the states of Penang, Kelantan, and Terengganu and nearly lost in Selangor. Alliance lost in many Chinese dominated constituencies in the urban areas and also Malay-majority constituencies in the rural East

⁷⁸ Interview with Mansor Mohd. Nor, Professor in Sociology, Institute of Ethnic Studies, National University of Malaysia, 3 March 2010.

⁷⁹ See, Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for a Malaysian Malaysia*, Ministry of Culture, Singapore, 1965.

⁸⁰ Leo Suryadinata, *The making of Southeast Asian Nations: state, ethnicity, indigenism and citizenship*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 2015, p. 29.

⁸¹ Amy H. Liu, *Standardizing diversity: the political economy of language regimes*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2015, p.219.

⁸² Ooi Kee Beng, Johan Saravanamuttu and Lee Hock Guan, *March 8: Eclipsing May 13*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2008, p. 55.

Coast states in the Peninsula. UMNO's grip on power, however, was re-strengthened when the May 13 riots in Kuala Lumpur erupted just three days after the election. It allowed the federal government to declare a state of emergency and establish an interim government which was known as National Operation Council (NOC). The situation also compelled Tunku to resign, and several months later, Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Razak Hussein became the de facto Chief Executive. He was officially appointed as the new Prime Minister in September 1970.

Despite the contention that the Alliance are rooted on two different takes on nationalism, Razak's camp arbitrarily regarded the clash and the electoral result as the consequences of the Malay's dissatisfaction with their status and situation, particularly their jealousy against the purportedly well-to-do Chinese. For this reason, Razak launched the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 to address grievances of the Malays and re-structured them to be the main foundation of UMNO political support for the sake of the survival of the political party. On the pretexts of eradicating poverty by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race and restructuring the Malaysian society to correct economic balance so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function,⁸³ NEP was prepared to elevate the status of the Malays and their culture to greater and more dominant heights despite its civic objectives. UMNO's administration under Razak had hoped that this new vision for Malaysia would restore racial balance and help foster national unity in the society.

Public Service

Standing alone as one part of the Federal Constitution, Part X, with sixteen articles in addition to other related provisions in other parts of the constitution,⁸⁴ the Malaysian Public Services comprised one of the grand components of the Alliance/BN's visions of the desired nation-state. As the backbone of the government which is responsible in executing and materialising the plans and policies of the ruling elite, Alliance/BN recognised the importance of aligning the make-up of the Public Services (which was originally established during the British colonialism) with the party. The transformation of the Public Service was

⁸³ See, Hugo Stokke, 'Reasonable discrimination? Affirming access to higher education in Malaysia', in Hugo Stokke and Arne Tostensen (ed.), *Human Rights in the development year book 1999/2000: the millennium edition*, Kluwer Law International and Nordic Human Rights, The Hague and Oslo, 2001, p. 202.

⁸⁴ Federal Constitution of Malaysia 1957.

one of items on the Alliance's campaign manifesto during the 1955 election on the pretext of "Malaysianisation".⁸⁵ However, instead of "Malaya-nising", UMNO-led Alliance/BN government have "Malay-nised" the Public Service in aligning the bureaucracy with the political and cultural make-up of UMNO. The bureaucracy then gradually become the symbol and also the instrument for maintaining 'Malay/UMNO supremacy' and 'Malay/UMNO government.

Under the British rule, British officers held top positions in the Public Services while some Malay elites gradually filled the middle-level positions when an elite administrative department, the Malayan Civil Service (MCS) was established in 1920.⁸⁶ The lower-level consisted of a good balance of the non-Malays and the Malays. As part of the Malaya decolonisation plan, a racial quota was imposed on the recruitment of Malayan senior-level civil servants in the elite MCS by the colonial government on 13 March 1953.⁸⁷ The ratio was 4:1 favouring Malays over the non-Malays which was later preserved by the Alliance government after the country's independence. Although the non-Malays considered this unfair as observed by Horowitz, it has never proven to be the destabilising issue⁸⁸ as the non-Malays still dominated the "professional and technical services"⁸⁹ in the early years of independence.⁹⁰ Out of 34000 public servants in the government services in 1957, 26.3 per cent were Indians and 15.4 percent were Chinese.⁹¹ Moreover, the total number of Malay officers in Division I, the highest division of the public service during that period, was relatively small, that was 14.1 per cent in 1957⁹² although the Malay proportion was much bigger in the elite Malayan Civil Service that was 34.6 per cent.⁹³ This situation, however, was about to undergo substantial changes not long after independence.

⁸⁵ 'Report of the Committee on Malayisation of the Public Service', *Federation of Malaya*, Committee on Malayisation of the Public Service, 1956, p.8.

⁸⁶ J.M. Gullick, *Rulers and residents : influence and power in the Malay States, 1870-1920*, Oxford University Press, Singapore and New York, 1992, pp. 123-5.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, p. 587.

⁸⁹ Milton J. Esman, *Administration and Development in Malaysia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1972, pp. 72-74.

⁹⁰ The Census Report of Malaya 1957 revealed that Out of 34000 public servants in the government services in 1957, 26.3 percent was Indians and 15.4 percent Chinese. See, Khoo Boo Teik, *Ethnic structure, inequality and governance in the public sector: Malaysian experiences*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva, 2005, p. 9.

⁹¹ Census Report of Malaysia 1957. See Khoo, *Ethnic structure*, p. 9.

⁹² Robert O. Tilman, *Bureaucratic transition in Malaysia*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1964, p. 70.

⁹³ Mavis Puthuchear, *The politics of administration: the Malaysian experience*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1978, p.57.

The propositions of Malay (and Bumiputera) officers in Division I, that is the second highest division of the public service rose substantially since independence. From merely 14.1 percent in 1957, the number of Malay officers significantly increased to 39.3 per cent in 1970 and constituted almost two-third (65 per cent) in the division by 1987.⁹⁴ By June 2005, the Malay officers in the same division rose to 81.65 percent or 155,871 out of 190,903.⁹⁵ In the top management composition of the public sector in the same year, the Malay directors comprised of 83.95 percent whereas the Chinese 9.25 percent and Indians 5.08 percent out of 1632 members.⁹⁶

Similar trends are evident in the support division which is the biggest group in the Malaysian Public Service. In 1957 the Malays comprised about 52 per cent in the division,⁹⁷ and then reached 64.5 per cent out of 75,875 personnel in 1969,⁹⁸ before rose to 75.77 percent out of 706, 715 in June 2006.⁹⁹ Out of 899,250 public servants in Malaysia in June 2006, 77.03 per cent or 692,736 of them are Malays, 9.37 per cent (84,285) Chinese and Indians comprised of 5.12 per cent (46,054). These figures, however, include the proportion of teachers and personnel in the public educational service which are the biggest service in Public Service. According to Malaysia Human Rights Foundation (HRF) estimation, 60 percent of the Chinese and 20 per cent of Indians in the Public Service in 2005 were of the Educational Service.¹⁰⁰ If the Educational Service was not to be included in the 2005 Government's Report, HRF contends 85 per cent of public servants were Malays.¹⁰¹

The size of the Malaysian Public Service grew exponentially since Independence. From just around 34,000 personnel (or 97,000 if the Police, Home Guard, Prisons and Armed Forces personnel were included) in 1957, the number swelled to a flamboyant 1.6 million in 2017. In ratio, this means that there is one civil servant for every 19 Malaysians, "the highest in the world".¹⁰² In 2010, the size of the Civil Service accounted for about 10 per cent of the

⁹⁴ Robert E.B. Lucas and Donald Verry, 1999, *Restructuring Malaysian Economy: Development and Human Resources*, St. Martin's Press, New York, p. 234.

⁹⁵ Government of Malaysia, 2005. See also 'Institutional racism and religious freedom in Malaysia', prepared by Human Rights Foundation Malaysia for US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, United States State Department and Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, p. 11.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Khoo, *Ethnic structure*, ibid.

⁹⁸ Puthuchery, *The Politics of Administration*, ibid.

⁹⁹ Government of Malaysia, 2005. See also 'Institutional racism and religious freedom in Malaysia', ibid.

¹⁰⁰ 'Institutional Racism', ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² 'One civil servant to 19 people', *The Borneo Post*, viewed 1 February 2017, <<http://www.theborneopost.com/2017/02/01/one-civil-servant-to-19-people/>>.

total labour force.¹⁰³ The growth may not be solely attributed to the growth in the Malaysian population and administrative complexity, as it also goes without saying that such growth is associated to the party-state's intention to create and provide employment for the Malays, in parallel with the spirit of the NEP.

The “Malay-nisation” of the services, however, did not reduce the recruitments of non-Malays in the absolute term. From 27,472 personnel (including those in the Police Department, Home Guard, Prisons and Armed Forces) in 1957,¹⁰⁴ the number of non-Malay personnel in the service grew to 136,686 in June 2005.¹⁰⁵ This annual increment, however is still marginal when compared to the significant growth of the number of Malay civil servants. The services were also ‘Malay-nised’ in the sense of the usage of Malay language in the organisation. Being the national and official language of the state, the Malay language was increasingly used for official purposes of the services, after the second wave of Malay nationalism starting from 1969. The fact that there are more Malay civil servants also meant that the Malay language is increasingly used in non-official communications among the staffs.

As a result, the Public Service and the Alliance/BN, both which formed the major parts of the state, are widely regarded by non-Malays and Malays as a “Malay government”. It has become emblematic of Malay political power and supremacy. Through this paradigm, the loyalty of the Malays toward the government is obliquely sought after. Since the government is a “Malay government”, any opposition from any Malay person would be deemed by the government as ‘traitors to the community’ or ‘ungrateful Malays’;¹⁰⁶ and any political challenge posed by the non-Malays, in particular their politicians, would be regarded by the government as a challenge or threat to the Malay community. The Communist insurgency (1960 to 1989) for example, was successfully framed by the UMNO government as a violent confrontation by the Chinese (or more specifically Chinese Communists) not only against the UMNO-led government but also the Malays at large.

¹⁰³ *Bernama*, 29 Jun 2010, viewed 1 April 2015,

<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v3/bm/news_lite.php?id=509687>.

¹⁰⁴ Census Report of Malaysia 1957. See, Khoo, *Ethnic structure*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Government of Malaysia, 2005. See also ‘Institutional Racism’, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ See for example, ‘Mahathir Mohamad is a traitor who betrayed Malays, says PM Najib’, *International Business Times*, viewed 5 April 2016, <<http://www.ibtimes.sg/mahathir-mohamad-traitor-who-betrayed-malays-says-pm-najib-884>>.

Government Scholarships

The Public Service offers numerous government scholarships – known as the Public Service Department (PSD) scholarships – to eligible school-leavers for the purpose of recruitment and development of qualified staff. The distribution of the scholarships, nevertheless, is not liberal and in fact largely secretive. As it is considered as one of the avenues in improving the socio-economic status of society and its restructuring, the distribution are governed by Article 153 of the Federal Constitution and the NEP.¹⁰⁷ Article 153 (2) provides the power to the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (YDPA - the King of the Federation) to review the quota of government scholarships periodically under the advice of the Prime Minister. The proportion of the distribution was in general believed to be based on the overall ethnic composition of Malaysian society or 55:45 as according to quota at public universities under the NEP. Nevertheless, government data revealed that that it was never adhered to.

In 2000, 92 per cent (3444 out of 3763) of the PAS scholarship were awarded to Bumiputeras,¹⁰⁸ while in 2011 only twenty percent (300) out of 1500 PSD scholarships were based on merit.¹⁰⁹ The rest (in 2011) was divided according to four categories – Sarawak Bumiputra (5 per cent), Sabah Bumiputra (5 per cent), socially-handicapped (10 per cent) and ‘racial’ composition (60 per cent).¹¹⁰ The number of PSD scholarships for outstanding student in local universities for the first degree and diploma programmes is usually much larger than those furthering their studies overseas as the costs are cheaper.¹¹¹ In 2011 the PSD offered 2500 scholarships for first degree programmes and 8000 for diploma courses compared to overseas scholarships which stood at 1500 grants.¹¹² The racial proportion for the PSD local university scholarship was (and is) more secretive. Although there are practically no official figures produced by the government on the distribution, the method of

¹⁰⁷ See, ‘Racial quotas not a mistake, says deputy education minister’, *Malaysiakini*, 26 Jun 2002, viewed 30 April 2012, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/11966>>.

¹⁰⁸ Hena Mukherjee, ‘Access and equity to higher education – Malaysia’, 2010, viewed 1 April 2015, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/Resources/2263001279680449418/HigherEd_MalaysiaEquity.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Abolish race quota for PSD scholarships, says ex-FT education chief’, *The Malaysian Insider*, 26 May 2011, viewed 15 February 2014, <<https://blog.limkitsiang.com/2011/05/26/abolish-race-quota-for-psd-scholarships-says-ex-ft-education-chief/>>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹¹ The PSD, nevertheless, only provided 100 scholarships for outstanding first degree student who commencing their studies at the local institutions in 2010. See, ‘Isu Biasiswa JPA’ (PSD scholarship issues), viewed 30 January 2014, <<http://pmr.penerangan.gov.my/index.php/component/content/article/16-isu-nasional/6989-biasiswa-jpa-fokus-bidang-kritikal-.html>>.

¹¹² ‘PSD recipients list will not be revealed’, *Malaysiakini*, 13 June, 2011, viewed 30 January 2014, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/166717>>.

distribution must have not varied much, not least because it was decided by the same persons who believe in the same ideals (in advancing the socio-economic status of the Malays). This is evident from the fact that the number of the Malays in tertiary public-funded institutions has increased to dominant proportions since the introduction of the NEP, particularly at the diploma level.¹¹³

Consequently, it is a common phenomenon for outstanding non-Malay students to be less successful in securing a PSD scholarship PSD, not because of the limited scholarships, but because the policy and practice of the government lies in favour toward ‘assisting’ or ‘prioritising’ the Malays. It is “a fact of life that the non-Malays have to live with”, told by a group of non-Malay students during one of my interviews in Malaysia.¹¹⁴ In 2011, for example, the Deputy Minister of Education, Dr Wee Ka Siong revealed that “363 straight A+ students (read: non-Malays) who deserved to receive scholarship grants to study overseas had lost out to those with lower grades (read: Malays)”.¹¹⁵

Despite such divergences, certain Malay nationalists and the aspirant middle class within and outside of UMNO regarded the allocations as too limited and competitive. Many non-Malays, they observed, are still able to study at tertiary institutions even without any assistance from the state. Therefore, in their minds, the government initiative in reducing the economic disparities between ethnic categories would not be much effective unless a bigger allocation is exclusively awarded with more focus on boosting the socio-economic status of the Malays. For this reason, the state under a major initiative by Razak (and his successors) since the mid-1960s have established and restructured several agencies for the advancement of the Malays and also themselves, both in the education and in the economy.

MARA or *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (People’s Trust Council), is one of the government agencies established under the Ministry of Rural Development in 1966 as a result of the strong pressure from the first Malay Economic Congress (*Kongres Ekonomi Bumiputra*) which was held in 1965. It is largely a strategic agency with a huge financial allocation exclusively entrusted by the state for the purpose of advancing the socio-economic status of the Malays (and the natives) through education and business entrepreneurship.¹¹⁶ The primary

¹¹³ See Khoo, *Ethnic structure*, pp. 20-22.

¹¹⁴ Interview with five Chinese student leaders in National University of Malaysia, Bangi, 30 March 2010.

¹¹⁵ ‘DAP mocks PSD over scholarship oversight’, *The Malaysian Insider*, May 21 2011, 30 January 2014, <<https://blog.limkitsiang.com/2011/05/21/dap-mocks-psd-over-scholarship-oversight/>>.

¹¹⁶ MARA was actually a revision and enlargement of the 1951 *Rural Industrial Development Authority* (RIDA) which was regarded by the Malay nationalists and entrepreneurs as ineffective in improving the socio-economic standing of the rural Malay in particular and the Malay at large.

functions of MARA are to enlarge and provide more structural opportunities for the Malays in improving their socio-economic position. The next paragraphs would detail the process in which the Malays (and other Bumiputra) are given more opportunities by the state in improving their 'class statuses' in contrast to non-Malays.

In the matter of its educational project, MARA has allocated thousands of scholarships, loans and convertible loans to Malay students to study at overseas or local higher institutions. In contrast to PSD scholarships, MARA scholarships, in parallel with its strategic function, are exclusive to the Malays and other Bumiputeras only. Through this policy, the Malays do not need to compete with non-Malays. Consequently, the number of Malays in higher tertiary education desired by the state could be easily achieved. Due to the sensitive nature of the matter, no public records regarding the number of the sponsorships given are kept.

Opportunities for Malays in securing educational sponsorship, however, are not limited to the PSD and MARA. There are others state agencies and state corporations which offer exclusive or almost-exclusive educational assistance to the Malays, such as PETRONAS (largest oil company in Malaysia) and FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority).¹¹⁷ Though application is open to all Malaysians regardless of race, it is dominated by the Malays, which is in parallel with the 'Malay character' of the corporation itself.¹¹⁸ The same goes with FELDA sponsorships, with application limited to the children of FELDA's settlers, which are predominantly Malays.

Special Schools, Universities, and Training Colleges

The Alliance/BN leadership saw the importance of educational institutions in its nation-building project in restructuring the ethno-cultural imbalances caused by colonial capitalism. To this end, special educational institutions were established by the state exclusively for the Malays, with the reason that the community is "the poorest among all races" on the ground despite being the natives in Malaysia. This policy arguably contradicts pre-established the 55

¹¹⁷ FELDA is the world's largest plantation operator which was established in 1956 to improve the socio-economic status of the landless rural populations by awarding agricultural lands. Through this scheme, many Malays, who are the main beneficiaries, were resettled to newly developed areas.

¹¹⁸ PETRONAS is regarded by many as Malay corporation due to the Malays's dominance in corporation and the company's preference in choosing Malay entrepreneurs as its franchisees (conducting PETRONAS petrol stations) all across the country.

(Malays) : 45 (Non-Malays) ethnic quotas which was imposed in the public universities during the 1960s (through Article 153 of the Federal Constitution).¹¹⁹

In accordance with the 1956 Razak's Report and Malay special positions, six elite secondary-level *Sekolah Berasrama Penuh* (SBP – Full Boarding Schools), designed after the British Boarding Schools (BBS), were built to exclusively organize and educate the top Malay students with the best facilities and educators in the country.¹²⁰ This is in parallel with the government's vision that the students will be the main leaders of various fields or industries in the future.¹²¹ These schools, however, are only the pioneers. Tunku's successors, through subsequent five-year Malaysia Plans which are the short-term blueprints for national development, have progressively increased the number of SBPs. Today, there are sixty-five SBPs all over Malaysia.

The number of SBPs, however, is regarded by UMNO leaders as inadequate in the improvement of the socio-economic status of the new generation of Malays. Moreover, as the recruitment is chiefly based on examination results, many of the students came from the well-to-do or elite Malay families. For this reason, the establishments of more special secondary schools which would better equip the children of underprivileged Malays, especially from the rural areas, was regarded as critical. MARA fulfils this 'nationalist agenda' by building its own special secondary schools – known as *Maktab Rendah Sains MARA* (MRSMs – MARA Junior Science Colleges). MRSMs are intended for bright Malay students all over the country with preference given to candidates from rural areas. The MRSMs began in 1972 with the first college in Seremban and today, there are forty-eight MRSMs throughout the country. Like the SBPs, MRSMs also equipped with advanced facilities and highly-qualified teachers. Though the academic curriculum in MRSMs (as well as SBPs) is similar to that in national schools, special teaching and learning methods, designed after the university system, were implemented. Together with the SBPs, MRSMs emerged and maintained their reputation as the top schools at the national level, which consistently produced top *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM – Malaysia Certificate of Education, which is equivalent to the UK's O-Level) students in Malaysia.

¹¹⁹ 'Racial quotas not a mistake', *ibid.*

¹²⁰ With the incorporation of Sabah and Sarawak into the federation in 1963, the SBPs are later open to Bumiputras of Sabah and Sarawak. To date there are two SBPs schools in each of the states.

¹²¹ The six SBP schools established during Tunku's administration were Dato 'Abdul Razak School (SDAR), Tun Fatimah School (STF) – 1956, Tuanku Abdul Rahman School (STAR), Sekolah Menengah Sultan Abdul Halim School (SMSAH), Sultan Alam Shah School (SAS) and Seri Puteri School (SSP).

Prior to the NEP, despite the ethnic quota under Article 153 of the Federal Constitution, the number of Malays in public universities was relatively smaller than the total number of non-Malays. In 1970,¹²² the percentage of the Malay and Bumiputra students was 40.2 per cent (3,084 students) in contrast to 48.9 per cent (3,752) Chinese and 7.3 per cent (559) Indians.¹²³ By enforcing the new ethnic quota in 1971 under NEP “affirmative action”, Malay representation was greatly increased, despite the mushrooming of public universities in the country.¹²⁴ In 1975, Malay numbers in public universities and public-owned tertiary educational institutions substantial increased. At the first degree level, the Malays commanded 57.3 percent, whereas the Chinese stood at 35.8 and Indians at 5.6.¹²⁵ Malay numbers at the diploma and certificate level reached 88.8 percent and 73.5 percent respectively.¹²⁶ Overall, the percentage of the Malays in public higher learning institutions in 1975 was 73.5 percent (20,003 students) in contrast to 23.7 percent of (6,885) Chinese and 2.4 per cent (961) Indians.¹²⁷ In absolute terms, the number of Malay students in public universities at the first-degree level alone within this period grew almost threefold, up from 3,084 in 1970 to 8,600 in 1975.¹²⁸ At the same time, Chinese and the Indian enrolment recorded small increment from 3,752 to 5,373,¹²⁹ and from 559 to 846 respectively.¹³⁰

A decade later, Malay proportion in tertiary institutions was 63.0 percent while Chinese made up 29.7 per cent (including students from the private Tunku Abdul Rahman College) and Indians 6.5 percent.¹³¹ In 1995, Bumiputeras percentage in public tertiary institutions at the degree level reached 69.9 percent, whereas at the diploma level the figure was 83.4 per cent and 17.0 per cent at the certificate level.¹³² As a matter of fact, while the proportions of the non-Malays/Bumiputeras at the first degree and diploma levels recorded a steady decline since 1975 to 1995, their numbers at the certificate level had gradually increased.¹³³

¹²² At this time, there were practically three public universities in Malaysia that are University of Malaya, Science University of Malaysia and National University of Malaysia.

¹²³ Khoo, *Ethnic structure*, p. 20.

¹²⁴ From three public universities in 1970, the institutions have expanded to twenty public universities by 2006.

¹²⁵ Khoo, *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20-21.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹³² *Laporan Majlis Perundingan Ekonomi Negara Kedua* (Report on the Second National Economic Consultative Committee), Government of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Government Printers, 2000, p.198.

¹³³ Seventy-seven per cent of certificate-level student at the public post-secondary learning institutions in 1995 was non-Bumiputera. *ibid.*

As a result of the affirmative action policy, many non-Malays are forced to enter private local higher learning institutions which are sprouting in the 1990s under Mahathir's administration or to foreign universities after graduating from their secondary schools. This development, to certain Malay nationalists, have created 'ethnic imbalance' and undermined Malay status in the country.¹³⁴ Accordingly, MARA Institute of Technology (ITM), an exclusive Malay (and Bumiputera) public-funded educational organisation which was established in 1968, was upgraded to university status by Mahathir in 1999 and became known as *Universiti Teknologi MARA* (UiTM - MARA University of Technology).¹³⁵ While the size of ITM was rather modest and the level of education were only up to advance diploma level, the size of UiTM is gigantic and offers hundreds of first degree and professional courses, apart from enrolling Masters and Doctor of Philosophy students. The fees are marginal as compared to other public universities, and its students also received educational allowances and sponsored meals (for those staying in hostels).¹³⁶ UiTM has branch campuses in every state in Malaysia, and certain states such as Pahang and Johor even have two UiTM branches. In 2005, UiTM leaders, under the idea to *bela nasib orang Melayu* (protect the status of the Malays) and to *mengubah destini anak bangsa* (change the destiny of the children of the nation – read: Malay/Bumiputera), came up with a strategic-nationalist project that was to expand the number of university enrolment from 100,000 to 200,000 students by 2010.¹³⁷ But due to "constraints in infrastructure and financial resources, UiTM could only provide accommodation to 127,000 full-time students and 20,000 part-time students in 2010".¹³⁸ Today, UiTM is the largest public university in not only Malaysia, but also Southeast Asia with enrolment of more than one hundred fifty thousand students. The annual financial allocation for UiTM far exceeds that of any public university in the country,¹³⁹ bigger even than the annual budget allocated to certain states in Malaysia.

MARA is also entrusted to provide semi-professional training to Malays/Bumiputeras school leavers who are less gifted academically, which is one of the central strategies under the NEP's poverty eradication objective. To this end, the agency established the *Institut Kemahiran MARA* (IKM - MARA Training Institute) which had low admission requirements

¹³⁴ 'Malaysian PM vetoes call to open university to non-Malays', *Malaysia Today*, 13 August 2008, viewed 1 April 2015, <<http://www.malaysia-today.net/malaysian-pm-vetoes-call-to-open-university-to-non-malays/>>.

¹³⁵ The transformation was dubbed by UiTM's administrators as 'from I to U'.

¹³⁶ The educational allowance was halt after ITM was transformed to UiTM and nowadays, UiTM students have to pay for the meals most probable because the public university has grown too big to support everyone.

¹³⁷ See, 'UiTM's 200,000 Enrolment Project', 15 March 2012, viewed 1 April 2015, <https://cspi.uitm.edu.my/v1/strategic-project/uitms-200000-enrolment-project.html>.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Currently there are twenty public universities in Malaysia including UiTM.

at marginal fees while MARA provides educational allowances to the trainees. IKM would be tasked with supplying semi-skilled workers to cater to the need of the then growing manufacturing industries. As with the case of UiTM, IKM gradually expanded and developed since its first operation in 1968. From only issuing technical certificates to its graduates, its Petaling Jaya campus has begun to offer higher diploma programmes in the 1990s. Recently, several IKM campuses have been upgraded to *Kolej Kemahiran Tinggi MARA* (KKTM – MARA Higher Technical College) which allowed for conducting diploma programmes. Today there are twelve IKM and seven KKTM campuses enrolling thousands of Malays from all over Malaysia. Along with IKM, there are several public-funded institutions which provide semi-professional and technical training in Malaysia such as the *Institut Kemahiran Belia Negara* (IKBN – The State Training Institute for Youth) and Community Colleges. While the IKM is exclusive to the Malays, other public-funded training institutions are not, although they are practically dominated by the Malays as well.¹⁴⁰

Economic Development

Apart from MARA, several other government agencies are also playing major roles in achieving the NEP objectives. The Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) is the prime example of the government initiative in eradicating poverty among the rural settlements “through increasing the access of the poor to land, public amenities, training, and various forms of technological and agricultural assistance”.¹⁴¹ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, hundreds of thousands of hectares of undeveloped agricultural lands in the rural areas of the Peninsular have been allocated by FELDA to more than one hundred thousand selected rural population which were (and are) pre-dominantly Malays.¹⁴² Most of the FELDA stakeholders were allocated with ten acres of land which will be used to cultivate “cash crops” notably palm oil and rubber trees. This scheme did not only provide a new access to the modern economy to rural Malays with support from FELDA, it also relocated them to

¹⁴⁰ In the Community Colleges for example, the Malay proportion consistently constituted more than 90 per cent from 2005 to 2008. See, ‘Statistics of Higher Education in Malaysia’ Malaysia, 2008, *ibid*.

¹⁴¹ A.B. Shamsul, *From British to Bumiputera rule: local politics and rural development in Peninsular Malaysia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore, 1986, p. 98.

¹⁴² In 2012, there are 112,635 FELDA settlers across in the Peninsula. See, ‘Jengka’, *Official Website Lembaga Kemajuan Tanah Persekutuan*, viewed 1 April 2015, <http://www.felda.net.my/feldav3/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=113&Itemid=176&lang=bn>.

newly developed and much more organised rural areas which are equipped with basic amenities and certain access to government services such as schools and community clinics.

Today FELDA has emerged as the world's largest state-owned plantation operator and had the world's second largest Initial Public Offering in 2012 when the agency listed its company, the FELDA Global Venture Holdings (FGVH) at *Bursa Malaysia* (Malaysia Stock Exchange). Several other government agencies such as Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA) and Southeast Johore Development Authority (KEJORA) which also have similar functions to NEP and its objectives but with different arrangements and in different economic sectors.

Another major aspect in NEP's restructuring is the 20-year target of 30 per cent Bumiputera ownership of or participation in corporate equity by 1990. These include allotment of new shares in public listed companies, sale or transfer of corporations or other assets in selected sectors, employment in private companies subjected to the purview of the Industrial Coordination Act (ICA) and development and sale of urban housing and commercial space.¹⁴³

In the sale of urban housing and commercial space, the Malays/Bumiputera are given seven percent rebate from the selling price. Although the primary objective is to enable underprivileged Bumiputeras to buy houses or commercial space in the urban areas, in practice it is applied to any Bumiputera. To this end, the rebate is not based on the individuals (bumiputras) incomes or the type of houses/commercial space, but solely based on the individuals' ethno-racial statuses. This policy evoked societal concerns when the Malay elites can buy multi-million worth of houses at discounted prices, while the non-Malays working class have to pay in full even though they are purchasing economical flat houses or apartments.¹⁴⁴

On restructuring the control of corporate equity, due to the fact that many Malays are incapable of buy shares due to financial constraints and limited expertise, both federal and state governments established a number of public enterprises. The government-linked companies (GLCs) and state-owned enterprises (SEs) use public funds and loans from commercial banks to acquire the shares in public-listed companies from Chinese or foreign owners, ostensibly in the name of the Malays. Through this practice, the GLCs and SEs act as

¹⁴³ Khoo, *Ethnic structure*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁴ 'Why rich politicians need a 7% discount on luxury housing', *Hornbill Unleashed*, 8 August 2010, 1 April 2015, <<http://hornbillunleashed.wordpress.com/2010/08/08/8693/>>.

the trustees in the government's effort of improving "Malays control" in the national economy and businesses. The numbers of these enterprises in 1960 and 1970 that was before the NEP, were 22 and 54 respectively.¹⁴⁵ Within five years after the introduction of NEP, the number increased by more than threefold to 362 in 1975. In 1992 there were 1,149 public enterprises of various economic sectors from all over the countries. The growth of the number of public enterprises since 1985 was partly pushed by the 1985 Mahathir's privatisation policy which not only saw privatisation of several government agencies, but also the growth of Malay/Bumiputera conglomerates.¹⁴⁶

Perbadanan Nasional Berhad (Pernas) and *Permodalan Nasional Berhad* (PNB) plays a central function in expanding "Malay control" over the national economy. Through diverse kinds of support including billion of ringgits of funds provided by the government and loans from private institutions, Pernas and PNB by various means purchased shares of various multi-national corporation giants and Chinese companies in Malaysia, notably during the mid-1970s to mid-1980s. It was also not uncommon for both enterprises to buy shares from listed companies for prices which were significantly under market value as the result of the NEP regulation on reserving/allocating thirty percent of the companies' shares to the Malays. Towards the end of the 1980s, both Pernas and PNB controlled major parts of the Malaysian economy, notably banking, finance, agricultural and mining industries. This not only significantly extended the size of public sectors which could absorb the increasing numbers of Malay/Bumiputra graduates from the public and overseas universities, but it also made it possible for the emergence of Malay corporate elites who were selected by the government to stand at the top of the enterprises.

Although some of the NEP 20-year targets were achieved, with some "over-achievements" such as the dominant Malay representation in public universities, government scholarships, along with in distribution of state developmental projects, Bumiputra ownership of the share capital, at least until 1990, was acquired with relative success. In 1970 Bumiputera individuals and trust agencies held 2.4 per cent of the overall share capital in Malaysia.¹⁴⁷ By 1985 the proportion was substantially increased to 19.1 per cent before

¹⁴⁵ Rugayah Mohamed, 'Public Enterprises', in K.S. Jomo (ed.), *Privatising: Rent, Rhetorics, Realities*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1995, p.66.

¹⁴⁶ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 April 1979, p.41.

¹⁴⁷ See, Jomo K.S, *Growth and Structural Change in Malaysian Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1990, p. 158-59 ; Phang Hooi Eng, 'The Economic Role of the Chinese in Malaysia', in Lim Kam Hing and Tan Chee Beng (eds.), *The Chinese in Malaysia*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 2000, p. 116.

recording a marginal rise 0.2 per cent (19.3) by 1990. In 1995 the increase was still insignificant at 20.6 percent.¹⁴⁸

National Language Policy

As for the cultural content of the nation, *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) was projected as the core element of the Malaysia nation and national identity, in parallel with Article 152 which stipulates its status as the sole “official and national language of the Federation”. This is in parallel with the status of the language as the language of the Malays, which was recognised by the authority as the original inhabitants of the region. Under Tunku, the usage of Malay for official purposes was less strict partly because of Tunku’s adherence to the constitutional provision of bilingualism which allowed the use of English within ten years after the independence. However, the Tunku’s tolerance lack of initiative and forcefulness in ensuring that Malay was used for official purposes and in the education system was aggressively and continuously criticised by many Malays. In light of aggressive Malay opposition, both inside and outside UMNO, to his approach, the National Language Policy was revised in 1967 which upheld the language to be the sole official language for official purposes of the government except in the court of law.¹⁴⁹ The revision, in return, sparked an antagonistic response from the non-Malays. In fact, the language issue was among the main factors which affected the Alliance’s electoral performance in the 1969 Elections. By framing this issue as one of the main reasons to the perpetuation of racial divisions and national problems which culminated in the bloody “racial clash” (13 May Tragedy) which took place several days after the election, Tunku’s successor Abdul Razak Hussein was prepared to push for Malay to take the centre stage under the pretext of “national unity”.

Out of the many dimensions of cultural differences among the perceived ethno-racial communities in Malaysia, language is seen by Malay nationalists as the main if not the only, feasible endeavour in building or integrating the Malay(si)an nation. It is projected as the ‘soul’ that signify a unified Malaysian nation (*Bahasa jiwa bangsa*) in a government campaign to encourage the use of Malay in the early 1970s.¹⁵⁰ Recall that I have highlighted in the previous paragraphs that mastery of the Malay language before it was nationalised as

¹⁴⁸ Phang Hooi Eng, ‘The Economic Role of the Chinese in Malaysia’, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa* Campaign (Language is the soul of the Nation) was actively promoted by the government especially in 1970s as one of its efforts in integrating the society.

Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysian language), was made one of the key determinants in granting citizenships. Later it was promoted and enforced almost at every level of Malaysians public life through various agencies, laws and policies of the government.¹⁵¹ A special institution, such as the *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (DBP – the Institute of Language and Literature) was established in the early years of independence in forming policies and spreading the use of Malay language. Despite the preservation and the use of other languages in the country which were allowed, they are less recognised as ‘Malaysian’ by the authorities in general. In the sphere of national literature, for example, only works produced in *Bahasa* are considered, despite considerable numbers of Malaysian Chinese and Tamil literature present at that time. For this reason, none of the eleven National Laureates to date is a non-Malay since the award was introduced in 1981.

Under British rule, there were four types of schools which were to some extent maintained by Tunku’s administration: the English-medium schools which were built in the town centres, Malay vernacular schools which mostly situated in rural Malay areas, Chinese vernacular schools in towns and suburban vicinities, and Indian vernacular schools mostly situated in the European-owned plantation estates. While the UMNO-led government and Malay nationalists, especially in PMIP/PAS, recognised the importance of education institutions in forging a national identity and boosting national integration through the enforcement of the Malay language as the medium of instruction in all types of schools in Malaysia, the non-Malays nationalists, especially the Chinese educationists of UCSCAM (United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia also known as *Dong Jiao Zong* – literally ‘the stronghold/fortress of Chinese’) and political leaders including those in the MCA, considered the move to be part of a national homogenisation project, and therefore a major threat to the preservation of their cultural identity. An interview with Chinese student leaders revealed that the Mandarin language, the medium of instruction in Chinese schools, functioned beyond than just as a tool of communication.¹⁵² Within the teaching of Mandarin at such schools, various imports of socio-cultural life are passed on to the students, including moral ethics, etiquettes, manners, custom, values, identity, cultures, history, citizenship, arts and literature – to name a few examples. “It is like a religion to the Chinese,” as told by one of the students this researcher interviewed, and the statement received unanimous agreement from others in the session. One quipped that this is “especially when some of us have no

¹⁵¹ See for example, Act 32 *Akta Bahasa Kebangsaan* (National Language Act) 1963/67.

¹⁵² Interview with five Chinese student leaders at National University of Malaysia, Bangi, 30 March 2010.

religious belief at all”.¹⁵³ For this reason, there is nothing unusual in the intense resistance from the Chinese against government attempts in implementing the use of Malay language as the medium of instruction in all schools, an issue which remains unresolved till this day.

In response to the nationalisation of the Malay language and the Razak Report, Malay-medium schools were categorised as ‘national schools’ (*Sekolah Kebangsaan*) while others (Chinese, Tamil and English) became ‘national-type’ or vernacular schools. While the vernacular schools adopted the national curriculum, it is still retained at the primary school level due to pressing demand from non-Malay nationalists and educationists. Nonetheless, most Chinese secondary schools during Tunku’s administration were slowly converted to English National-Type Secondary Schools through the government’s financial incentives and academic (curriculum and examinations) recognition. However, the Razak’ government - believing in the idea which suggests that the separate school systems is one of the main sources of racial conflict, and with overwhelming rise of the second of Malay nationalism in 1970s – took a bold move in progressively transforming the English-medium secondary schools predominantly attended by non-Malay children to Malay-medium schools. Hence, beginning in 1982, practically all secondary schools in Malaysia use *Bahasa* as the medium of instruction. Chinese secondary schools which refused government aids went on to become Independent Chinese High Schools (ICHS) which use Mandarin as the medium of instruction with its own separate syllabus coordinated and examined by the Dong Jiao Zong. The examination conducted by the ICHS, known as the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) however, is not recognised by the government for admission into public universities and scholarship applications. In fact, most of the students are oriented to attend universities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, China or Singapore where the UEC is recognised. The ICHS also encourages its students to take some papers in the national curriculum which will allow them to sit for the MCE/SPM examination, which could broaden their chances of securing places in the tertiary institutions.

The Construction of Statist-Capitalist Class

In aiming to increase the Malay capitalist class under the NEP, various state development projects are arbitrarily awarded to well-connected Malays and their companies. Yet many of

¹⁵³ Ibid.

the Malays have neither the resources nor the expertise in conducting such projects. Thereby emerged the phenomenon of Malay - non-Malays (usually Chinese) business (and political) alliances, popularly known as the Ali-Baba, in a number of forms.

Three of the most common forms are; first, the well-connected Malays would secure development projects from the government and then sub-contract the projects to non-Malay contractors. Through this approach, the well-connected Malays gain *untung atas angin* (easy profits) while the Chinese contractors got the jobs. Secondly, the non-Malay companies appoint certain well-connected Malays, usually UMNO politicians or ex-top bureaucrats, to the board of directors of their companies. Not only does this comply with the NEP's 30 per cent target of ensuring Malay representation in business organisations, more importantly, it would also increase the chances of the companies of securing government projects. Therefore, the main function of the Malay directors is essentially to seek projects (rent-seeking) from the government. Through this alliance, the "sleeping partners" received commissions and remunerations, while the Chinese run the companies' projects. This form of company is widely dubbed as the "Ali-Baba Company". The third form of alliance is between UMNO politicians with their non-Malay proxies, nominees or cronies who are the "go-between" through the establishment of companies under the name of the agents. By this method, the agents are usually paid with handsome remunerations and commissions while politicians strengthen their power-based through patronage and personal wealth. Therefore, despite the nature of the racially-focused NEP, the non-Malays too, in particular, the Chinese capitalist class, enjoy handsome benefits under the real practices of the policy.¹⁵⁴

It should be noted that there are also many cases where the projects are attained and run by solely Malay companies. Nevertheless, the fact remains that only the well-connected would stand a chance in securing work. The economic boom since 1988 has fuelled a rapid development phase in Malaysia. With increased national revenue, the Mahathir government launched various development projects at the national and local levels. Some mega projects at the national level included the construction of the then highest building in the world, the Petronas Twin Tower, Kuala Lumpur Tower, Light Rapid Transit (LRT) system in Kuala Lumpur, a new administration city in Putrajaya, the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and Sepang Formula One Circuit which became icons of state development and national progress to the world. The ability of the government in managing these projects also

¹⁵⁴ 'Mahathir: NEP made some non-Malays rich, too', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 24 February 2012, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/190154>>.

served as effective propaganda symbolising Mahathir's capability and leadership. More projects mean more business opportunities for politically connected Malays and their non-Malays partners at various levels. From a few thousand ringgits projects involving road patching/widening, constructing drainage system, garbage management contract, school extension in the *kampungs* (villages) to multi-million ringgits projects of building bridges, schools and universities in the urban areas, there was enough to go by.

As a result, under Mahathir's leadership, UMNO slowly changed to being "visited, and gradually control by businessmen"¹⁵⁵ or "projectians" (the project seekers).¹⁵⁶ Politics then has become something of "*cari makan*",¹⁵⁷ a means to make a living, in contrast to a means for a living,¹⁵⁸ or a "political business".¹⁵⁹ When this researcher asks what this means to Ismail Sani, an UMNO state assemblyman in Selangor, he replied "a struggle for the religion, the nation and the motherland" while pointing one of his index fingers to his stomach, chest and head.¹⁶⁰ The political economic nexus which is based on the developmental and privatisation projects since Mahathir's administration become widespread and later formed the major part of the economy – as it partly functioned to channel funds to the ruling party, their cronies and themselves for their class interests. The practices have affected the economic system so much so that a distinguished Malaysian economist like Jomo K.S. and Edmund Terence Gomez considered that the Malaysian economy since the Mahathir years is based on "crony capitalism".¹⁶¹

During the Mahathir years, many "new rich" were personally cultivated by Mahathir himself through the awards of lucrative state rents,¹⁶² thus creating "the Malay crony" class",¹⁶³ or "statist capitalist"¹⁶⁴ including Syed Mokhtar Albukhory, Tajuddin Ramli and

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Ismail Sani, UMNO's State Assemblyman in Selangor, Hulu Langat, 30 April 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Ong Kooi Jin, Political Aide to a Minister at the Prime Minister Department, Bangi, 2 September 2015.

¹⁵⁷ 'Don't just 'cari makan', take a stand', *Malaysia Today*, August 21 2011, viewed 2 April 2015, <<http://www.malaysia-today.net/dont-just-cari-makan-take-a-stand/>>.

¹⁵⁸ 'Lessons from Hasan's 'cari makan' remark', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 21 November 2015, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/320452>>.

¹⁵⁹ See, Edmund Terence Gomez (ed.), *Political Business in East Asia*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002.

¹⁶⁰ Ismail Sani, *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Edmund Terence Gomez and K.S. Jomo, *Malaysia's political economy: politics, patronage and profits*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.117.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Judith Nagata, 'Elusive democracy: appropriation of "rights" ideologies in Malaysian ethnic and religious discourse', in Susan J. Henders (ed.), *Democratization and identity: regimes and ethnicity in East and Southeast Asia*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2004 p.231.

Daim Zainuddin (who was also Mahathir's Finance Minister). Mahathir's son like Mokhzani and Mirzan also made it to that class. Apart from receiving various projects worth billions of ringgits from the state-owned company PETRONAS,¹⁶⁵ Mokhzani is one of few Malay elites who was given numerous approved permits for importing luxury cars from Europe.¹⁶⁶ Mirzan also received various contracts from the government.¹⁶⁷ When his shipping company was facing difficulties during the 1998 economic crisis, the government provided the bail-out for him which cost RM1.7 billion.¹⁶⁸ Anwar was sacked from Mahathir's cabinet due to his opposition to the government's bail-out of Mahathir's son and cronies during the economic recession.¹⁶⁹ When Abdullah 's government was criticised by Mahathir on the awarding of RM 1 billion worth of projects to Kamaludin's (Abdullah's son) company (Scomi), Abdullah openly responded that "The projects awarded to the Mahathir children were far bigger than what Scomi received".¹⁷⁰

The practice of crony capitalism and nepotism is not confined to the Malay statist-capitalist class but is actually more multi-racial in character. Mahathir also played a crucial role in the rise of Chinese tycoons such as Vincent Tan and Indian capitalist like Ananda Krishnan. Tan was given various state projects through privatisations. When Tan's sewerage company Indah Water faced problems, Mahathir's government bailed the company which cost taxpayers more than RM1 billion.¹⁷¹ Ananda on the other hand is given monopoly in satellite televisyen, Astro and formed one of the major controls of telecommunication companies in Malaysia, through Maxis. All of these statist-capitalists are among the richest peoples in Malaysia and in the Southeast Asian region.

¹⁶⁴ Edmund Terence Gomez, 'Introduction: modernization, democracy, equity and identity', Nicholas Tarling and Edmund Terence Gomez (eds.), *The state, development and identity in multi-ethnic societies: ethnicity, equity and the nation*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2008, p. 10

¹⁶⁵ 'Anwar: I Will Revoke Mokhzani's Petronas Contract', *Malaysian Digest*, viewed 5 April 2013, <<http://www.malaysiandigest.com/news/122282-anwar-i-will-revoke-mokhzanis-petronas-contract.html>>.

¹⁶⁶ 'Mokhzani passes Porsche rights to Sime', *Press Reader*, 3 February 2010, viewed 2 April 2015, <<http://www.pressreader.com/malaysia/the-star-malaysia/20100203/286358355404185>>.

¹⁶⁷ Edmund Terence Gomez, 'Governance, affirmative action and enterprise development: ownership and control of corporate Malaysia', in Edmund Terence Gomez (ed.), *The state of Malaysia: ethnicity, equity and reform*, Routledge Curzon, London and New York, 2004, p.161.

¹⁶⁸ Barry Wain, *The Malaysian maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in turbulence times*, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire and New York, 2009, p. 323.

¹⁶⁹ 'How a blood feud in Malaysia spun out of control', *Bloomberg*, 9 November 1998, viewed 2 April 2015, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/1998-11-08/how-a-blood-feud-in-malaysia-spun-out-of-control>>.

¹⁷⁰ Barry Wain, *The Malaysian maverick*, ibid.

¹⁷¹ 'IWK bailout shows perils of privatisation', *Malaysiakini*, 19 April 2001, 30 January 2014, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/2133>>.

Conclusion: The Class Undercurrent in the Politics of Race

In this chapter, I have examined how state power are used as a powerful tool in shaping the cultural content of the Malaysian state. UMNO and Malay hegemony is clearly evident through the making of the Malay-led government involving the appointment of politically-linked Malays as top bureaucrats and rapid Malay-nisation of the public service particularly since the Razak administration.

The general election, nevertheless constituted influential checks in pressuring the prime ministers to the extent it could influence the policy of the ongoing nation-building. The Chinese pressure and the UMNO split during the Mahathir's era for example, had induced the government to be more open in order to maintain support.

Despite ethno-nationalist turn in the Malaysian nation-building trajectory since early 1970s, beyond the politics of Malayness – there is also the operation of class rule and interests. By patronising the Malay masses, the dependency of the Malay masses are structured and restructured to the UMNO elites. Through the offerings of the lucrative state rents or projects, politically-connected persons are given access to the state's wealth. The state thus has the direct control over the making of this class which is labelled with many terms such as “statist-capitalist”, “political businessmen” or “projectians”. As the practice is wide-scale, it has transformed the nature of the Malaysian economy into a crony-capitalism. In fact, the channels of state funds to the right cronies through the ‘production’ of state projects (in justifying the spending of the state's fund) is crucial not only for the personal interest of the powers that be, but also to be used as the ruling party's political war chest. In spite of the intensity of the Malay politics in UMNO, the creation of the ‘new rich’ is not confined only to the highly connected Malays, but also to well-connected non-Malays.

CHAPTER 4

Malaysia's Politics of Nation-State Building under Najib Razak

“The era of government-knows-best is over.”

Najib Razak, 14 May 2012¹

Following a number of dramatic tussles between UMNO leaders and the then Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi after the 2008 General Elections (GE), the latter eventually relinquished his post to his deputy, Najib Razak, in early April 2009. Determined not to repeat Abdullah's mistakes, particularly his failure to appreciate societal and technological changes, and the people's aspirations and problems, Najib came with a grand idea of transformation that he dubbed “1Malaysia” with its slogan, “People first, Performance Now”.

The structure of Malaysian society post-Mahathir Mohamad had changed dramatically. Following Mahathir's resignation from premiership in late 2003, Malaysian society, especially urbanites and the younger generation, progressively modernised and inched towards becoming a post-industrial society. With the economy rising (and sometimes falling) since the 1980s, globalisation trends, and the emergence of information and communication technology (ICT), Malaysian society transformed into a more advanced and complex society, with complicated aspirations and problems. ICT enabled many quarters of society to access and comment on the news, which was otherwise heavily controlled during the Mahathir years. In pioneering modernisation, the Mahathir administration was “influential in shaping the loyalty and dependency, particularly among members of the Malay community, towards his administration”.²

The social situation when Najib assumed leadership was markedly dissimilar. Particularly in urban areas, the population was turning into a post-modern or post-industrial society due to the modernisation of the economy, education, and technology. Many started thinking more critically about the world and became much more independent, including the

¹ ‘Bukan sekadar mendengar’ (Beyond listening), *Utusan Malaysia*, viewed 15 May 2012, <http://ww1.utusan.com.my/utusan/Dalam_Negeri/20120515/dn_01/>.

² Interview with Abdul Rahman Embong, Emeritus Professor in Sociology at National University of Malaysia 7 March 2010. See also, Abdul Rahman Embong, *State-led modernisation and the new middle class in Malaysia*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2002.

Malays. Consequently, not only were they less confined by the political parties' ideologies, but ethnic sentiments were less salient relative to their predecessors' context. During the 12th General Elections in 2008, many of them were critical and rational voters, who did not mind casting cross-ethnic votes and split votes. This explains the election's tight contest between the incumbent parties and the opposition. Modernisation has produced a much more complex society, beset by new problems and the repercussions of late capitalist development.

Najib Razak was highly perceptive in acknowledging these changing dynamics. As per the quote at the beginning of this chapter, he knew that he and the UMNO/Barisan Nasional (BN) government would be changed if they do not themselves change.³ Unlike his predecessors, Najib was surrounded by several controversies at the time he assumed premiership. BN had suffered an appalling blow in the 2008 General Elections as it lost its two-thirds majority for the first time since 1969. Therefore, both to Najib and to BN, damage control and crisis management were critical in securing the ruling coalition's victory in the coming election and hence a second term for Najib.

The 12th GE also marked the start of a new phase in Malaysian politics, that is, a two-party coalition system. The solidarity among three main opposition parties—PKR, PAS and DAP that respectively appealed to the middle and working classes, Muslims, and Chinese—created an equal challenge to BN's dominance. Consequently, BN lost its hegemony, though still dominant through its control of the state structures. A system of “competitive authoritarianism”⁴ thus existed in Malaysia, whereby politics became very competitive with the opposition winning several states and some regions despite operating within an authoritarian structure.⁵

Given the above realities, it was only natural for Najib Razak to work all-out in restoring his image and his party's reputation as soon as he became Prime Minister. His 1Malaysia ideology brought in several transformation programmes and new policies on politics and the economy. However, following BN's unsatisfactory performance in the 13th GE and in light of new issues surrounding Najib himself, his original policies met with changes and contradictions. To better understand Najib's leadership, periodisation is a useful

³ 'Umno must dare to change, says Najib', *The Sun Daily*, 23 March 2009, viewed 13 April 2013, <<http://www.thesundaily.my/node/157674>>.

⁴ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive authoritarianism: hybrid regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010, Chapter 8.

⁵ Muhamad Nadzri Bin Mohamed Noor, *Politik Malaysia di persimpangan: praktik politik dalam PRU 2008 dan kontemporari* (Malaysian politics at the crossroad: the 12th General Election and contemporary political practice in Malaysia), Strategic Information Research and Development, Petaling Jaya, 2009, Chapter 1.

tool. Reflecting on how Najib's government works, his leadership is divided into two terms: April 2009 to April 2013, and May 2013 to date—or before and after the 13th GE. This chapter examines how the politics and policies of Malaysia's nation-state building under Najib have been structured in his efforts to sustain the UMNO/BN regime, from April 2009 to date.

Najib's First Term: Towards the 13th GE – The Politics of 1Malaysia

Modern Malaysia's political system is heavily shaped by the authoritarian 1948 Emergency Regulations, and dictatorial elements particularly during the Mahathir Mohamad years (from 1981 to 2003). Although Najib Razak inherited a similar power arrangement when he came to power in 2009, this culture of authoritarian governance had moderately eased under his immediate predecessor, Abdullah Badawi (from October 2003 to April 2009). Abdullah was popularly seen as a "gentle" and "open-minded" leader by some, as "weak" by others, and even as a "reformer".⁶ Nonetheless, when Najib assumed power, he was acutely aware that the people wanted fundamental changes. In reflecting the aspirations of many, Najib changed the game of UMNO/BN politics by working hard on his very first day to respond to the people's wishes. In contrast to UMNO/BN's previous elitist political approach as they enjoyed continuous overwhelming support, Najib's approach to the people from day one to the 2013 GE (5 May 2013) was enormously populist.

On the very day he took office in April 2009, he launched the 1Malaysia policy which, among others, stressed the politics of togetherness, ethnic and class equality, inclusivity, and people- and performance-centred-ness.⁷ Parallel to the "spirit of 1 Malaysia", Najib in 2010 introduced the so-called "wasatiyyah" or moderation concept to his government and society at large.⁸

Under his 1Malaysia project, Najib launched the National Transformation Policy (NTP) in 2009. The NTP comprised three main transformation programmes that marked the UMNO/BN government's game change, namely:

⁶ See, Muhammad Takiyuddin Ismail, *Saga neo-konservatif: Abdullah Badawi, UMNO dan neo-konservatisme* (Neo-conservative saga: Abdullah Badawi, UMNO and conservatism), National University of Malaysia Press, Bangi, 2014.

⁷ Najib Razak, 'The 1Malaysia Concept Part 1', 15 June 2009, viewed 10 April 2011, <<https://www.najibrazak.com/bm/blog/the-1malaysia-concept-part-1/>>.

⁸ 'A "Global Movement of Moderates": Speech of a Muslim Prime Minister', *The Atlantic*, 28 September 2010, viewed 10 April 2011, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/09/a-global-movement-of-moderates-speech-of-a-muslim-prime-minister/63689/>>.

- i. Economic Transformation Programme;
- ii. Government Transformation Programme; and
- iii. Political Transformation Programme.

Economic Transformation Programme

The economy was a main factor behind BN's poor performance in the 2008 GE.⁹ The cost of living in Malaysia, which under Mahathir's administration was remarkably managed, has increased significantly since 2006. Abdullah failed to recognise the matter's urgency and to afford it proper attention. In a bid to reverse the situation, Najib made two big moves. First, he launched various 1Malaysia economic products, gradually but extensively since 2009. These products were aimed at controlling the rising living cost in Malaysia. Second, he unravelled the New Economic Model (NEM) in 2010, which revised the ideas behind the much-criticised New Economic Policy (NEP) and National Development Policy (NDP).

Najib's 1Malaysia economic products were aimed at assisting Malaysians of various socioeconomic backgrounds. The less-advantaged groups and the working class were the main beneficiaries. Numerous 1Malaysia Restaurants opened to allow Malaysians to have meals at discounted prices. Billions of ringgit were invested by the government to open 1Malaysia Clinics nationwide, allowing easy access to medication at almost no cost.¹⁰ Hundreds of million ringgits were spent to help local entrepreneurs open 1Malaysia Groceries that provided daily needs at controlled prices. These groceries sold subsidised goods like sugar, flour, and cooking oil. The biggest assistance to the needy came in the form of 1Malaysia People's Aid (*Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia* – BR1M). BR1M was introduced about two years before the 2013 GE. As the “peak” of Najib's economic goods, BR1M was partly meant to ease the burden of households with monthly incomes below RM3,000. More importantly, BR1M sought to create a “feel good factor” among the majority in the electoral poll. Since 2012, BR1M has been distributed at the beginning of every calendar year, giving RM500 to every eligible household. The quantum of assistance is revised (increased) almost every year and now made available to eligible unmarried citizens. As it was introduced in the years

⁹ See for example, Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, *Politik Malaysia di persimpangan*, ibid. See also a number of poll reports on the 2008 General Election published by the Merdeka Center at its website, http://www.merdeka.org/pages/02_research.html.

¹⁰ At 1Malaysia Clinics, only RM 1 (equivalent to USD 0.25 as at March 2016) is charged to each patient. Basic medications for ordinary illnesses are free.

leading up to the 2013 GE, BR1M was criticised by the opposition as an electoral goody for “vote-buying”. Instead of the respective state agency (that is, the Inland Revenue Board, IRB) directly giving BR1M to recipients, it is common for the ruling-party leaders to hold a presentation ceremony in conjunction with the IRB and party machinery. Hence, in assistance, there is remembrance. Media representatives are called, and photographs of joyful recipients holding BR1M vouchers or cash feature in their dailies the day after. At a BN BR1M presentation ceremony in 2012, a party worker who had worked with BN for more than 20 years told this researcher that, “I have never seen the government as generous as Najib throughout my life”.¹¹ As BR1M is continuously distributed after the elections, Najib’s administration is more than proud to state that the assistance should be seen as a kind of social-security allowance for the recipients, rather than as an electoral goody.

Najib Razak’s administration also addressed the circumstances faced by the middle class citizens, particularly on the availability of affordable housing. Since 2010, there has been a sharp increase in Malaysian property prices, such that many from the middle class regarded the houses as “affordable only to their eyes,” but not to their capabilities. While the problem of homelessness is not severe in Malaysia, the issue I term “houselessness” is pressing amongst many Malaysians. In 2010, only 59 per cent of Malaysian households (6.35 million) owned a house, a noticeable decrease from the year 2000 when 67.3 per cent owned a house.¹² In response, Najib, through several state-linked companies such as PRIMA (1Malaysia People’s Housing), launched a number of urban and suburban areas throughout the country. Najib’s administration also offered temporary discounts for the new middle class comprising graduates who took government loans (from the National Higher Education Fund Corporation, PTPTN) for their tertiary studies.

Although limited, the elite class also benefited from Najib’s generosity. While many of Najib’s economic assistance initiatives targeted lower-income groups, all Malaysians can access most of them. If the rich go to 1Malaysia Restaurants, they can enjoy meals at discounted prices as per the lower- and the middle-income groups. If they visit 1Malaysia Clinics, they too are charged RM 1 only. Najib’s government provides RM100 aid to every primary and secondary school student at the beginning of each year to help parents prepare school materials; the children of the elite also receive such aid.

¹¹ Interview with a BN party worker at a BR1M give out ceremony in Hulu Langat Selangor, 26 February 2012.

¹² Department of Statistics Malaysia, Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, *Report on characteristics of household 2010*, viewed 11 Mac 2012, <https://www.statistics.gov.my/images/stories/files/LatestReleases/population/Web_Release_Ciri_IR2010.pdf>.

While some urbanites receive help through affordable housing projects including low-cost flats, the rural population also receives various forms of aid, all in the name of 1Malaysia. Students at local universities, including part-timers, receive RM250 book vouchers (BB1M) annually.

After only one year, and despite much criticism and scepticism, 1Malaysia economic products have become so popular that many businesses mimic the government's slogan in selling their goods and services. Several telecommunication providers have offered '1Malaysia flat-rate call charge'. Though the businesses neither have relations with government, nor do they understand the idea of 1Malaysia, the 1Malaysia slogan has proven to be a very attractive idea for their businesses.

Nevertheless, the grandest policy that marked the shift of Malaysian economic policy under Najib from his predecessors is not the 1Malaysia goodies, but the introduction of the New Economic Model (NEM) in 2010.¹³ The policy aimed to make Malaysia a high-income country by 2020 based on the growth of private sector, inclusivity, and sustainability.¹⁴ Under the old economic model in early 1970s, that is, the New Economic Policy (NEP), the public sector gradually enlarged to the extent that it started to dominate the national economy from the 1980s. As the biggest spender the national economy, the rents (sources of contracts, projects, licences, permits, and tenders) controlled by the government attracted many capitalists and ruling-party politicians as lucrative wealth sources.¹⁵ This growth of the public sector then created strong links between ruling-party politicians, capitalists, and state-controlled businesses, in competing for the rents from the government.¹⁶ As the most of the rents, particularly the large-scale rents, are controlled by the top leaders in the government-cum-ruling parties, politics and businesses were intertwined in the Malaysian economy. This infected the system with corruption, nepotism, and cronyism.¹⁷ The Malaysian economy was dominated by a select few, usually those well-connected to the top government leaders. Thus, this has engendered a rather exclusive and problematic system.

¹³ See, Prime Minister Office Economics Planning Unit website, viewed 16 April 2012, <<http://www.epu.gov.my/epu-theme/pdf/nem.pdf>>.

¹⁴ See, Prime Minister Office Economics Planning Unit website, viewed 17 April 2015, <http://etp.pemandu.gov.my/About_ETP-@-Overview_of_ETP.aspx>.

¹⁵ Edmund Terence Gomez and K.S. Jomo, *Malaysia's Political Economy: Politics, Patronage and Profits*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, Chapter 1 and 2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See for example, Jamaie Hamil. *Umno Dalam Politik Dan Perniagaan Melayu* (UMNO in Malay Politics and Business), National Universiti of Malaysia Press, 2004.

For these reasons, the NEM was introduced to improve the current economic situation towards becoming a high-income country. Firstly, to lessen the government's economic domination, private-sector growth was encouraged through many development schemes, such as the provision of loans and assistance to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and to larger businesses.¹⁸ Secondly, the economy was to be more inclusive not only to the non-Malays who were less-targeted by the previous policy, but also to the Malays of lower income brackets. Since the NEP, economic policies, while focusing on the Malays, benefited a small group of well-connected Malays and non-Malays the most, thus making the intragroup wealth inequalities within the ethnic communities, including the Malays, too obvious. To some Malays, they “only got the gravy, not the rice” (*dapat kuah, bukan nasi*).¹⁹

Government Transformation Programme

Najib Razak introduced the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) in July 2009.²⁰ According to Malaysia's Economic Planning Unit;

the objective of GTP is two-fold – first, to transform the government to be more effective in its delivery of services and accountable for outcomes that matter most to the rakyat (people); and second, to move Malaysia forward to become an advanced, united, and just society with high standards of living for all.

In refining the government's effectiveness and efficiency towards the people, six key concerns were identified by Najib's administration as the main focuses of GTP. These concerns are known as the National Key Results Areas (NKRAs). They are:

- i. Reducing Crime;
- ii. Fighting Corruption;
- iii. Improving Student Outcomes;
- iv. Raising Living Standards of Low-Income Households;
- v. Improving Rural Basic Infrastructure; and
- vi. Improving Urban Public Transport.

¹⁸ See, Malaysia SME Corp. Website, <<http://www.smecorp.gov.my/index.php/en/>>.

¹⁹ Rice is a staple food in Malaysia, as in many other Asian countries.

²⁰ 'Énam Bidang Keberhasilan Utama Negara' NKRA, viewed 5 January 2014, <<http://pmr.penerangan.gov.my/index.php/nkra/4808-pointers-6-bidang-keberhasilan-utama-negara-nkra.html>>.

All these NKRAAs were based on voters' concerns in the 2008 GE.²¹ In April 2015, Najib announced his government's achievements in GTP and ETP after they were implemented for more than five years.²² On "Improving Rural Basic Infrastructure," Najib reported that the government had built 4,068 kilometres of rural roads, helped over 330,000 households to enjoy clean water supply and enabled another 130,000 to enjoy uninterrupted electricity supply from 2010 and 2014.²³ On "Improving Urban Public Transport," Najib's administration introduced multibillion-dollar projects including the Bus Rapid Transit system, the extension project for the current Light Rapid Transit (LRT), and the gigantic Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) project.²⁴ Since 2013, Najib's administration has been pursuing a High-Speed Rail (HSR) project to link Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, likely costing RM65 billion.²⁵ For Najib, this commitment shows that his government "does not practice partisanship in places to develop, but it is the people's interests and welfare",²⁶ as most of the people in Klang Valley voted for opposition parties in the previous election.

On "Raising Living Standards of Low-Income Households," Najib's administration helped 170,000 poor people through the 1AZAM programme, which focused on promoting self-development capabilities and financial skills among target groups.²⁷ As for the NKRA on "Ensuring Quality Education," the government has assisted various groups of students. For example, more than 100 million ringgits in aid for fees has been given to nearly 130,000 preschool students in private institutions and from low-income households; and almost 7.5 million ringgits has been given to more than 3,000 children in private childcare centres.²⁸

On the "Reducing Crime" NKRA, Najib's administration proudly announced that under the GTP, the country's crime rate has been reduced by 40 per cent between 2010 and 2015.²⁹ Lastly, under the NKRA for "Fighting Corruption," Najib was pleased to declare that

²¹ Survey on '12th General Elections - observations on issues, voting directions and implications', *Merdeka Center*, 12 March 2007, viewed 30 December 2011, <http://www.merdeka.org/pages/02_research.html>.

²² See, 'GTP/ETP report: PM Najib's full speech', *The Star*, viewed 28 April 2015, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/04/28/gtp-etp-full-text/>>.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ 'MRT project on track and well within budget', *New Straits Times Online*, viewed 23 February 2016, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/02/128832/mrt-project-track-and-well-within-budget>>.

²⁵ 'High-speed rail likely to cost RM65b', *New Straits Times Online*, viewed 6 November 2016, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2015/11/high-speed-rail-likely-cost-rm65b>>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

“Malaysia has improved in its perception index score, rising from 44th spot in 2010 to 52nd in 2014, from among 175 countries”.³⁰

At the everyday level, however, most Malaysians understood GTP and ETP through government development projects, service delivery, and monetary assistance. Urban Transformation Centres (UTCs), Rural Transformation Centres (RTCs) and the MRT are the most popular examples. UTCs and RTCs integrated a number of government agencies into one location at selected territories. This policy gave citizens quicker and easier access to these agencies, in contrast to the previous setup where the agencies were generally situated away from one another. The multibillion-ringgit MRT projects across the Klang Valley are simply too big to go unnoticed, particularly among motorists in the region. Besides the gigantic physical build-up of the projects along roadsides or in the middle of the highways, the construction of the MRT has profoundly affected traffic conditions in the region. Numerous advertisements by developers request the motorists’ patience, as the former claim to “build the future” to the latter. Quite a number of Malaysians, especially of low-income levels initially supported the 1Malaysia Grocery Shops (KR1M), although there were some reported cases on the quality of the subsidised products. Nonetheless, due to the narrow price difference between 1Malaysia grocery products and other low-standard products sold by competitors, many Malaysians went for the latter, except a few 1Malaysia grocery products like flour and cooking oil.

Political Transformation Programme

“...as a nation which practises parliamentary democracy, the power to determine the political party which will form the government whether at the Federal or at the state level rests absolutely in the hands of the rakyat. After more than five decades of independence and almost five decades after the formation of Malaysia, we find that, the experience, maturity and wisdom of the people of this country in electing the government to determine the future direction which they desire cannot be denied by anybody”.

Najib Razak, 15 September 2011³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

The Political Transformation Programme (PTP) is the third dimension in Najib Razak's transformation policy. Appreciating the population's aspirations towards democratisation, Najib on the night before the Malaysia Day in 2011, declared his intent to abolish several longstanding laws including those regarded by some as draconian. Many scholars have cited the government's heavy-handedness and the use of draconian laws against dissenters as a major factor of BN's longstanding position as the ruling party. Therefore, Najib's decision in this regard was very surprising to many. For Najib, apart from keeping the promises he gave on the first day he became Prime Minister, democratisation and political modernisation in Malaysia were inevitable and have become the new reality in Malaysia. Instead of allowing this reality to be thrust upon him, he decided to be the main driver of Malaysia's political trajectory. Hence, though this move may risk his regime's prospects in the coming election, it was a politically correct and popular move by Najib at the right time. As aforementioned, popularity, was crucial for Najib's and his regime's survival.

In July 2012, Najib repealed three emergency proclamations that were made between the late 1940s and early 1970s. Several laws relating to the emergencies were accordingly abolished and reviewed. These include the Emergency Ordinance (EO) and the infamous Internal Security Act (ISA), which were originally introduced in the 1960s to counter communism in the state. The colonial-age Restricted Residence Act of 1933 and later Banishment Act of 1959 was also repealed. Initially, all these laws were primarily directed against communist influences in Malaya (and later Malaysia). In practice however, their application was very unclear as they were also directed against political opponents of the government.

In addition, Najib executed a nationwide rally and meet-the-people sessions across Malaysia under the "transformation programme" banner, as well as "friendly visits" at public places such as hospitals, bus stations, and supermarkets. Najib is always seen as taking the opportunity to chat with the people, sometimes giving them government assistance. In programmes organised during festive seasons, Najib would distribute party and personal assistance. During the 2009 *Eiduladha* Celebration, Najib sacrificed 470 cows and three

³¹ The Prime Minister Najib Razak Malaysia Day Speech, 15 September 2011, Prime Minister Office's Website, viewed 10 October 2011, <http://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1908&news_id=525&speech_cat=2>.

camels for his constituents in Pekan.³² He also is known to give his constituents *duitraya* and *angpow* (small monetary gifts) during *Eidulfitr* and Chinese New Year.

Najib worked all-out to reach Malaysians from many quarters and at many places. He also utilised social media to touch the hearts and minds of the people. He opened *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts several months before becoming Prime Minister, and has used them frequently.³³ Most of his social-media postings show his daily activities as Prime Minister and his thoughts on certain issues. He has occasionally asked his social-media followers for their thoughts on certain issues and government policies.



Elderly women received *duitraya* from Najib in Pekan, 27 August 2011.³⁴

³² 'Najib sedekah korban 470 ekor lembu' (Najib donates 470 cows for Eidul Adha), *Mesra.net Forum*, viewed 11 January 2012, <<http://www.mesra.net/forum/lofiversion/index.php/t96982.html>>.

³³ See, Najib Razak's Facebook and Twitter accounts, viewed 2 May 2016, <<https://www.facebook.com/najibrazak?ref=mf>> and <https://twitter.com/NajibRazak?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor>.

³⁴ Source and picture from BERNAMA Malaysia, viewed 2 May 2016, <<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/newsarchive.php>>.



Najib's wife Rosmah Mansor distributing *duit raya* to orphans, the elderly and the aborigines of Pekan on 27 August 2011.³⁵

Government machinery, particularly the state-owned media, are exploited to boost Najib's reputation via television and radio stations, government-controlled newspapers, and on the Internet. Billboards and advertisement of Najib's images, programmes, and thoughts are erected and hung at public places throughout the country, including the opposition-controlled states.



Najib's poster "*Kami mendengar*" (We listen) is rather "innovatively" pasted on a number of commuter trains in the Klang Valley.

³⁵ Ibid.

Several government ministries and departments, as well as ruling-party wings, work very aggressively for Najib's administration. The Ministry of Information (known as Ministry of Communications and Multimedia since 2015) plays a crucial role in propaganda projects, with its minister and perhaps Najib's press secretary as key figures. Given the rapid advancement of communication technology, their task to shape the minds of the people has become very challenging. The "information" (read: propaganda) fed by the state machinery is vigorously countered by many *netizens* (those who use the Internet and other communication technology to express their opinions and to share information). The government appears handicapped in retaliating through the same channels. In an interview with a government information officer in Selangor, the informant told this researcher that the situation now is "very chaotic" as they could not fully control the information and its exchange in the public sphere like in the past.³⁶ To the current Minister of Communication Salleh Keruak, "the Internet is like wind, if you close this part (action against certain portals), then another part will be opened".³⁷

Given these new challenges, UMNO/BN under Najib innovated their methods of engaging the public, apart from meet-the-people sessions. In response to societal changes driven by the Internet, Najib's administration begun using the Internet as its new political medium, while simultaneously launching its cyber warfare in an environment previously dominated by the opposition. Najib himself became an active user of *Twitter* and *Facebook* since taking premiership. The Department of Information has started recruiting cyberwar personnel, particularly young interns. One of their core duties is to get online and share mainstream media (government-controlled) news across the new media, such as websites, portals, and social media. They are also required to take part in "public debates" among netizens in social media, whether as defenders of the ruling regime or as "detractors" who question the authenticity and precision of anti-government news, often by sarcastically undermining or downplaying the issues. The ruling party-cum-government war in the cyberspace, as a new political reality in Malaysia, is also supported by other state agencies and BN wings including the Special Affairs Department (JASA), Department of Youth and Sports, UMNO Youth Wing, Belia 4B (4B Youth Movement), and public universities (in

³⁶ Interview with an officer at Information Department at one of districts in Selangor, 18 March 2011.

³⁷ 'Tunjukkan 'Kabinet bayangan kamu'' (Show us your shadow cabinet), viewed 7 April 2016, <<http://www.utusan.com.my/berita/politik/tunjukkan-8216-kabinet-bayangan-kamu-8217-1.217499>>.

collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education).³⁸ The “cyberwar personnel” in Department of Information are assisted by thousands of outstanding, highly-politicised students at public universities who form the government’s “cyber troopers”, in conjunction with the UMNO Youth Wing, the universities’ Student Affairs Department, and the Ministry of Higher Education. The cyber troopers play roles similar to their counterparts at the Department of Information, with their massive numbers potentially counterbalancing the opposition’s domination in cyberspace.

The Najib administration’s overzealous efforts to win the next GE seem to have paid off. Several months before the election, Najib appeared very popular as many Malaysians, particularly Indians and Malays, approved of his performance as Prime Minister.³⁹ He was even more popular than his own government in 2012.⁴⁰ He was much more prominent than opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim or any opposition parties, with more than three million *Facebook* followers and more than 2.7 million *Twitter* followers—almost double that of Anwar’s *Facebook* followers and triple on *Twitter*.⁴¹ Through these efforts and other supporting factors, Najib and BN maintained their position in the 2013 GE, although BN lost a few more seats and the popular vote.

Najib Razak’s Second Term: Post-13th GE Policy Reversal and the Re-Building of Dictatorial Rule

“I was also a dictator before, but not as bad as Najib”.

Mahathir Mohamed, 27

March 2016.⁴²

Compared to the 2008 GE, BN’s parliamentary seats in the 2013 GE (5 May) were reduced from 140 to 133. Its popular vote dropped from about 51% to less than 47%.⁴³ In the BN

³⁸ In reality, various other government-cum-ruling party agencies support the Najib administration’s efforts in the cyberspace war.

³⁹ National Public Opinion Update N°2/2012 Survey results on PM’s approval rating and perception on government, *Merdeka Center*, February 2011, viewed 3 May 2015, <http://www.merdeka.org/pages/02_research.html>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ See, Najib Razak’s Facebook and Twitter account, viewed 11 November 2012, <<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=najib%20razak>>; and, <<https://twitter.com/NajibRazak?lang=en>>.

⁴² ‘Mahathir: I was a dictator, but it’s all right’, *Free Malaysia Today*, 27 March 2016, viewed 3 May 2016, <<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2016/03/27/mahathir-i-was-a-dictator-but-its-all-right/>>.

coalition, MCA suffered the greatest loss, from winning 15 seats in 2008 to only seven seats in 2013. UMNO, on the other hand, gained nine additional seats in 2013. Even though Najib's administration managed to win the highly-contested general election, the outcome was very frustrating for Najib, who worked extremely hard to secure better results. It was a "failure in a victorious situation" for Najib and his administration. Moreover, in the practice of electoral politics in Malaysia, the success or failure of the ruling regime is always accounted personally to the current prime minister instead to BN as a whole. The failure to get a two-thirds majority in the 1969 and 2008 GEs forced the respective Prime Ministers, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to step down. Mahathir's success in securing a two-thirds majority in Parliament during his premiership made him very dominant in UMNO and BN, despite several internal struggles within UMNO and public protests against his administration. This political fact in Malaysia may have made Najib extremely upset at the results, as it placed his position as Prime Minister—the post he has aimed for since entering politics in the mid-1970s—at significant risk.

Barely twelve hours after the electoral results were announced by the Electoral Commission, a swearing-in ceremony was speedily organised by Najib's administration with the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*, the Head of State of Malaysia, thereby settling Najib's brittle position after the unsatisfactory victory. Najib's reappointment as Prime Minister for the second term marked a new shift in his administration. His administration was no longer burdened by electoral pressure, which was the main force structuring his leadership during the democrat or transformation phase, at least until 2017. He has also proved his credibility by leading BN to victory in the 2013 GE. As Najib was freed from the immense political pressure of the election, he started to respond rather openly on issues affecting the government, particularly on the economic situation and his other agendas that were halted for the election. The second term of Najib's rule, from 6 May 2013 to date (2017) is marked by the return of racial politics, policy reversals on economic restructuring (and the launch of a number of megaprojects), and the reversing of "democratisation" projects towards a fuller level of authoritarianism.

⁴³ 'A dangerous result after a tainted election victory, Najib Razak needs to show his reformist mettle', *The Economist*, viewed May 11th 2013, <<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21577390-after-tainted-election-victory-najib-razak-needs-show-his-reformist-mettle-dangerous>>.

The Return of Racial Politics and Policies, and the Disappearance of 1Malaysia

Instead of seeing the 13th GE results in a holistic light, Najib's administration completely blamed the Chinese for its failure. UMNO's mouthpiece, the *Utusan Malaysia* newspaper publicly asked, "What more do the Chinese want?" immediately after the election results were released.⁴⁴ To the newspaper's editors, the Chinese were ungrateful towards Najib's administration, and had exploited the government's benevolence to secure political power.⁴⁵ Despite such dangerous and provocative statements that could incite racial hatred among Malaysians, Najib did not disapprove at all. When a reporter asked Najib for his comment on the said headline (in the *Utusan Malaysia*), he diverted the question by asking the reporter a rather unrelated query, "You blame *Utusan*, but what about the Chinese papers? Are you saying that they (Chinese newspapers) are saying the right things all the time?"⁴⁶

A number of serious ethnic and religious "tensions"⁴⁷ occurred after the 13th GE, to which the government itself contributed. First was the "Allah issue". In June 2014, the Federal Court upheld the government's ban on the use of the word "Allah" for God by non-Muslims (particularly Christians) in Malaysia, including Sabah and Sarawak.⁴⁸ While this may be accepted with reservations by some Christians in the Peninsular as English Bibles normally used, the decision sparked fury among the Christians in Sabah and Sarawak as the religion is preached and the Bible read in the Malay language, which is the common language among Christians in that region.⁴⁹ They were using the word "Allah" for God long before the Home Ministry imposed the ban against this practice in 2013.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ 'Apa lagi orang Cina mahu?' (What more do the Chinese want?), *Utusan Malaysia*, viewed 6 May 2013, <http://www1.utusan.com.my/utusan/Pilihan_Raya/20130507/px_03/Apa-lagi-orang-Cina-mahu>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ 'Najib keeps cool and carries on', *The Star*, viewed 8 May 2013, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2013/05/08/najib-keeps-cool-and-carries-on-pm-calm-when-pestered-for-comments-on-utusan-malaysias-front-page-h/>>.

⁴⁷ Shamsul A. B, quoted in, 'Malaysia in a state of stable tension, says don', *The Star*, 22 May 2008, viewed 13 December 2013, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2008/05/22/malaysia-in-a-state-of-stable-tension-says-don>>.

⁴⁸ 'Malaysian court to Christians: You can't say 'Allah'', *Cable News Networks*, viewed 24 June 2014, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/24/world/asia/malaysia-allah-ban/>>.

⁴⁹ 'When, why and how Christians use the word 'Allah' – CFM', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed August 22, 2013, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/what-you-think/article/when-why-and-how-christians-use-the-word-allah-cfm#sthash.DLEkGCus.dpuf>>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

In a separate case in January 2014, the Department of Islamic Affairs of Selangor (JAIS) raided the Bible Society of Malaysia (BSM) and seized 351 Malay-language Bibles.⁵¹ Despite orders by the then Selangor *Menteri Besar* (Chief Minister) and the Attorney General,⁵² JAIS refused to return them to BSM.⁵³ In 2011, JAIS raided a church in Petaling Jaya during a religious function, claiming that the church was attempting to convert Malays at the function despite having no reliable proof of such an allegation.⁵⁴

On 19 April 2015, a group of UMNO members protested against the operation of a newly-established church in Taman Medan, also situated in Petaling Jaya.⁵⁵ Its branch leader Abdullah Abu Bakar, who is UMNO local chief and younger brother of the current Inspector-General of Police, alongside party members demanded the complete ceasing of the church's operation, on the grounds that the local community "are starting to panic because they hear stories that Christians would attempt proselytising their faith to others".⁵⁶ Claiming the protest would "prevent racial tension", the group successfully negotiated with the church for the latter to remove "the cross symbol" from the building.⁵⁷ Abdullah was later investigated by the police, but he and his fellow protestors were neither arrested nor charged in court.

More recently in late June 2016, in light of the Hadi's Bill to strengthen Sharia laws in the state, the Pahang Mufti⁵⁸ pronounced anyone who opposed Islam, particularly "DAP's Chinese," as "kafir harbi"—that is, non-Muslims against whom it is compulsory to wage war. His statement invoked outrage among many Malaysians, such that even the most conservative Malay extreme-right group Perkasa considered it "offensive" and "dangerous".⁵⁹ The police were practically silent and failed to take any immediate action, even though such a remark could lead to religious and racial conflicts.

⁵¹ 'Isu rampas Bible: Jais perlu 'hikmah'', *Sinar Harian*, viewed 6 Januari 2014, <<http://www.sinarharian.com.my/nasional/isu-rampas-bible-jais-perlu-hikmah-1.237791>>.

⁵² 'After raid, BSM urges for calm and forgiveness from Christians', *The Malay Mail Online* viewed 2 January 2014, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/after-raid-bsm-urges-for-calm-and-forgiveness-from-christians>>.

⁵³ 'Selangor MB orders Jais to return seized bibles', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 12 June 2014, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/selangor-mb-orders-jais-to-return-seized-bibles>>.

⁵⁴ 'For Malaysian Christians, an Anxious Holiday Season', *New York Times*, 12 December 2011, viewed 2 January 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/13/world/asia/for-malaysian-christians-an-anxious-holiday-season.html?_r=0>

⁵⁵ 'IGP's brother: We protested to prevent racial tension', *The Star*, 20 April 2015, viewed 21 April 2015, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/04/20/church-cross-protest-igp-brother/>>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mufti is the highest Islamic religious cleric in each state of Peninsular Malaysia.

⁵⁹ 'Labelling DAP 'kafir harbi' is too much, says Ibrahim Ali', *Astro Awani*, viewed 25 June 2016, <<http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/labelling-dap-kafir-harbi-too-much-says-ibrahim-ali-109216>>.

A racially-charged case concerning mobile phone theft took place in Low Yat Plaza on 12 July 2015. The pro-Najib Armed Forces Veterans Association's president Mohd Ali Baharom, also known as Ali Tinju (literally "Ali the Boxer") was caught inciting hundreds of Malay protestors (many from underworld gangs around Kuala Lumpur) against the Chinese traders.⁶⁰ Hundreds of them assembled outside the plaza when news that a group of Malay youths were whacked by Chinese workers went viral on social media.⁶¹ The protest caused several brawls between the Malay protestors and the Chinese traders at the site. Property damages are estimated to be more than RM70,000, and many shops in the plaza were closed for several days out of fear.⁶² Through social media, several Malay-based associations called on the Malays to boycott Low Yat Plaza, on the grounds that the Chinese dishonestly sell fake products at inflated prices. In response, ironically, Najib's administration approved the opening of a new, fully Bumiputera-operated digital mall, known as Low Yat 2.⁶³ Ali Tinju was probed under the Sedition Act for several days after the incident, but was later freed without any charges. The then Attorney-General Apandi Ali found insufficient evidence against Ali Tinju.⁶⁴ The youth caught for stealing the mobile phone was elevated as a hero by several Malay groups and by UMNO,⁶⁵ although he was later found guilty by the court.⁶⁶

Najib has kept mum on these issues of the word "Allah", the JAIS raids, "the Christian cross," and the "kafir harbi" label. His government has failed to intervene in all these cases, despite potential intensification towards ethnic conflict. The fact that the suspects went off uncharged and unpunished despite what they did contravenes with Najib's Malaysia and *wasatiyyah* policies.

After the 13th GE, Najib's administration has begun resorting to racial politics, which had been downplayed since 2009, and has called for Malay unity. Seeing the Malays and

⁶⁰ 'Cops arrest military veteran 'Ali Tinju' over racially-charged speech in Low Yat riot crackdown', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 14 July 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/cops-arrest-military-veteran-ali-tinju-over-racially-charged-speech-in-low>>.

⁶¹ 'Brawl erupts at tech mall Low Yat Plaza in Kuala Lumpur when thugs smash up shop', *The Straits Times*, viewed 12 July 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/brawl-erupts-at-tech-mall-low-yat-plaza-in-kuala-lumpur-when-thugs-smash-up-shop>>.

⁶² 'Low Yat Plaza mayhem as 7 men run amok', *New Straits Times*, viewed 12 July 2015, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2015/09/low-yat-plaza-mayhem-7-men-run-amok>>.

⁶³ 'Congrats to Mara Digital traders, but don't celebrate yet', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 10 January 2016, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/326161>>.

⁶⁴ 'AG: No proof of Ali Tinju uttering seditious remark', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 12 November 2015, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/319195>>.

⁶⁵ 'Accused admitted to theft that led to Low Yat riot, court told', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 6 January 2016, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/325749>>.

⁶⁶ 'Jobless youth sentenced to jail, fine over Low Yat phone theft', *New Straits Times*, 24 May 2016, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/05/147557/jobless-youth-sentenced-jail-fine-over-low-yat-phone-theft>>.

natives as their strong supporters in contrast to the “others”, and given the lack of the electoral pressure, the government after the 13th GE has become less apologetic and sensitive towards the non-Malays.⁶⁷ Since 2015, the government has gradually formed a pact with PAS under Hadi. In early 2017, Najib’s administration cooperated pragmatically with PAS to elevate the position of the Sharia courts, in a bid to win the Malay votes in the 14th GE.

Hence, 1Malaysia-style politics have become something of the past for Najib’s administration. Unlike his predecessor’s ideologies (Abdullah Badawi with *Islam Hadhari* and Mahathir Mohamad with Vision 2020) that were neglected by their respective successors, Najib’s grand policy of 1Malaysia seemed to have been abandoned by his own administration while his tenure as Prime Minister is still ongoing

Reversed Democratisation, Fuller Authoritarianism

Despite Najib’s promise to repeal the Sedition Act prior to the 13thGE, his administration made a series of arrests under the act barely three weeks after the election. Two opposition politicians were detained and charged (Tian Chua and Tamrin Ghafar).⁶⁸ Several days later, two student activists (Adam Adli and Safwan Anang) were also arrested on similar charges.⁶⁹ All were among the organisers of a series of mass rallies, dubbed *Blackout 505*, in protest of the electoral results announced on 5 May 2013, which they regarded as rigged and fraudulent.⁷⁰ The Sedition Act dragnet continued in 2014,⁷¹ where at least 15 more people were charged on various grounds on different issues including a university professor,⁷² a journalist,⁷³ and a preacher.⁷⁴ Najib remained silent on the May 2013 arrests. Most

⁶⁷ ‘DPM: No need to be apologetic to other races’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 14 Sep 2013, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/241135>>.

⁶⁸ Tian Chua, Tamrin, Haris, Safwan claim trial to sedition charges’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 29 May 2013, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2013/05/29/tian-chua-tamrin-haris-safwan-claim-trial-to-sedition-charges/>>.

⁶⁹ ‘Malaysian activist charged with sedition, others arrested’, *ABC News*, viewed 24 May 2013, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-05-23/malaysian-activist-charged-with-sedition/4709930>>.

⁷⁰ ‘120,000 show of force at post-GE13 rally’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 8 May 2013, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/229564>>.

⁷¹ ‘Dragnet proves urgency to axe Sedition Act, Suhakam tells Putrajaya’, *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 2, September 2014, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dragnet-shows-urgency-to-axe-sedition-act-suhakam-tells-putrajaya>>.

⁷² ‘Azmi Sharom ‘shocked’ over sedition charge’, *The Star Online*, viewed 2 September 2014, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2014/09/02/court-azmi-sharom/>>.

⁷³ ‘Mkini journo arrested for sedition, quizzed for 9hrs’, *Malaysiakini*, 4 September 2014, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/273607>>.

government statements were made by the country's top cops. In 2014, when more arrests were made under the same Act, Najib only broke his silence in November, but with an expected surprise: by declaring that the Act will be preserved and re-strengthened with several amendments⁷⁵. Supposedly due to "the rising attacks on race and religious issues", Najib announced that the Sedition Act would stay, during UMNO's Annual General Assembly in late November 2014.⁷⁶ This was a U-turn from his promise in July 2012.⁷⁷ Behind this *volte-face* was changes in Najib's support base and political pressure from UMNO leaders.⁷⁸ Right from the outset in 2009, Najib faced resistance from UMNO conservatives with his moderation and liberal politics.⁷⁹ Even in his cabinet, Malaysia was a practically unfilled slogan only supported by several members. Out of their loyalty to the supreme leader, and due to Najib's overarching power as UMNO president and Prime Minister, many conservatives restrained their reservations against Najib's policies. However, when they and indeed Najib himself saw that the politics of moderation had failed at the 13th GE, they exerted more pressure to Najib to turn the nation's course back towards UMNO supremacy.⁸⁰ To some UMNO leaders, the government should not be apologetic (to the other races) in defending Islam, the Malay race, and the Malay Rulers.⁸¹ Thus, recognising the greater benefit in bending towards the wishes of conservative UMNO leaders, Najib disregarded his promise to repeal the Sedition Act⁸² and went overboard⁸³ by strengthening

⁷⁴ 'Muslim preacher arrested under Sedition Act', *Astro Awani*, viewed 10 September 2014, <<http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/muslim-preacher-arrested-under-sedition-act-43624>>.

⁷⁵ 'Sedition Act will stay, says Najib', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 27 November 2014, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/sedition-act-will-stay-says-najib>>.

⁷⁶ 'Sedition Act here to stay, says PM', *The Star Online*, 28 November 2014, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2014/11/28/sedition-act-here-to-stay-says-pm/>>.

⁷⁷ 'Malaysia to repeal repressive sedition law', *The Guardian*, 12 July 2012, viewed 10 September 2014, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/12/malaysia-repeal-repressive-sedition-law>>. See also, 'Tony Pua, Najib lied about repealing the Sedition Act', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 8 May 2014, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/262194>>.

⁷⁸ 'Sedition Act won't go before UMNO polls, St predicts', *Malaysia Today*, viewed 20 July 2013, <<http://www.malaysia-today.net/sedition-act-wont-go-before-umno-polls-st-predicts/>>.

⁷⁹ See, 'National Harmony Act is a mockery', *The Rakyat Post*, viewed 16 September 2014, <<http://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2014/09/16/national-harmony-act-mockery/>>.

⁸⁰ See for example, 'Wanita Umno: 'We want Sedition Act to stay'', *The Star Online*, viewed 10 November 2014, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2014/11/10/we-want-sedition-act-to-stay-wanita-umno-also-aims-to-get-a-million-signatures-to-oppose-changes-to/>>.

⁸¹ See, 'No need to be apologetic in upholding Umno's main pillars, says Hishammuddin', *The Sun Daily*, viewed, 23 November 2014, <<http://www.thesundaily.my/news/1235373>>.

⁸² 'Another broken promise', *The Heat Malaysia*, viewed 3 December 2014, <<http://www.theheatmalaysia.com/Main/Another-broken-promise>>.

⁸³ 'DPM: No need to be apologetic to other races', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 14 September 2013, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/241135>>.

the Act much further.⁸⁴ The toughened version of the Sedition Act in April 2015 included mandatory jail and an online media ban.⁸⁵

New laws were introduced and arrests have been made under such laws, including against Najib's opponents. In the name of fighting terrorism, particularly the "Islamic State Militant Group," a number of new security laws were introduced while the older ones were fortified (as in the case of the Sedition Act).⁸⁶ First, the Prevention of Crime Act (POCA) was reintroduced in April 2014.⁸⁷ This Act was heavily criticised as it lacks the element of justice to the accused.⁸⁸ Those caught under POCA will not be charged in court, are not allowed legal representation, and may be held by the police for up to two months.⁸⁹ The detainment period of suspected criminals may be extended for up to two years upon approval of the Minister of Home Affairs.⁹⁰ From 2nd April 2014 to 1 October 2015, 975 people have been reportedly detained under POCA on various grounds.⁹¹

Next, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was passed in April 2015 to replace the ISA.⁹² POTA was proposed to eliminate potential threats of violence from terrorism-related acts.⁹³ According to the current Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid,

⁸⁴ See, 'Malaysia strengthens sedition law in a 'black day' for free speech', *The Guardian*, viewed 10 April 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/10/malaysia-strengthens-sedition-law-in-a-black-day-for-free-speech>>.

⁸⁵ 'Malaysia toughens sedition law to include online media ban, mandatory jail', *Reuters*, viewed 10 April 2015, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-lawmaking-sedition-idUSKBN0N10AD20150410>>.

⁸⁶ See, 'Malaysia tables White Paper on Islamic militancy; says new anti-terror law needed', *The Straits Times*, 26 November 2014, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-tables-white-paper-on-islamic-militancy-says-new-anti-terror-law-needed>>.

⁸⁷ 'POCA 2013 akan dikuat kuasa dalam masa terdekat', *The Borneo Post*, viewed 29 January 2014, <<http://www.theborneopost.com/2014/01/29/poca-2013-akan-dikuat-kuasa-dalam-masa-terdekat/>>.

⁸⁸ 'POCA jadi akta zalim tanpa dipantau KDN — V Sivakumar', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 28 October 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/projekmmo/pendapat/article/poca-jadi-akta-zalim-tanpa-dipantau-kdn-v-sivakumar>>.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ 'Malaysia's new anti-terror law includes detention without trial, electronic monitoring: report', *The Straits Times*, viewed 3 March 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysias-new-anti-terror-law-includes-detention-without-trial-electronic-monitoring>>. See for example, 'Malaysia to detain illegal gambling operators for two years without trials', *CalvinAyre.Com*, viewed 6 May 2016, <<http://calvinayre.com/2016/05/06/business/malaysia-detain-illegal-gambling-operators-two-years-without-trial/>>.

⁹¹ 'Almost 1,000 arrested under POCA so far', *New Straits Times*, viewed 21 October 2015, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2015/10/almost-1000-arrested-under-poca-so-far>>.

⁹² 'Malaysia: Proposed Repeal of Security Laws', *Library of Congress*, 7 October 2011, viewed 21 October 2015, <<http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/malaysia-proposed-repeal-of-security-laws/>>.

⁹³ '9 things to know about the Prevention of Terrorism Act', *Poskod.My*, viewed 6 February 2016, <<http://poskod.my/cheat-sheets/9-things-know-prevention-terrorism-act/>>.

POTA “will help Malaysia achieve zero terrorism”.⁹⁴ Despite the government making several changes to POTA in an effort to distinguish it from the ISA, many critics see it as a reincarnation of its predecessor, particularly on its provision to detain suspects for up to two years without trial.⁹⁵ POTA allows for detention without trial of up to 60 days, and this period can be extended for up to two years if the appointed board is satisfied with the evidence against the suspect(s).⁹⁶ The introduction of POTA has puzzled many, not only due to its resemblance to the ISA that Najib’s administration had repealed, but also due to its redundancy vis-à-vis another anti-terrorist act, namely the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act or SOSMA that was gazetted in 2012.⁹⁷ To lawyer Aerie Rahman, this redundancy is needed as POTA;

“With its widely drafted provisions, can be used against dissidents and opponents of the government... POTA is there not to safeguard our security but to insulate the government of the day from being accountable to the people”.⁹⁸

To the Bangkok-based Human Rights group FORUM-ASIA, the introduction of POTA and the strengthened Sedition Act mark Malaysia’s “complete return to authoritarianism”.⁹⁹

Only several months later, in December 2015, the National Security Council (NSC) Bill was approved.¹⁰⁰ To the Malaysian Bar Council, the “NSC Bill aims to empower a select few”.¹⁰¹ It enables the NSC to “control the police, armed forces and maritime enforcement

⁹⁴ ‘DPM: POTA will help Malaysia achieve zero terrorism’, *The Malay Mail Online*, 2 October 2015, viewed 5 October 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dpm-pota-will-help-malaysia-achieve-zero-terrorism>>.

⁹⁵ ‘Malaysia’s new anti-terrorism law and why it can be challenged in court’, *The Malay Mail Online*, 14 April 2015, viewed 15 April 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/malaysias-new-anti-terrorism-law-and-why-it-can-be-challenged-in-court>>. See also, ‘HRW slams Malaysia’s new ‘repressive’ anti-terrorism law’, *Human Rights Watch*, 7 April 2015, viewed 15 April 2015, <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/07/hrw-slams-malaysias-new-repressive-anti-terrorism-law>>.

⁹⁶ ‘Malaysia: New anti-terrorism law a shocking onslaught against human rights’, *Amnesty International*, viewed 20 April 2015, <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/malaysia-new-anti-terrorism-law-a-shocking-onslaught-against-human-rights/>>.

⁹⁷ ‘Guest Post: Pre-trial detention and Malaysia’s Prevention of Terrorism Act’, *Fair Trial*, 25 June 2015, viewed 27 June 2015, <<https://www.fairtrials.org/malaysias-prevention-of-terrorism-act-2015/>>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ ‘Malaysia: Reintroduction of detention without trial and proposed amendments to strengthen Sedition Act mark country’s complete return to authoritarianism’, *Forum-Asia*, 8 April 2015, viewed 15 April 2015, <<https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=18755>>.

¹⁰⁰ ‘National Security Council Bill approved’, *New Straits Times*, 3 December 2015, viewed 8 December 2015, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2015/12/115376/national-security-council-bill-approved>>.

¹⁰¹ ‘The NSC Bill aims to empower select few, says Malaysian Bar’, *The Edge Markets*, 3 December 2015, viewed 9 December 2015, <<http://www.theedgemarkets.com/my/article/nsc-bill-aims-empower-select-few-says-malaysian-bar>>.

agencies directly. This law effectively renders the Cabinet and Parliament powerless”.¹⁰² It gives “vast powers to the National Security Council that is chaired by the Prime Minister”.¹⁰³

In January 2016, Najib’s administration planned to amend the Communications and Multimedia Act (MCMC Act) to “coordinate enforcement to block sites from defaming the national leadership”.¹⁰⁴ According to Communications and Multimedia Minister Salleh Said Keruak, “other items to be blocked were articles and postings which threatened peace and stability in the country as well as those violating the Sedition Act”.¹⁰⁵ MCMC banned *Sarawak Report* in July 2015,¹⁰⁶ and later blocked *The Malaysian Insider*, a popular online news site.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, MCMC also warned another news portal to be aware of “unverified reports”.¹⁰⁸ In July 2016, a 76-year-old man was been detained and charged under MCMC Act for sharing “a crude photo that insulted the Prime Minister, in a WhatsApp chat group”.¹⁰⁹ Prior to that, at least three individuals were detained and charged under the Sedition Act for their social media postings directed against the Malay rulers and Islam.¹¹⁰ This raised new concern among Malaysians, as their social privacy was now being monitored by the government.

Together with other powerful laws in Malaysia such as the Official Secrets Act,¹¹¹ the Police Act, the Penal Code, and the Peaceful Assembly Act, the above extra-legal laws have not only reversed the much-opened political system under Najib before the 13th GE, but also pushed the Malaysian state to a new level of governance between fuller authoritarianism and

¹⁰² ‘Act gives vast powers to NSC’, *The Malaysian Bar*, 13 June 2016, viewed 20 June 2016, <http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/members_opinions_and_comments/act_gives_vast_powers_to_nsc.html>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ ‘MCMC Act to be amended to stop slander of national leaders’, *Malaysiakini*, 21 January 2016, viewed 1 February 2016, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/327651>>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Sarawak Report whistleblowing website blocked by Malaysia after PM allegations’, *The Guardian*, 20 July 2015, viewed 30 July 2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/20/sarawak-report-whistleblowing-website-blocked-by-malaysia-over-pm-allegations>>.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Malaysian Insider to close after government blocked it following 1MDB coverage’, *The Wall Street Journal*, viewed 14 March 2016, <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/malaysian-insider-news-site-closing-1457942708?t=123>>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Senior citizen held over insulting photo of PM’, *The Star*, 3 July 2016, viewed 13 August 2016, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/07/03/senior-citizen-held-over-insulting-photo-of-pm/>>.

¹¹⁰ ‘Man detained to help investigation on insulting TMJ via Facebook’, *New Straits Times*, 29 May 2016, viewed 6 June 2016, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/05/148396/man-detained-help-investigation-insulting-tmj-facebook>>. See also, ‘Police detain man for insulting Islam on Facebook’, *Free Malaysia Today*, 29 April 2016, viewed 6 June 2016, <<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2016/04/29/police-detain-man-for-insulting-islam-on-facebook/>>, and, ‘Sex worker detained after insulting Johor sultanate on facebook’, *Malaysian Digest*, 22 February 2016, viewed 3 June 2016, <<http://www.malaysiandigest.com/news/596162-sex-worker-detained-after-insulting-johor-sultanate-on-facebook.html>>.

¹¹¹ ‘Ku Li: OSA conceals thousands of sins’, *Malaysiakini*, 16 October 2014, viewed 2 January 2015, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/277768>>.

a dictatorship.¹¹² Through the manipulation of laws and government institutions, and the concentration of powers in the hands of the Prime Minister, Malaysia's political system has returned to the one-man-rule setup. At the institutional level, however, the biggest test of Malaysia's law enforcement system and administration of justice was the 1MDB Saga, which has implicated Najib in the misappropriation of billions of dollars in public funds.

The 1MDB Saga and the Return of One-Man Rule

On 28 February 2015, *The Sarawak Report* (in conjunction with London's Sunday Times) revealed their investigation into the trail of the missing billions from Malaysia's Ministry of Finance-owned investment arm 1Malaysia Development Board (1MDB).¹¹³ These reports were supported by leaked and official documents from relevant parties, and caught massive attention within and outside Malaysia. The government came under enormous pressure to launch investigations against 1MDB and Najib Razak, who was Chairman of the Board of Advisors in 1MDB and the Minister of Finance. Partly to clear his name through his state structures, Najib was initially quite willing to allow the organisation of separate investigation teams by several bodies in Malaysia including the Malaysian Ant-Corruption Commission (MACC), the Central Bank, the Malaysian Police, the Attorney General's Chamber (AGC), and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in Parliament. Najib's confidence on the separate investigations is not without basis. All the chiefs of these bodies were indirectly (re)-appointed and controlled by Najib. In the PAC, BN parliamentarians greatly outnumbered the opposition members.

As the investigations of these bodies gradually progressed, Najib's administration was lambasted with another two appalling exposures several months later in June and July, this time by the renowned *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ). The first article unravelled how 1MDB funds were misappropriated to fund the 13th GE,¹¹⁴ and the second reported the presence of USD700 million (equivalent to RM2.6 billion at that time) deposited into Najib personal bank

¹¹² 'Malaysia approves security law amid warning it could lead to dictatorship', *The Guardian*, 4 December 2015, viewed 5 January 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/04/malaysia-approves-security-law-amid-warning-it-could-lead-to-dictatorship>>.

¹¹³ 'Heist of the century - How Jho Low used PetroSaudi as "a front" to siphon billions out of 1MDB!', *The Sarawak Report*, 28 February 2015, viewed 11 March 2015, <<http://www.sarawakreport.org/2015/02/heist-of-the-century-how-jho-low-used-petrosaudi-as-a-front-to-siphon-billions-out-of-1mdb-world-exclusive/>>.

¹¹⁴ 'WSJ: Fund controversy threatens Malaysia's leader', *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 June 2015, viewed 30 June 2015, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/fund-controversy-threatens-malysias-leader-1434681241>>.

account.¹¹⁵ These reports by an authoritative paper worsened the fractures in Najib's administration since the exposé by the *Sarawak Report*. Najib was not only criticised by members of the public, NGOs, and opposition leaders, but even certain quarters within the ruling parties were dissatisfied with Najib over these issues. Initially, former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad repeatedly questioned Najib on the missing money of 1MDB and the USD700 million deposit in his bank account. Subsequently, certain UMNO leaders at various levels aired their concerns, including Najib's deputy Muhyiddin Yassin and his cabinet members including Shafie Apdal and Khairy Jamaluddin. Najib at first denied the existence of the said money in his bank account and threatened to sue WSJ in a move to clear his name. A Special Task Force was established, involving the Chief of MACC, the Chief of Police, the Governor of the Central Bank, and the then Attorney-General (AG) Abdul Gani Patail as head, to scrutinise the allegations thoroughly as a team. The establishment of this task force did not end each body's separate investigations into 1MDB.

To Najib's surprise, Abdul Gani Patail, the MACC, and the Central Bank were serious in their investigations and seemingly wanted to take legal action.¹¹⁶ Perceiving a rebellion within UMNO apparently led by Muhyiddin, and realising the potential of being charged by the authorities,¹¹⁷ Najib swiftly acted to remove the "detractors" and frustrate the investigations.¹¹⁸ On 28 July, he unexpectedly sacked Muhyiddin and Shafie from his cabinet.¹¹⁹ Gani was also removed as Attorney-General. The three were replaced by Najib's staunch supporters, namely Zahid Hamidi (Najib's former political secretary, as the new Deputy Prime Minister), Salleh Said Keruak (Najib's most popular propagandist, as the new Communication Minister), and Apandi Ali (former Kelantan UMNO leader¹²⁰ as the new

¹¹⁵ 'Investigators believe money flowed to Malaysian leader's accounts amid 1MDB probe, *The Wall Street Journal* 2 July 2015, viewed 1 August 2015, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10130211234592774869404581083700187014570>>.

¹¹⁶ 'Arrest warrant for the prime minister! - the real reason the attorney general was fired - exclusive!', *The Sarawak Report*, 30 July 2015, viewed 1 August 2015, <<http://ec2-52-49-68-71.eu-west-1.compute.amazonaws.com/2015/07/arrest-warrant-for-the-prime-minister-the-real-reason-the-attorney-general-was-fired-exclusive/>>.

¹¹⁷ 'Cabinet reshuffled due to attempts to criminalise PM, says Rahman Dahlan', *The Rakyat Post*, 16 August 2015, viewed 3 October 2015, <<http://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2015/08/16/cabinet-reshuffled-due-to-attempts-to-criminalise-pm-says-rahman-dahlan/>>.

¹¹⁸ 'Najib had to stop charge sheet from being served', *Malaysiakini*, 16 August 2015, viewed 14 September 2015, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/308745>>.

¹¹⁹ 'Malaysia PM sacks top officials over corruption probe ahead of Cameron visit', *Telegraph*, 28 July 2015, viewed 2 October 2015, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/malaysia/11766990/Malaysia-PM-sacks-top-officials-over-corruption-probe-ahead-of-Cameron-visit.html>>.

¹²⁰ 'Who is the new AG Apandi Ali?', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 28 Jul 2015, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/306422>>.

AG).¹²¹ On the day of his “retrenchment,” Abdul Gani Patail was amazed to learn from the news that he was removed “due to health issue” as he was not officially informed in advance.¹²² In the cases of Muhyiddin and Shafie, they only learnt of their removals a couple of hours before Najib’s introduced his new line-up. Najib also promoted Nur Jazlan Mohamed, chair of the PAC on investigations into 1MDB, to Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs on 28 July. This move practically stalled PAC’s ongoing inquiry into 1MDB, at least until a new chief is appointed.¹²³

Three days later, Najib’s administration mobilised the police’s Special Branch for a major crackdown against MACC officials and an AGC officer who they believed to be involved in the production of a “charge sheet” against Najib.¹²⁴ This crackdown came on the order of the new Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid, who was also Minister of Home Affairs.¹²⁵ It involved investigations against and arrests of MACC Deputy Public Prosecutor Ahmad Sazilee Abdul Khairi,¹²⁶ MACC advisor Rashpal Singh,¹²⁷ MACC Special Operation Director Bahri Mohamad Zin,¹²⁸ five other senior MACC officers,¹²⁹ and Deputy Public Prosecutor at AGC Jessica Gurmeet Kaur.¹³⁰ Kaur and Singh were later sacked from their respective bodies. Kaur’s permanent residency (PR) in Malaysia was revoked, and she was

¹²¹ *The Straits Times*, 29 July 2015.

¹²² ‘Pemecatan Gani Patail perlu dibuat secara sah kata Gobind Singh’, *Astro Awani*, 28 July 2015, viewed 1 August 2015, <<http://www.astroawani.com/berita-politik/pemecatan-gani-patail-perlu-dibuat-secara-sah-kata-gobind-singh-67537>>.

¹²³ ‘1MDB probe temporarily frozen as PAC chief, members made deputy ministers’, *Malay Mail Online*, 28 July 2015, viewed 16 October 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/1mdb-probe-temporarily-frozen-as-pac-chief-members-made-deputy>>.

¹²⁴ ‘Former Malaysian attorney general planned charges against PM – report’, *The Guardian*, 28 March 2016, viewed 2 September 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/28/former-malaysian-attorney-general-planned-charges-against-pm-report>>. See also, ‘PPPR desak dua pegawai SPRM ditukar kembali ke tugas asal’, *Astro Awani*, 8 August 2015, viewed 11 March 2016, <<http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/pppr-desak-dua-pegawai-sprm-ditukar-kembali-ke-tugas-asal-68951>>.

¹²⁵ ‘1MDB: Timb pendakwa raya pula ditahan’, *Malaysiakini*, 1 August 2015, viewed 3 February 2016, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/306983>>.

¹²⁶ ‘Cawangan khas serbu rumah Timbalan Pendakwa Raya SPRM, cari dokumen 1MDB’, *Astro Awani*, 2 August 2015, viewed 3 February 2016, <<http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/cawangan-khas-serbu-rumah-timbalan-pendakwa-raya-sprm-cari-dokumen-1mdb-68115>>.

¹²⁷ ‘Tan Sri, pegawai Pejabat AG ditahan’, *Malaysiakini*, 1 August 2015, viewed 15 April 2016, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/306946>>.

¹²⁸ ‘As dragnet widens, senior MACC man vows to learn who ordered arrests’, *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 5 August 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/as-drag-net-widens-senior-macc-man-vows-to-hunt-down-culprits-behind-arrest>>.

¹²⁹ ‘Panel rasuah desak dua pegawai dikembalikan kepada SPRM’, ISMA, viewed 8 August 2015, <<http://www.ismaweb.net/2015/08/panel-rasuah-desak-dua-pegawai-dikembalikan-kepada-sprm/>>.

¹³⁰ ‘3 individu dibebaskan susulan siasatan laporan fitnah Sarawak Report’, *Astro Awani*, viewed 2 August 2015, <<http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/3-individu-dibebaskan-susulan-siasatan-laporan-fitnah-sarawak-report-68084>>.

deported to her home country, Singapore.¹³¹ Bahri and another MACC director were immediately transferred to the Prime Minister Department on 7 August on the grounds of “disciplinary issue”.¹³² Najib’s administration thus effectively dismantled the Special Task Force with the replacement of the AG, and with serious intimidations against its officers.¹³³

The heavy-handed disciplinary measures by Najib’s administration signified a new beginning in his leadership: towards dictatorship, centralisation of powers, and one-man rule.¹³⁴ First, it showed that Najib was not planning to retire anytime soon, but intended to hold on to power for as long as he wishes. For this reason, he is willing to reward those who support his wish, and to punish anyone that steps in his way. This includes cleansing opposition from within and without the ruling party, the appointment of executive officials and bureaucrats who are loyal to him, the revision of acts that constrain his administration’s political powers, the introduction of new laws to increase the power of the executive, and changes to certain policies.

These issues also had a number of lodged reports against them, including by UMNO leaders. An UMNO leader who inexhaustibly made reports to local and foreign authorities was Khairuddin Abu Hassan, Batu Kawan UMNO vice-president in Penang. He was later detained under SOSMA for several months,¹³⁵ together with his lawyer Matthias Chang.¹³⁶ The IGP Khalid Abu Bakar said, “Khairuddin’s attempt to solicit foreign investigations into IMDB was an act of sabotage and a danger to Malaysia’s economy and sovereignty, as well as a disservice to the country’s law enforcement agencies”.¹³⁷

While making a lot of new enemies out of his old friends, Najib gained many new friends. After the cabinet reshuffle in July 2015, Najib’s cabinet and UMNO Supreme Council stood increasingly loyal towards him, to the extent that cabinet was labelled as

¹³¹ ‘Sacked AG officer to file ‘explosive’ affidavit’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 21 August 2015, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/309363>.

¹³² ‘Two MACC directors transferred to PM’s Department over ‘disciplinary issues’, source confirms’, *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 7 August 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/two-macc-directors-transferred-to-pms-department-over-disciplinary-issues-s>>.

¹³³ ‘With PR secure, sacked AG officer wants to move on with life’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 27 Aug 2015, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/310176>.

¹³⁴ Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, ‘Najib Razak, From democrat to dictator?’, *Aliran*, viewed 5 April 2016, <<http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/malaysia-a-new-dictatorship-under-najib-ex-deputy-prime-minister/>>.

¹³⁵ ‘Khairuddin gets full 28-day detention under Sosma’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 24 September 2015, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/313393>>.

¹³⁶ ‘Matthias Chang arrested under Sosma’, *The Sun Daily*, viewed 8 October 2015, <<http://www.thesundaily.my/news/1576303>>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

“Najib’s fan club” and UMNO as “United Mohd Najib Organisation”.¹³⁸ By replacing Muhyiddin with his loyalist Ahmad Zahid, Najib not only eliminated the pressure to step down, but could hold his current position for as long as he wished, backed the unquestioning support of Ahmad Zahid and his new cabinet. Ahmad Zahid is responsible, as the Minister of Home Affairs, for certain police actions against Najib’s opponents. Najib’s cabinet is more than willing to perform “clean-up” (read: removing dissenters) within the party even without direct orders from Najib.¹³⁹ The newly-appointed A-G Apandi cleared Najib of any wrongdoing on the allegations of the RM2.6 billion deposit and of 1MDB mismanagement,¹⁴⁰ merely five months after his appointment.¹⁴¹ Consequently, no case against Najib or 1MDB was brought to court, as such powers lie within the A-G’s jurisdiction,¹⁴² while the Special Task Force that he then headed was disbanded.

UMNO old-time nemesis, the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), particularly under its new supreme leader Abdul Hadi Awang, became Najib’s new ally. With the demise of Nik Abdul Nik Mat in February 2015,¹⁴³ who “always oppose[d]”¹⁴⁴ any cooperation with UMNO, no obstacle was left for Hadi in renewing PAS’s relation with UMNO, especially after the cleansing of the professional group in PAS. Obsessed over pursuing *hudud* (Islamic) laws in Kelantan and the “idea of Malay-Muslim supremacy in Malaysia”,¹⁴⁵ Hadi not only played a significant role in marginalising the professional group in the party, but was also a key reason behind the breakup of the most formidable opposition pact in the history of Malaysian politics,¹⁴⁶ the Pakatan Rakyat (the People’s Coalition),¹⁴⁷ which Nik Aziz himself

¹³⁸ ‘Twin polls victory made Najib arrogant, laments Umno rebel group’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 25 Jun 2016, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/346580>>.

¹³⁹ ‘Muhyiddin, Mukhriz sacked from Umno’, *New Straits Times*, viewed 24 June 2016, <www.nst.com.my/news/2016/06/154389/muhyiddin-mukhriz-sacked-umno-shafie-suspended>.

¹⁴⁰ ‘AG’s Chambers clears Najib of wrongdoing in donation, SRC International cases’, *New Straits Times*, 26 January 2016, <<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/01/124061/ags-chambers-clears-najib-wrongdoing-donation-src-international-cases-video>>.

¹⁴¹ ‘Malaysia’s Attorney-General clears Najib of corruption over cash gift from Saudi royals’, *New Straits Times*, viewed 27 January 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysias-attorney-general-clears-najib-of-corruption-over-cash-gift-from-saudi-royals>>.

¹⁴² ‘Malaysian government must stop impeding corruption investigations, Transparency International’, viewed 15 February 2016, <http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/malaysian_government_must_stop_impeding_corruption_investigations>.

¹⁴³ ‘Nik Aziz, spiritual head of Malaysian Islamic Party dies’, *Bloomberg*, viewed 13 February 2015, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-12/nik-aziz-spiritual-head-of-malaysian-islamic-party-dies-at-84>>.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Nik Aziz Nik Mat, Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) of Kelantan, 10 March 2010.

¹⁴⁵ An interview with Nashruddin Mat Isa, PAS Deputy President, 14 March 2010, revealed that Hadi and himself have strong sentiments of Malay nationalism.

¹⁴⁶ ‘PKR censures Hadi for ‘pimp and broker’ statement’, *Asia One*, viewed 22 September 2014, <<http://news.asiaone.com/news/malaysia/pkr-censures-hadi-pimp-and-broker-statement>>.

had helped create.¹⁴⁸ There are at least two significant points of this new development to Najib's leadership, which is under tremendous attack from many quarters since the eruption of the 1MDB scandal. First, the fall of Pakatan Rakyat left the opposition in disarray and thus unable to capitalise on the weakened position of Najib and BN on the 1MDB scandal and the pressing economic situation faced by the people. Second, the breakup of Pakatan Rakyat transformed the two-party coalition system, which was in place since the 12th GE in 2008, into a multiparty system since 2016.¹⁴⁹ Three-cornered fights between BN, *Pakatan Harapan* (the new opposition coalition party minus PAS), and PAS grant BN new advantage as opposition support is now divided into two opposing camps.¹⁵⁰ The Sarawak State Election in May and the twin by-elections in Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar in June 2016 proved UMNO/BN return into political dominance in these new electoral settings.¹⁵¹ In these elections, BN not only managed to maintain its position as the incumbent party despite the explosive issues and scandals, but achieved landslide victories¹⁵² due to the split-vote among the opposition.¹⁵³

U-Turn in Economic Policy (Najibnomics): The Persistence of Crony Capitalism and the Widening of Income Gap

In terms of economic management, a series of subsidy rationalisations (withdrawals) have been executed by Najib Razak's administration, only several months into his second term. In April 2014, Najib introduced a new tax affecting all Malaysians, that is, the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Although Najib has mentioned the feasibility of subsidy cuts and of the GST since mid-2010,¹⁵⁴ they did not take place until after the 2013 GE. Starting with the

¹⁴⁷ 'Malaysia's opposition Pakatan Rakyat alliance ceases to exist: DAP', *Channel News Asia*, 22 Aug 2015, <<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/malaysia-s-opposition/1918690.html>>.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Nik Aziz Nik Mat, *ibid*; See also; 'Malaysian Islamic spiritual leader Nik Aziz dies at 84', *Daily Mail*, 13 February 2015, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2951818/Malaysian-Islamic-spiritual-leader-Nik-Aziz-dies-84.html>>.

¹⁴⁹ Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, Analysis of the twin by-election in Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar, Nasional FM, Radio Television Malaysia.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁵¹ 'Breakdown of Sarawak election wins', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 7 May 2016, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/340682>.

¹⁵² 'Resounding twin victories for BN in Kuala Kangsar', Sg Besar, *New Straits Times*, viewed 18 June 2016, <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/06/152911/resounding-twin-victories-bn-kuala-kangsar-sg-besar>.

¹⁵³ 'PAS more bent on attacking Amanah than Umno', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 21 September 2015, <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/312994>.

¹⁵⁴ 'Najib Razak, Rationalising Subsidies for Malaysia's Future', *NajibRazak.com*, viewed 15 July 2015, <https://www.najibrazak.com/en/speeches/rationalising-subsidies-for-malaysias-future-2-2/>.

restructuring of the sugar subsidy in October 2013, Najib then announced the gradual and systematic withdrawal of government subsidies on cooking oil, rice, flour, liquid gas for cooking, petroleum, diesel, inter-city highway tolls, and the KLIA train express.¹⁵⁵ Aimed at helping Malaysians of lower-income groups—who are the majority in society—pay for their daily needs, subsidies have always been an integral part of government expenditure and economic management since independence. In fact, Najib himself, before the 2013 GE, provided many new “subsidies” in the form of 1Malaysia products. Therefore, the systematic cessation of subsidies and the introduction of the GST have irritated many Malaysians, including government supporters. To them, Najib’s administration had not only broken its election promise to curb the high living costs in Malaysia,¹⁵⁶ but was now a driver of these rising costs. In response, Najib brazenly told the press that he does not mind not becoming a popular leader, so long as he is an effective one.¹⁵⁷ As such, the public’s response did not keep Najib from reviewing other government subsidies.¹⁵⁸ To Najib, the financial viability of the government to properly operate is more crucial than his pre-GE 2013 people-first orientation. It is something, Najib argued, that the government needs to do in the pressing time and is inevitable.¹⁵⁹

Ironically, the Najib administration’s justification for cutting subsidies, that is, to reduce the government’s financial burden, seemingly contradicts the numerous government megaprojects announced after the 13th GE. About a week after Najib’s administration announced the sugar subsidy rationalisation on Budget Day in October 2013, Najib announced a new government megaproject, that is, the High-Speed Rail (HSR) connecting Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. While the sugar subsidy cuts will save the government less than RM500 million a year,¹⁶⁰ the HSR is estimated to cost around RM65 billion.¹⁶¹ Najib’s administration seems unhesitant in continuing previously-planned megaprojects whilst

¹⁵⁵ ‘Najib: GST, subsidy rationalisation helped Malaysia weather economic uncertainties’, *The Star*, viewed 18 December 2013, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/05/09/gst-subsidy-rationalisation-economic-uncertainties/>.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Najib breaks promise on toll rates’, *Free Malaysia Today*, viewed 18 December 2013, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2013/12/18/najib-breaks-promise-on-toll-rates/>.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Don’t be afraid to make unpopular decisions, says Malaysian PM Najib’, *New Straits Times*, viewed 11 May 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/dont-be-afraid-to-make-unpopular-decisions-says-malaysian-pm-najib>.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Malaysia plans more subsidy cuts’, *New Straits Times*, viewed 8 Jul 2015, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-plans-more-subsidy-cuts>.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Najib: Unpopular policies needed for long-term benefits’, *The Star*, viewed 12 May 2015, <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/05/12/najib-unpopular-policies-needed-for-longterm-benefits/>.

¹⁶⁰ ‘BR1M akan naik RM1000 dengan syarat subsidi gula RM456 juta dikurangkan. Setuju?’, *Berita Semasa*, viewed 22 February 2013 <http://www.beritasemasa.com.my/br1m-rm1000-subsidi-gula>.

¹⁶¹ Sharen Kaur ‘High-speed rail likely to cost RM65b’, *New Straits Times*, viewed 5 November 2015, <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2015/11/high-speed-rail-likely-cost-rm65b>.

announcing new ones from time to time. These include a new 600-metre *Warisan Merdeka* Tower (costing RM5 billion; to be among the world's tallest buildings, higher than the Petronas Twin Towers),¹⁶² the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) Hub (RM3.5 billion),¹⁶³ 4G Internet line projects (more than RM6 billion), MRT projects (more than RM30 billion), MRT II extension projects (more than RM20 billion), LRT extension projects (more than RM8 billion), and the proposed new bridge to Singapore (more than RM2 billions). In addition, the controversial government-owned investment arm, 1Malaysia Development Board (1MDB), spent at least RM42 billion. Most of this sum was spent on acquiring big businesses and projects within and outside Malaysia, including the purchase of power plants for RM18 billion, while RM5.8 billion was invested in Brazen Sky.¹⁶⁴ Such extravagant spending by a government that was announcing economic restructuring and subsidy cuts has puzzled many, even BN leaders such as Khairy Jamaluddin (Minister of Youth and Sports) and Mahathir Mohamad (who in 2014 still approved of Najib's administration).

In the current economic system under Najib's administration, Malaysia is still practicing what the economist Jomo K.S. termed "crony capitalism,"¹⁶⁵ made possible via the politics of development. As the biggest spender in the economy, the federal government spent hundreds of billions each year on development projects across Malaysia. Although the need for development in a developing country like Malaysia is high, not all development projects in Malaysia are done out of need. Some are more for channelling public money legally to politically-connected cronies and elites through the awards of rents (including development projects, licenses, permits, tenders, privatisation, government grants, soft loans, government buyouts, and bail-outs), whereby a portion of the funds will be given back to the ruling parties or leaders for political, and perhaps personal, purposes. For example, the Warisan Merdeka Tower, an ambitious 118-storey, 644-metre high¹⁶⁶ tower in Kuala Lumpur, is clearly a want rather than a developmental need as there already exist two towers in Kuala Lumpur that are among the highest in world (that is, the Petronas Twin Towers and the KL Tower). The launch of this extravagant project in March 2016 (this project is currently

¹⁶² 'Warisan Merdeka phase 1 costing rm5 billion set for completion in 2020', *Bernama*, viewed 16 March 2016, <<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/bu/newsbusiness.php?id=1225647>>.

¹⁶³ 'Tun Razak Exchange', TRX Malaysia, viewed 12 January 2016, <http://www.tunrazakexchange.com/about/>.

¹⁶⁴ '1MDB gives breakdown of RM42 billion debt', *Free Malaysia Today*, viewed 3 June 2015, <<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/06/03/arul-kanda-gives-breakdown-of-rm42-billion-debt/>>.

¹⁶⁵ Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo K.S., *Malaysian political economy: politics, patronage, and profits*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and Melbourne, 1999, Chapter 1.

¹⁶⁶ 'Najib launches Warisan Merdeka project', *The Star*, viewed 16 March 2016, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/03/16/najib-launches-warisan-merdeka-project/>>.

estimated to cost RM5 billion, though its estimated cost in 2014 was only between RM2.5 billion and RM3 billion)¹⁶⁷ is untimely given the pressing economic circumstances that have forced the government to impose the GST and to cut various subsidies, supposedly to retain a sound national financial position.¹⁶⁸

This practice of crony capitalism has several major repercussions. Firstly, it has caused extreme wealth inequality as public money is funnelled to the politically-connected few through the awards of rents. Mega-sized rents are frequently awarded to a few well-connected companies, such as the MMC Corporation controlled by Syed Mokhtar Albukhary; the Genting Group controlled by Lim Kok Tay; Ananda Krishnan the owner of satellite television company Astro, Maxis Communications, and a recipient of multibillion-ringgit Independent Power Plant (IPP) projects; Gamuda Berhad; YTL Corp. owned by Yeoh Tiong Lay; and the Berjaya Group controlled by Vincent Tan; among others. All the owners/founders of these companies (except Gamuda Berhad) are of the top 20 richest people in Malaysia.¹⁶⁹ Syed Mokhtar, a former main trustee of UMNO's businesses, is awarded with multibillion-ringgit projects¹⁷⁰ almost every year by the government, including the SMART Tunnel, high-speed Internet cables, MRT, and the building of a number of highways (including a new highway across Borneo announced in the 2016 Budget).¹⁷¹ He also controls several previously-government-owned organisations that have been privatised, such as DRB-Hicom, Proton, Pos Malaysia Berhad, Johor Port and Senai Airport.¹⁷²

At the same time, Malaysian economists reported "evidence of steadily rising earnings inequality in both private and public sectors in the 2000s".¹⁷³ According to them,

¹⁶⁷ 'Warisan Merdeka project will not be at Bandar Malaysia', *The Star*, viewed 15 March 2014 <http://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2014/03/15/warisan-merdeka-stays-put-118storey-ionic-project-will-not-be-at-bandar-malaysia/>.

¹⁶⁸ 'Warisan Merdeka to be world's fifth tallest tower', *The Rakyat Post*, viewed 16 Mar 2016, <<http://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2016/03/16/warisan-merdeka-can-generate-over-rm11b-gains/>>.

¹⁶⁹ 'Forbes, Malaysia's 50 Richest, 2016 Ranking', *Forbes.com*, viewed 14 January 2016, <<http://www.forbes.com/malaysia-billionaires/list/#tab:overall>>.

¹⁷⁰ 'Syed Mokhtar like a king, says senior Umno MP', *Malaysia Today*, viewed 27 June 2012, <<https://hornbillunleashed.wordpress.com/2012/06/27/31276/>>.

¹⁷¹ 'Umno's chief crony', *Free Malaysia Today*, viewed 28 October 2012, <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2012/10/28/umnos-chief-crony/>.

¹⁷² 'The sprawling empire of Syed Mokhtar Albukhary', *Kinibiz.com*, viewed 12 November 2013, <http://www.kinibiz.com/story/issues/58876/the-sprawling-empire-of-syed-mokhtar-albukhary.html>.

¹⁷³ 'In Malaysia, income disparity widening gap between rich and poor, UM paper shows', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 5 November, 2014, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/in-malaysia-income-disparity-widening-gap-between-rich-and-poor-um-paper-sf>>. See their full article at, https://umexpert.um.edu.my/file/publication/00006071_117503.pdf, 'Is inequality in Malaysia really going down?', Hwok-Aun Lee & Muhammad Abdul Khalid, FEA Working Paper 2014/09, Faculty of Economics Administration, University of Malaya.

private “sector wage inequality has grown, especially at the uppermost segments, while the ranks of managers and professionals have expanded disproportionately faster in the public sector”. Selected indicators used to explain this situation include passenger-car sales, property sales, unit-trust investments, and Employees Provident Fund (EPF) savings. Sales data for passenger vehicles “show increasing proportions of luxury cars.”¹⁷⁴ Luxury-car (costing more than half a million ringgit) sales have “increased, making up 0.1 per cent of the total number of vehicles sold in 2006 to 0.2 per cent in 2011”.¹⁷⁵ Other high-end brands “costing between RM100,000 and RM500,000 recorded rising sales too”.¹⁷⁶ In addition, “property sales also show rising concentration in the upper rungs, where the top 10 per cent of property buyers controlled more than 40 per cent of the total value of property purchases in 2011, up from 35 per cent in 1997”.¹⁷⁷ On unit-trust investments, “the bottom half of Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB) unit holders, the largest unit trust fund in Malaysia, the top 10 per cent investors controlled a whopping 77 per cent”.¹⁷⁸

The Malaysia Human Development Report of 2013 indicated that around half of Malaysians do not have any financial assets; around 90% of rural households and 86% of urban households have zero savings; and the top 1.7% of EPF depositors owned more than the entire savings of the bottom 57% depositors.¹⁷⁹ Around “78% of Malaysians” reportedly “do not have enough funds for retirement” as of 2016,¹⁸⁰ whereas 50% of retirees are expected to fully exhaust their savings within five years of retirement.¹⁸¹

Secondly, crony capitalism brought corruption into the political system. In a media exposé by *The Wall Street Journal* on 18 June 2015, Malaysian government-owned investment arm 1MDB reportedly purchased a power plant from the Genting Group “at what appears to be an inflated price” of RM2.3 billion in October 2012,¹⁸² several months before the 13th GE in May 2013. Later in the first quarter of 2013, Genting Group’s subsidiary

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ ‘With zero savings, majority of Malaysians face dire straits in emergencies’, *The Edge Markets*, viewed 27 November 2014, <<http://www.theedgemarkets.com/en/node/171825>>. For a full report please visit, <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/mhdr_2013.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ ‘78% of Malaysians ‘do not have enough funds for retirement’, *Today Online*, 16 May 2016, <<http://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/78-malaysians-do-not-have-enough-funds-retirement>>.

¹⁸¹ ‘50% Retirees exhausted their savings within five years of retirement, how can you avoid this?’, *Malaysian Digest*, viewed 17 December 2015, <<http://www.malaysiandigest.com/features/585044-50-retirees-exhausted-their-savings-within-five-years-of-retirement-how-can-you-avoid-this.html>>.

¹⁸² ‘Fund controversy threatens Malaysia’s leader’, *The Wall Street Journal*, viewed 18 June 2015, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/fund-controversy-threatens-malaysias-leader-1434681241>>.

Genting Plantations donated RM31 million to the 1Malaysia Foundation (YR1M), whose chairman is Prime Minister Najib. In April 2013, during BN's election campaign in Penang, Najib channelled RM2 million worth of YR1M funds to two Chinese schools.¹⁸³ In 2012, 1MDB bought Independent Power Producer (IPP) projects from Ananda Krishnan, giving him a quick multibillion-ringgit profit.¹⁸⁴ When 1MDB was unable to service its bank loan in January 2015 to the tune of RM 2 billion, Krishnan came for help,¹⁸⁵ possibly returning the favour to 1MDB.

Thirdly, overpriced and sub-standard development projects are frequently part and parcel of the interplay between crony capitalists and the ruling parties. Under Najib's leadership, the new KLIA2 airport was estimated to cost RM1.7 billion, but ended up costing RM4 billion.¹⁸⁶ Despite its ballooning cost, the quality of KLIA2 is questionable. It was reported that "the passenger terminal is sinking, with cracks appearing in the taxiway and water forming pools that planes must drive through".¹⁸⁷ Several months later, the Transport Ministry announced that the "cost spent by MAHB (Malaysia Airport Holdings Berhad) to carry out repairs to fix defects in KLIA2 since its opening (for less than two years) is RM76.5 million".¹⁸⁸ In the case of constructing a new palace for the head of state, the originally-approved cost of RM400 million doubled to RM800 million due to certain "upgrades".¹⁸⁹ Of 1MDB's purchase of several IPPs for RM18 billion from well-connected persons in 2012, Genting reportedly made an instant profit of RM1.9 billion when its asset was bought by 1MDB for RM2.3 billion, although the actual cost is estimated at RM400 million.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ 'Mahathir: Why is 1MDB so stupid?', *Malaysiakini*, viewed 12 Jun 2015, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/301580>>.

¹⁸⁵ '1MDB on debt papers and Ananda's loan', *The Star*, viewed 16 June 2015, <<http://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2015/06/16/1mdb-on-debt-papers-and-ananda-loan/>>.

¹⁸⁶ 'Kuala Lumpur's S\$1.4 billion budget terminal is sinking, airline says', *New Straits Times*, viewed 27 July 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/kuala-lumpurs-s14-billion-budget-terminal-is-sinking-airline-says>>.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ 'RM76.5m spent for repairs on KLIA2, Transport Ministry says', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 21 October 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/rm76.5m-spent-for-repairs-on-klia2-transport-ministry-says>>.

¹⁸⁹ 'New Istana Negara in Jln Duta to cost over RM800m', *Lowyat.net*, viewed 15 June 2010, <<http://www.theedgeproperty.com.my/content/new-istana-negara-jln-duta-cost-over-rm800m>>.

¹⁹⁰ See, 'DAP MP: Why didn't 1MDB explain power plant purchase before?', *The Malay Online*, viewed 15 November 2015, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dap-mp-why-didnt-1mdb-explain-power-plant-purchase-before>>.

These issues have made fragile the federal government's financial capacity.¹⁹¹ This explains the rationalisation of subsidies to reduce the government's burden in the national economy,¹⁹² and the introduction of GST to widen the government's income base. Consequently, the government's ability to assist the people has been greatly affected. Government assistance has become selective and political due to financial limitations. For example, despite the slight rise in oil prices from May 2016, there was no corresponding increase in the sale price of petroleum and diesel in May and June. Incidentally, two elections were held in the country during this period: the Sarawak State Election in May and the Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar by-elections in June. Subsequently, on 1 July, the government increased the sale price of oil by 5 cents per litre even though the Muslims, the majority group in Malaysia, would be travelling across the country to visit their parents in their hometowns during Eid Mubarak, starting 6 July.¹⁹³ This situation may well suit Laswell's traditional definition of politics as "determining who gets what, when and how",¹⁹⁴ and explain the politics behind Najib's economic management, or the so-called "Najibnomics".

The Politics of Development and its Repercussions

"Arrested development" may best describe the current socioeconomic situation of the Malaysian populace. The pressing economic circumstances under Najib's administration structured and influenced the state of Malaysian society. Massive expenses on development, megaprojects, and high management costs (due to an oversized public service) meant tighter constraints on the national budget. Ordinary citizens were practically left to weather the economic storm by themselves. The significant rise in living costs and the relatively slow increase in wages left many ordinary Malaysians hard-pressed to get by in the current economic situation, what more to build financial savings and retirement funds.

This has led to many other social problems. Firstly, is the problem of homelessness has noticeably grown in cities, particularly in Kuala Lumpur. The government has used a

¹⁹¹ See for example, 'At RM630b, Malaysia's debt nearly hitting ceiling', *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 17 March 2016, <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/at-rm630b-malaysias-debt-nearly-hitting-ceiling>>.

¹⁹² 'Malaysia Plans subsidy cuts with 1MDB raising policy risk', *Bloomberg.com*, viewed 7 July 2015, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-07-07/malaysia-plans-more-subsidy-cuts-with-1mdb-raising-policy-risk>>.

¹⁹³ 'July 2016 fuel prices – RON 95, RON 97, diesel all up!', *Paultan.org*, viewed 30 June 2016, <<http://paultan.org/2016/06/30/june-2016-fuel-prices-ron-95-97-and-diesel-all-up/>>.

¹⁹⁴ Harold Lasswell, *Politics; who gets what, when, how*, McGraw-Hill, New York and London, 1936.

carrot-and-stick approach in providing limited temporary shelters to some, while simultaneously taking action against others.¹⁹⁵ Much effort has been taken by civil groups, especially in providing them with free food.¹⁹⁶

Secondly, although not as severe as homelessness, many Malaysians are “houseless” as most cannot afford to buy a house due to booming property prices. To many, most houses are “affordable to be seen,” in contrast to the “affordable housing” term popularised by the government. Based on the Malaysia Human Development Report 2013, “about 57% of non-Malay Bumiputera and 55% of Malays have no financial assets, with the figure for the Chinese and Indians at 45% and 44% respectively”.¹⁹⁷

Thirdly, some sections of the working- and middle-classes face problems of job instability and financial insecurity in the current climate of economic uncertainty. Since 2015, the fall in the ringgit’s value and the sharp drop in the price of petroleum has strained the Malaysian economy. Giant companies in Malaysia such as the Malaysia Airline System (MAS), Petronas, and Proton are downsizing. While thousands of employees have lost their jobs, hundreds of thousands of new graduates are finding it much harder to get hired. This has led to the emergence of the “precariat” class—those who live precariously due to financial and job insecurities.¹⁹⁸

While the government and citizens aspire towards development, development projects in Malaysia, particularly in Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas, may simply be too rapid, too numerous, and too costly to be financially sustainable. With the subsidy cut on KLIA Express train (ERL) for example,¹⁹⁹ many resort to other modes of transportation such as buses run by private corporations. This situation is rather ironic as the ERL, and many others government projects, are launched in the name of the people, thereby arbitrarily justifying considerable financial assistance (some in billions of ringgit) towards the developers in completing these projects. Ultimately however, the citizens’ use of these

¹⁹⁵ See, ‘Homeless say rounded up by DBKL, left miles outside city’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 2 Jun 2016, <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/343764>>.

¹⁹⁶ See for example, ‘7 soup kitchens in the Klang Valley’, *Poskod.my*, viewed 23 January 2016, <<http://poskod.my/cheat-sheets/soup-kitchens/>>.

¹⁹⁷ ‘With zero savings, majority of Malaysians face dire straits in emergencies’, *The Edge Markets*, viewed 27 November 2014, <<http://www.theedgemarkets.com/en/node/171825>>. See also, ‘Malaysia Human Development Report 2013, *ibid*.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹⁹ ‘KLIA Ekspres fare to go up over 50pet next month’, *Malaysiakini*, viewed 1 December 2015, <<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/321806>>.

facilities is made difficult by subsidy cuts, even though they are ostensibly the target group of such developments.

The construction of highways reveals a similar predicament. As highways are expensive to build, the government often assists developers with grants and/or soft loans to help them complete the projects. In the case of Maju Expressway (MEX) that was completed in 2012, the government awarded a grant of RM976.7 million to the well-connected contractor Abu Sahid Mohamad.²⁰⁰ This grant amounted to 74% of the total cost.²⁰¹ Such funding enabled the contractor to realise this project, even though he had only RM60 million in his own capital.²⁰² Upon completion of the project, the contractor sold the highway to a third party, EP Manufacturing Berhad.²⁰³ While this made Abu Sahid himself an “instant billionaire”,²⁰⁴ the public had to bear the large costs. When certain quarters of the public make noise over the government’s announcement of a new tariff, the government seems ever-ready to justify its decision, even offering advice on how to cope with the situation. For examples, one minister in Najib’s administration directly told the citizens to “not use highways if they think the fares are too expensive”.²⁰⁵ Another minister advised urbanites to “wake up much earlier for work” than others, so they can take ordinary roads to their workplaces with less traffic and save money on toll payments.²⁰⁶

In sum, state-led development projects have had mixed impacts on Malaysians. On the one hand, the many megaprojects have modernised the physical infrastructure and lifestyle enjoyed by Malaysians. On the other hand, as these developments’ connection to the politics of development and crony capitalism compounded their costs, many ordinary citizens eventually regarded them as expensive, except a few free public services (like public schools and public hospitals). Corruption, nepotism, and cronyism also resulted in an unequal

²⁰⁰ ‘Maju Expressway classic highway robbery by BN’, *Malaysiakini*, 19 Mar 2012 <<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/192480>>.

²⁰¹ Tony Pua, ‘MEX - highway robbery in broad daylight!’, *Tony Pua.blogspot.com*, viewed 20 March 2012, <<http://tonypua.blogspot.my/2012/03/mex-highway-robbery-in-broad-daylight.html>>.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ ‘Maju expressway deal made 'instant billionaire' out of public funds’, *Harakah Daily*, [19/03/2012], viewed 19 March 2012, <<http://arkib.harakahdaily.net/arkibharakah/index.php/arkib/berita/lama/2012/3/40386/maju-expressway-deal-made-instant-billionaire-out-of-public-funds.html>>.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ ‘Anwar: Menteri jangan jadi 'Mr Arrogant'’, *Sinar Harian*, viewed 21 December 2013, <<http://www.sinarharian.com.my/anwar-menteri-jangan-jadi-mr-arrogant-1.232807>>.

²⁰⁶ ‘The Malaysian ministers’ guide to coping with rising costs’, *The Malay Mail Online*, viewed 3 January 2016 <<http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/the-malaysian-ministers-guide-to-coping-with-rising-costs#sthash.28RLHr9X.dpuf>>.

distribution of national wealth, which further “arrested” Malaysians from reaching a better standard of development.

Conclusion: *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*

Nation-state building in Malaysia under Najib’s administration resembles a pendulum. It swings forward and backward between progress and the status quo. Politically, Najib’s administration was apparently moving towards democratisation before the 13th GE, albeit with some limitations. However, Najib’s administration later gradually headed towards fuller authoritarianism or perhaps dictatorship by introducing and using draconian laws against its opponents.

At the heart of the pendulum is Najib’s pragmatism retain power as Prime Minister. He knows the structural limitations and opportunities surrounding his position, and cunningly responds to them. Realising that society wanted change and progress, Najib “supplied” these aspirations with his transformation programmes. Later, when he came under great attack for his connection to 1MDB-related issues, and especially after much of the government’s rhetoric fell on deaf ears, Najib started to use authoritarian measures to combat his opponents.

The development of state and society is “arrested” between the politics of development and the development of politics. While the former has caused an unequal distribution of national wealth, the latter suggests improving the situation towards a more just and equal society. On culture and ethnicity, the government was, for part of the time, open and inclusive, as with the politics of 1Malaysia. For the other part, however, it resorted to ethno-racial politics to win the support of Malay conservatives.

PART III : SINGAPORE

CHAPTER 5

Personal is National: The Case of Singapore's Nation-Building Policy under Lee Kuan Yew

Singapore is a paradox. On the surface it is a free-trade capitalist economy, yet for its citizens and some visitors it is one of the most intensely policed and closely controlled countries in the world.

Carl A. Trocki¹

One of the common features expressed by many analysts on the socio-political situation of postcolonial Singapore, as Trocki remarked above, is its elusiveness. This character is not only the result of Singapore's unparalleled economic growth with its socio-political development, but also due to the frequent and sudden shifts in state policies throughout time, often with new policies that contradict the objectives of previous ones.² This occurred in spite of Singapore, from 1959 to 1990, has been ruled by the same man – Lee Kuan Yew, and remains under the control of the same political party up to this day – the People's Action Party (PAP).

Nonetheless, if one were to attempt to comprehend the Singaporean state and its politics through the perspective of its dominant party only, it could be misleading. This is because the PAP practically serves as a vehicle for the government's ruling elite to contest in state elections. When elections are not around the corner, the party is almost nowhere to be found even though its influence is everywhere in Singapore. Most of the functions and formulation of policies and interests of the ruling party are run by the government particularly through the executive's cabinet, in contrast to the Central Executive Council (CEC) of PAP. For this reason, it should be more appropriate to comprehend the subject matter through the

¹ Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: wealth, power and the culture of control*, 2006, Routledge, Oxon and New York, Preface.

² See, Michael D. Barr, 2008, 'No island is a man: the enigma of Lee Kuan Yew's legacy', *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 2, 3rd issue, pp. 45-56.

lens of “party-state” as suggested in Chapter Two, because the distinction between the two political entities is not only very fuzzy, but they are essentially ‘combined’ in practice. Most of the top executives in government are also the top officials in PAP. With the fact that PAP has never failed to re-occupy the government structure since 1959 to date, the government to many Singaporeans, is PAP and *vice versa*. The party-state’s perspective however, is only one of several perspectives that should be used eclectically in analysing the subject matter in this chapter with the fact of the “elusiveness” in the operation of politics in Singapore.

In analysing Singapore’s postcolonial political and social situations one cannot avoid observing and linking them with the personal political projects and actions of its first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and later his successors Goh Chok Tong and Lee’s Hsien Loong (Lee Kuan Yew’s first son). Lee Kuan Yew became the Prime Minister of Singapore in 1959 to 1990, but he continued to serve the government until 2011 through his creative political manoeuvring. From 1990 to 2004, he ‘made himself’ as a ‘Senior Minister’, a position he creatively created in Goh Chok Tong’s cabinet, which is arguably the most important position after Goh. Then from 2004 to 2011 he became the ‘Minister Mentor’ (also creatively invented by Lee Kuan Yew) to his son, Lee Hsein Loong’s cabinet when Goh passed the leadership to Lee Hsien Loong. Throughout the latter period, Lee Kuan Yew has expected Lee Hsien Loong to have his mentorship and consider the former as his main advisor with the former’s long and immense experience in politics and state’s administration.

For more than three decades of political premiership, Lee Kuan Yew has pragmatically rearranged the position of the Prime Minister to an unequal one that was difficult to be checked or balanced by any institution or entity in Singapore except only himself. This is perhaps one of his ultimate legacies which explained the power of Goh Chok Tong which Lee Kuan Yew tried to check as a Senior Minister during the former administration, and later the position of Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong in Singapore’s politics.

Taking these facts into account, one cannot simply see Lee Kuan Yew as one of the longest serving elected Prime Ministers and top executives in the history of the modern world. More importantly, one would also need to consider how has Lee Kuan Yew and his successors shaped the structures of the state and society in Singapore, through (re)productions of various state policies that enabled Lee Kuan Yew and his legacy continued to be in the governing positions, almost perpetually.

Thus there are two components to be studied and linked here which are the PAP's nation-state building projects and their relations with Lee Kuan Yew (and his successors) personal and sectoral situations and interests. Through these approaches, I hope I could shed a light on the puzzle of the contradictions and the *volte-face* in the state policies from 1959 to the present, particularly with regard to Singapore's nation-building projects which are highly connected and personalised to the political life of its prime Ministers throughout the history of modern Singapore. At the heart of Singapore's nation-building projects as structured by Lee Kuan Yew and followed by his successors, there are three major ideological components:

1. Pragmatism – A reflection of Lee's political strategies and actions to survive in politics *vis-à-vis* his ideas and vision about the world and the future of Singapore. Through creative political framing via the government controlled mass media and institutions, not only were the personalised aspects of the official world view belonging to Lee's administration obscured to the masses, but the latter are successfully made to see and to think about the world as the government's wish.
2. Racialism (ethnicity) - usually played through the politics of multiracialism and the management of ethnicity.
3. Elitism (meritocracy) – frequently through the idea and policy of meritocracy.

Through this prism, Singapore's nation-building projects are constructed and continuously re-constructed (modified, changed or discarded) according to the dynamic relations between the political trajectories and personal situations (class interests) of each respective prime minister. For these reasons, the natures of Singapore's nation-building projects are always obscure and puzzling. Nonetheless, this thesis contends the aims of such projects under Lee are clear. They could be identified through a thorough and careful examination of Singapore's nation-building policies under Lee's rule. First, by analysing the dynamic relationships between the policies with the current situations faced by Lee and his administration over several phases, and secondly by looking and linking them with the first, for the common patterns and consistencies (as well as inconsistencies, shifts and departures) of such policies in the long run.

Basically the undercurrent aims (no matter what are the official claims) of Singapore's nation-building under Lee revolved around these three interrelated projects:

1. To strengthen, secure and prolong Lee's position as the premier which led Singapore to be a dominant party-state and later practically became a one-man rule political system throughout 1980s.
2. In relation to the first objective, to create a pragmatic and elitist society, that is politically submissive but economically vibrant and materially oriented.
3. To maintain and perpetuate Lee's PAP regime and the ruling class's legitimacy, supremacy and legacy essentially through the use of political control, and the productions of hegemonic ideologies, myths, cultures and values.

Nation-building projects under PAP are thus the class project for class-rule perpetuation. The cultural contents of the Singapore 'nation' and the nature of the society are continually shaped to be elitist and in hierarchical order. The ruled were made to believe of their status in the hierarchy and abide to order dictated by the powers that be, the so-called 'impartial technocrats', in the name of progress and stability of Singapore. By doing this, not only Lee Kuan Yew and PAP's position was to be less questioned and challenged, but also achieved its ruling legitimacy and validity when they introduced new policy albeit with some inconsistencies.

Pragmatism, Racialism, Elitism and Lee Kuan Yew

Two of the most popular policies in Singapore's nation-building are multiracialism and meritocracy. They are regarded by the state and the people as the 'two founding pillars' of independent Singapore. The policies are also considered by many as the motive or the "secrets" behind the country's success in becoming a developed state. The policies are not only praised by many Singaporeans, but also studied by a number of foreign governments in understanding and following the path of Singapore's successes. Nevertheless, these policies are not simply *a* policy. They are both ideological and political. As ideological policies, its objectives will never be straightforward, precise and specific as political policies will never be consistent, *bona fide* and fully disclosed to the public. Nevertheless, like most hegemonic policies, the government has to only make the policies resonate with the people, look practical and needed, and appear undisputed and achievable which in Singapore's context is

relatively easy to be done by Lee-led PAP state through his overarching control in the government structures and political sphere.

Until today, the objectives of the above policies are not clearly spelt out; they are only discursively described with various and repetitively opposite bearings, throughout Singapore's political history. This is because, as I will examine and explore in detail throughout this chapter, both multiracialism and meritocracy are means rather than ends in Singapore's nation-state building projects under PAP. The main principles of multiracialism and meritocracy are contradicting to each other to begin with. The former promotes fairness based on racial group or ethnicity, while the latter is based on individual's merits and abilities. However, through the discursive formation of pragmatism and the PAP's sole dominance over mainstream media, the inconsistency between and within these two policies become hardly questioned and scrutinised by the public. The two are pragmatically merged and changed from time to time, depending on the socio-political situations that were confronted by Lee. Through his dominant control over the production of common sense knowledge, particularly the mass media, Lee was frequently successful in making the masses to think about the world based on how he wanted them to believe.

In achieving the hidden objectives of Singapore nation-state building, which is Lee's interests and the class rule, pragmatism has become the grand policy, though it is neither officially written nor directly stipulated by the state. But it is the major undercurrent policy that shaped and structured the nature and evolution of most and if not, all policies in Singapore including multiracialism and meritocracy based on the personal situations and political trajectories of the premier and PAP elite respectively.

Though their names suggest otherwise, Singapore's multiracialism and meritocracy in practice are not based on, and certainly not beyond, racial and individual equalities. Its multiracial policy, which will be discussed in detail in the later sections of this chapter, has led to the perpetuation of racial politics and preferences. The policy also strengthened and re-strengthened racial differences which led to disparity and tensions within the population in the republic. To certain critics the policy is simply racist because it is based on race, but to me it is more of an ideological practice of racialism. While the former sees the policy (multiracialism) as an essence of racism, the latter sees it more as political utility employed by the powers that strive to advance their interests.

With regard to my reflections of PAP's meritocracy policy in a nutshell (before I examine it in detail in the later sections in this chapter), the policy in practice is incommensurate to equality though many Singaporeans have been made to believe it from an unclear perspective. In reality it is a soother term for, and a *façade* of elitism.³ It was introduced by the Lee-led PAP government soon after the state's independence in 1965 mainly in constructing an elitist and technocratic state and society. Though there were several purposes aspired by the prime minister in such policy of nation-state building, the main intention arguably was for his regime's perpetuation. The ideology and practice of inverted meritocracy (elitism) in Singapore at the political level has not only created intolerance to political opposition, civil society and popular criticisms, but was also used to rationalise the heavy-handedness on the part of the government in suppressing legitimate dissents. At the everyday level, meritocracy has become a form of unrelenting competition for the state and material rewards, particularly in the education system, public sectors and the economy. In this 'competition', however, individual ability is not *a* factor, but more like one out of many factors. Class backgrounds and personal networks are also influential and significant to Singapore's meritocracy.⁴ Those with these elements have some advantages and "jump-start" in the competition, while those who have not would rather unpreparedly begin at the official starting grid with certain disadvantages.⁵

Accordingly, both multiracialism and meritocracy in Singapore cannot be taken only at face value, as they are not the ultimate ends of nation-state building although they are heavily and continuously propagated by PAP as the two founding pillars of Singapore city-state. Rather, they are parts of the means which are critical for PAP's regime perpetuation for the maintenance of power of its first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his successors, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong.

Lee Kuan Yew, or his Westernised name Harry Lee, was a Straits-born Chinese (locally referred as *Baba* or *Peranakan*), born and bred in Singapore, and educated in English. Culturally, the Babas were distinct from most of the Chinese population in Singapore particularly in 1950s and 1960s, which then constituted the majority in Singapore.⁶ Most of the Chinese in Singapore at this time were not only immigrants, they were also

³ Michael D Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, ethnicity and the nation-building project*, no. 11, NIAS Press, Copenhagen, 2008, Chapter 3 and 4.

⁴ See for example, *ibid.*, Chapter 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ John Clammer, *Straits chinese society: studies in the sociology of the Baba communities of Malaysia and Singapore*, 1980, Singapore University Press, Singapore, 1980, p. 9.

educated in Chinese languages and spoke in their own Chinese dialects, contrasting to Lee (and the Babas) back then who conversed in English or *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay Language). To many Chinese-educated populations, the *Babas* and Lee are de-culturalised Chinese whose identity is closer to the West (particularly the British) and Malaya (through their social life and intermarriage with local populations) than their mother China. The difference in education and language between Lee (as well as the *Babas*) and the Chinese populations led to another distinction, which is of class. While most of the Chinese-educated populations constituted the majority of the working class and lower strata of the society, many members of the Baba community through their class advantages (especially because they were educated in English institutions) occupied the middle and the elite strata.

The stark differences between the politically ambitious Lee and most of the Chinese populations in Singapore in 1950s meant the former had little chance in grabbing the ruling power unless a strategic alliance is made with the influential leaders of the Chinese-educated populations. This was the beginning of Lee's pragmatism, which involved pre-calculated action(s) where the short and long terms objectives practically are not based on, and bounded to particular normative idealism(s) of whatsoever claimed by him, but to the situational interests and ultimate intention to effectively win, and later hold on to, the state power. Lee's pragmatism can be first witnessed in his strategic and cunning political pact with the socialist-leaning group led by Lim Chin Siong several months before the 1955 General Election – which saw the establishment of PAP.⁷ The pact was a pragmatic mover and political marriage, or perhaps 'force marriage' which would enable the Chinese and English educated leaders to contest openly in politics and stand a better chance to win in the elections.⁸ But Lee went even further by publicly claiming that he is also a socialist. Not too long after that, however, Lee made a secret concord with the British during Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock interim government administration (from 1956 to 1959) in 1957 by postulating that he is a democrat (albeit a social one), anti-communist/extremist and the right person to be working to restraining Lim Chin Siong's group from taking over the leadership in PAP.⁹ As a result, Lim Chin Siong, Lee's number one opponent to premiership, was detained by the colonial government twice. First in 1956, which helped Lee to secure his

⁷ See, Goh Keng Swee in, Dennis Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse*, Singapore: Times Book International, 1986, p. 66.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Geoff Wade, 'Operation Coldstore: a key event in the creation of modern Singapore', in Poh Soo Kai, Tan Kok Fang & Hong Lysa, *The 1963 Operation Coldstore in Singapore: commemorating 50 years*, Strategic Information Research and Development, Petaling Jaya, 2013, p. 17.

position as the supreme leader in PAP in the party election and secondly in 1963, which assisted the Lee-led PAP government to win the 1963 General Elections.¹⁰ At about the same time, he calculated that Singapore would survive without being incorporated to the newly independent Federation of Malaya (now Malaysia). Initially, he repeatedly insisted that Singapore to be merged with Federation. In wooing Tunku Abdul Rahman (the then Prime Minister of Malaya) to his idea, he did not only awkwardly elevate Malay, the language of minority Malays as the national language and granted special position to the community when he became Chief Minister in 1959, but he was also more than willing to surrender Singapore's sovereignty and his state powers to the Federal Government of Malaysia in overpowering the imminent possibility of *Barisan Sosialis* of taking over the Singapore government in 1963 General Election.

Thus, Lee as a 'political man' has many faces. At one moment, he could become someone of specific or certain political orientation(s), convincing to the world and even to his closest friends that he is truly the man that he claimed to be but later when the situation is altered, he became a different person with a supposedly different ideology. At another occasion, he might claim again that he is of the former or a combination of the former, and the latter or even has nothing to do with the former or the latter ideology. He once described himself as a faithful socialist when he was setting up a pact with Lim Chin Siong's group to form PAP, and later as a democrat - while working with British to contain Lim only several years after, and then simply as 'social-democrat' after he 'managed' to oust Lim's group from PAP in early 1960s. In 1959 when he first came to power, his government unashamedly announced that socialism is not feasible to be practiced in Singapore although since 1954 he rationalised most of his political causes based on socialist idealism.¹¹ Today, though Singapore was effectively led by him until 1990, Singapore's political system is not identical to socialism at all, even to the lowest degree. The system is certainly not a democracy too, except perhaps at a very minimalist definition.

As a matter of fact, pragmatism is thus one of Lee's main political characters, and a method of argument in which he, across the time and space, used to be somebody, and later an opposite to the somebody, or a combination between the somebody with the opposite, or

¹⁰ Greg Poulgrain 'Lim Chin Siong in Britain's Southeast Asian de-colonisation', in Tan Jing Quee and Jomo K.S. (eds.), *Comet in our sky: Lim Chin Siong in history*, INSAN, Kuala Lumpur, 2001, pp. 117-8.

¹¹ See for example, .C. V. Devan Nair, *Socialism that works ... the Singapore way*, Federal Publications, Singapore, 1976.

simply have nothing to do with the somebody or all of them. By this discursive and pragmatic method, he usually wins arguments with his political opponents, dissidents and the people as he has never truly and firmly posited himself with specific ideology, but facilely changes his “beliefs” or political identity according to the situation. This is even reflected by the words of a social scientist Chua Beng Huat, one of the strongest supporters of PAP state, on the frequent changing character of PAP’s state policy under Lee, “(T)he justification for intervention is always contextual and never been based on principles of political philosophy”.¹²

Thus, this leads us to two additional and important departures from previous literature of Singapore’s nation-building and Lee Kuan Yew. First, it might (or could) be misleading if we analyse Singapore’s nation-building under Lee Kuan Yew based on his “beliefs” as suggested by several influential studies.¹³ As I stipulated briefly earlier and in detail later in this chapter, most of Lee’s political practices were motivated by his situational interests (personal and maintaining his class position) and long term goal (perpetual rule) rather than based to the alleged “beliefs”. In fact Lee himself did not seem to essentially believe in those “beliefs”. On the contrary, Lee pragmatically used those beliefs or rather the ‘knowledge’ or simply ideologies, for his political gains instead of political ends. Beliefs are sets of moral philosophy that believers hold on to, whereas knowledge or ideology is a set of thoughts that give people some ideas for the respective purposes. While the former might structure and influence the behaviour of believers, the latter would only guide and give some ideas to the people without the obligation for them to obey. The nation-building ideologies were selectively picked, and politically modified and strategically utilised by Lee. As for the case of ‘Asian Values’ which was championed by Lee and several Asian leaders in 1980s and 1990s, Michael Barr succinctly argues that the values “were constructed and manipulated by these elites for utilitarian purposes”.¹⁴

In this regard, the nation-building ideologies at least served two important functions to Lee’s regime. Firstly, they functioned as the justifications for his rhetoric, programmes and policies. Secondly, the ideologies served Lee a number of political ideas in governance, in which he could comfortably choose (almost at will) based on his personal and class interests,

¹² Chua Beng Huat, *Communitarian ideology and democracy in Singapore*, London and New York, 1995, p. 69.

¹³ Michael Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: the beliefs behind the man*, Curzon Press, Richmond, 2000.

¹⁴ Michael D. Barr and Zlatko Skrbis, *Constructing Singapore*, p. 45. See also, Michael D. Barr, ‘Lee Kuan Yew and the ‘Asian Values’ Debate’, *Asian Studies Review*, 24:3, 2000, pp. 309-34; and Michael D. Barr, *Cultural Politics and Asian Values: The Tepid War*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002.

and where he could test the practicality of the said beliefs on his society, modifying or disbanding the ideas when they do not work as they intended to.

With that being said, this chapter has departed from analysing Singapore's nation-building under Lee Kuan Yew from Lee's beliefs-based approach towards his more situational-based (or political) approach. Although Lee's ideologies are still being examined, this thesis carefully and critically takes them as Lee. Secondly, from the viewpoint of the grand ideological practice of post-independent Singapore, this study attempts to view national integration from the perspective of political utilities rather than norms or beliefs that were supposedly guided by pragmatism as the main undercurrent, though it is unwritten and not directly stipulated or expressed in policy. This thesis contends that this is the foundation of most and if not all ideologies of Singapore under PAP, including meritocracy and multiracialism which are the most prominent ideologies in the country. This theoretical departure would illustrate various definitions, some contradictory, volte-face and inconsistent in PAP Singapore's nation-state building project. Particularly, of the 'two grand ideologies' in Singapore – meritocracy and multiracialism. Hopefully, the perspective taken in this chapter (and thesis) would also be able to provide some understanding of the "other pasts, other Singapore stories"¹⁵ to balance Lee Kuan Yew's version of 'Singapore Stories'¹⁶ which is well entrenched in the popular belief and historical books in and on Singapore.

The Matrix of Singapore Nation-Building under Lee Kuan Yew

Pragmatism lived in the heart of Lee Kuan Yew-led Singapore's nation-state building. In fact it is still the main undercurrent for Singapore's nation-state building policies even after Lee stepped down as Prime Minister in 1990. Thanks to Lee's creative inventions of himself in the cabinet, he managed to ensure that his legacy would be preserved under Goh Chok Tong's premiership (1990 to 2004) and subsequently continued by his first son Lee Hsien Loong in 2004. With pragmatism at the core, the fuzzy and inconsistent elements of

¹⁵ T.N. Harper, 'Lim Chin Siong and the 'Singapore Story'', in Tan Jin Quee and Jomo K.S., 2001, *Comet in our sky : Lim Chin Siong in history*, Kuala Lumpur : INSAN, p. 48.

¹⁶ Lee is a prolific writer. He has penned a numerous writings since he was in power as the Prime Minister and later as a senior cabinet member to his death in March 2015. See for examples, Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, Singapore : Prentice-Hall, 1998, and Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to first: the Singapore story, 1965-2000 : Singapore and Asian economic boom*, New York : HarperCollins Publishers, 2000.

Singapore's nation-state building were inevitable. However, the ultimate objective of this project was always clear and consistent - to enable himself, his legacy and the PAP to hold on to power almost perpetually.

With regard to the question of nation-state building under Lee Kuan Yew's administration from 1959 to 1990, as suggested by David Brown,¹⁷ it could be best divided into three periods. Each of the periods were marked with distinct socio-political situations that influenced the characteristics of Lee's administration during the particular period. Although I agree with Brown on the divisions of the time period, but the term used to characterise those periods might require refinement in reflecting the approach of this chapter and thus situation of each period much more critically. The first phase was from 1959 to 1965. It involved Lee's grand project on "Road to Independence" (publicly known as the Malaysia Plan) and then the actual merger with Malaya (including British North Borneo and Sarawak) to form a new sovereign state known as Malaysia in 1963.¹⁸ Politically, this was the most critical 'live or die' period for Lee-led PAP government. Throughout this period, Lee's administration was restlessly trying to withstand and survive its ruling position both in party and government with formidable contest from within (the Lim Chin Siong's group) and without - particularly after the party split in 1961. The party split has caused many members of PAP to leave in support of a new contending force, an opposition party known as the *Barisan Sosialis* (literally Socialist Front) led by Lim's group. In the effort to endure his reigning, Lee strategically used political forces through collusions with the British Government in Singapore and London, and the Government of Malaya to crush his opponents. Lee's administration also pragmatically employed the politics of multiracialism – which was heavily biased towards Malay and English cultures – not only wooing the Malayan government to merge but also the Malays, Indians and other non-Chinese communities in the island in order to balance up the enormous support of Chinese-speaking communities towards *Barisan Sosialis*. Thus, instead of a period of "ethnic mosaics" as per Brown's reflections, this era was actually an era of 'PAP's regime survival and consolidation'.¹⁹

The second phase, from 1965 to late 1970, was an era of Lee's regime legitimisation amidst the ongoing project of consolidation. Through the overarching ideology of

¹⁷ David Brown, *The state and ethnic politics in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, pp. 46-50.

¹⁸ Anthony Oei, *Lee Kuan Yew: blazing the freedom trail*, Marshall Cavendish, Singapore, 2015, Chapter 6.

¹⁹ David Brown, *The State and ethnic politics in Southeast Asia*, *ibid.*

meritocracy - championed by Lee-led PAP while Singapore was a part of Malaysia, it was quickly adapted as a grand new state policy following Singapore's full independence in September 1965. The construction of technocratic society was steadily undergoing. Politics was de-politicised and competition for rewards and social mobility were heavily structured and controlled by the PAP state, particularly through the education system and public service. To say that this period was an era of "race-blind meritocracy" as Brown suggests,²⁰ might be somewhat overstating. Throughout this era, PAP's bilingual policy (rooted in the previous period) was extremely biased towards English, the language of the ruling class (mostly *Baba* Chinese which themselves constituted its own kind of race or ethnicity) as per categorised by British colonial government and identified by themselves and considered by others in local interactions) – was not only still running, but was made as one of the most important elements of Singapore's meritocracy, supposedly because it is the "language of science and technology" and alien to most of the population in Singapore. Through such policy, the cultural gap between the ruled (who mostly speak Chinese dialects, Malay or Tamil) and the rulers (English speakers) were gradually accommodated and together with other strategic policies engineered by Lee-led PAP government, the English language gained prominence and inherently, the people's perception of their rulers as well. In parallel with the policy of meritocracy, a system of governance based on technocracy - supposedly professionals who are considered as the most intelligent and competent technocrats that are ostensibly unbiased and above politics - was put in an all-encompassing place in the state system. This period, as will be examined in the next section, saw several significant changes in the political history of Singapore which legitimised and further consolidated the position of the ruling class, i.e. Lee and his PAP government.

Lee's regime perpetuation and habituation make the best description of Singapore's nation-state building from late 1970s to 1990. During this period, most of the 'old guards' – which refer to first batch of English-educated ministers in Lee's Cabinet - have retired or been replaced with a second generation leader like Goh Chok Tong, and PAP's position as the ruling party was well entrenched and consolidated. With most of the executive powers centralised and concentrated in Lee's hands, and in the absence of any oppositions in the political scene, the nature of Singapore's nation-building throughout this era confirmed the inevitable propensity towards Lee's idiosyncrasies particularly on his views towards race, culture and genes. Since late 1970s, ostensibly as a "cultural ballast" against the unhealthy

²⁰ Ibid.

aspects of Western culture (as the results of his own policies particularly by placing English as one of the cores in PAP's nation-building projects), Lee progressively sinicised Singapore – a process which he himself vowed to forbid in 1960s. Through the politics of race, culture and genetics, Lee somewhat unashamedly (considering he was extremely against such an idea a decade before) exerted much of state policies and programmes heavily based on Chinese-ness and towards the Chinese community.²¹

The “Sinicisation” of Singapore as suggested by Michael Barr,²² can reflex the situation of the third phase of Lee Kuan Yew's administration, beginning from late 1970s to 1990 as the downplay of culture and ethnicity as in the second phase was extremely reversed to the extent that it was not only an effort in “Asianising Singapore”,²³ but more importantly make “Chineseness” as the central cultural content of the nation-building project.

PAP's Regime Survival and Consolidation, 1959 to 1965

The situational context for Lee Kuan Yew and the English-educated group in PAP have changed dramatically after winning the 1959 General Election. Under the new constitutional arrangement where Singapore was given much more powers than the previous government, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his cabinet which were completely made up by the English-educated faction in PAP, were confronted with two crucial questions. The first being how to rule Singapore, a new state with lack of resources and a number of pressing problems, effectively and practically? Second and a more important question, in relation to the first question, how could they preserve their leadership given that most of votes given to them in the 1955 election were supporters of the Left? In responding to these questions and the progress of history from 1959 to 1965, a number of essential policies, programmes and actions have been introduced and made through strategic political projects for Singapore's nation-state building. More crucially in this era, Lee's collusion with British was further strengthened and the coalition with the Alliance's government of Malaya was forged in preserving PAP's rule in the name of fighting communism.

It is important for us to appreciate the historical context of Singapore's politics in 1959 to 1965 in comprehending the PAP's leadership's actions and reactions in politics of that era more holistically:

²¹ Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, Chapter 5.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²³ Raj Vasil, *Asianising Singapore: the PAP's management of ethnicity*, Heinemann Asia, Singapore, 1995.

- i. Firstly, there was an imminent threat posed by the release of Lim Chin Siong and other left-leaning leaders from imprisonment after the 1959 General Election. Due to certain political actions in early 1960s, the Left had in fact, parted from PAP and formed a new party known as the *Barisan Sosialis*. It was formed in 1961 and decided to challenge PAP's reign in the next election.
- ii. Secondly, the ruling regime would still have problems in connecting with the masses. Previously, they were utilising the influence and activities of the left-leaning organisations to connect to the masses. This problem was a structural one. It is based on ethnic and class differences. While most the ruling elites were English-educated professionals, most of the masses were dialect-speakers with lack of educational and economic prospects.
- iii. Thirdly, state bureaucrats were politically independent with a number of Westerners at the top level. They might also pose certain threats or obstacles to PAP's reigning and in policy implementation.
- iv. Fourthly, by the time PAP taking over the control of the state, there were lot of problems in Singapore including high unemployment and housing problems.

The Lee-led, English-educated group of PAP were fully aware of these situations, and responded to them in a planned and skilful manner. Lee's group always believed that right from the inception of PAP in 1954, they cannot survive in politics without Singapore's incorporation to the Federation of Malaya.

The English-educated elite in PAP were too different with the bulk of the masses, and would not be able to reach many sections of the masses because of their ethnic and class differences at the one hand, and were lacking organisational support on the other hand. At the same time, the Left was more organised and popular amongst the population after the first quarter of the 1950s. PAP's success in the 1955 General Elections and victory in 1959 were fundamentally made possible by Lee and the English-educated leaders in PAP by "riding the

tiger” – that is, using the Chinese-educated leader’s popularity and work, to attain state power.²⁴

Thus, there was no question that the Chinese-educated leaders could not dominate the future election if they were not effectively contained. Furthermore, as the British were decolonising the island, this also meant that Lee needed to confront the Left without any help from the British in the future. The “real fight” for Lee, would begin after the 1959 Election.²⁵ For these reasons, the anti-communist/socialist government of Malaya under the leadership of UMNO/Alliance emerge as the sensible (and at that time, the only) ally²⁶ that they could depend on in their bid to stay in power. Apart from that, Malaya could also provide better prospects for the development of Singapore’s economy. Singapore’s economy was small and limited even though they had better manufacturing facilities than Malaya. Singapore’s merging with Malaya, for these purposes, would be very beneficial as it would not only enlarge its market, but also Singapore’s entrepreneurs could have better access to raw materials and cheap labour from Malaya. Politically, it would provide an opportunity to PAP to enter Malayan politics, which is on a much larger scale than Singapore, and perhaps serve the prospect of becoming an important partner in the Alliance’s government. These politically (pre)calculated moves, what a Malaysian political scientist termed it as “thinking two steps ahead”,²⁷ have become the typical nature of PAP’s policy under the leadership of professionals, from Lee Kuan Yew to now one of his sons, Lee Hsien Loong. The course that they were choosing would frequently (though not always) have multiple purposes and functions, although those that suit personal and sectoral interests of the leadership were concealed and played down, and those for Singapore are outstandingly and repeatedly propagated. Thus, the merger with Malaya, in this perspective, is not only a logical option to the professionals in PAP, but also a strategic one.

The above situations were serious threats for the Lee-led PAP government and its continuity. Thus, in withholding the pressures for the regime change, PAP under Lee’s leadership at this era have taken two strategic moves in confronting the new realities that arises in between 1959 to 1965. The first involved the production hegemonic policies by the

²⁴ See for example, Singapore Ministry of Information and the Arts, *Riding the tiger: the chronicle of a nation’s battle against Communism*, DVD, 1st edition, Singapore, 2001.

²⁵ Lee Kuan Yew as quoted in R.S. Milne and D. K. Mauzy, *Singapore: the legacy of Lee Kuan Yew*, 1990, Western Press, Boulder San Francisco & Oxford, p. 52.

²⁶ Raj Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, Eastern University Press, Singapore and Petaling Jaya, 1984, p. 6.

²⁷ Interview with Ghazali Mayudin, a former political scientist at National University of Malaysia, Bangi, 3 May 2010.

PAP government. The second revolved around the practice of political control in dominating the state and society. These two moves are not mutually exclusive. They are interrelated to each other, and together they become a potent force that fundamentally facilitated PAP to remain in power up to this date.

On the hegemonic approach, the ruling regime reacted to the problems and situations from 1959 to 1965 with rather equivocal policies based on their ideas of multiracialism. PAP's multiracialism is equivocal as it is discursively defined and applied according to the country's political context rather than as a clearly established principle. Hence, it is difficult for observers to objectively comprehend the meanings of the policies of Singapore's nation-building under PAP, as they carried different meanings at the different junctures of history. Many scholars are confined to Lee and PAP's rhetoric on specific situations without linking those rhetoric with a bigger plan of Lee and his colleagues to remain in power. In fact, across the history of the policies, especially on multiracialism, the meanings were not only inconsistent, but also contradictory. The 'ambiguous character' of the PAP's multiracialism ideological policy has an important deliberate function. By defining the policy somewhat obliquely and discursively, it could be used to justify other policies and political rhetoric when needed, and could just be ignored on other occasions.

Thus, in contrast to real effort to instil the spirit of the so-called multiracialism among the population, the ideology was strategically used to achieve Lee and the ruling elite agenda in regime perpetuation. In attracting Tunku for the merger and wooing the Malay support for his government, a number of 'pro-Malay policies' were introduced by Lee soon after he assumed his premiership. First, Lee's regime launched a number of pro-Malay policies ostensibly based on constitutional provision on the special position of the Malays,²⁸ and the status of the Malay as the only original inhabitants (indigenes) in Singapore.²⁹ Thus "the symbols of the new state and the new nation had to be built around their historical experience, folklore, culture, language and way of life".³⁰ Among the most symbolic acts performed by Lee in this regard are the appointment of a Malay as the Yang di-Pertuan Negara (YDPN - Head of State), the making of Malay language as the national language and free education to Malay children. In the case of the appointment of YDPN of Singapore – which is quite equivalent to the current position of Singapore's President, Lee elevated one of

²⁸ Article 152, Constitution of Singapore.

²⁹ Vasil, *Governing Singapore* p. 96.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

his close associates in politics Yusof Ishak, a Malay administocrat, to the post. In fact, Lee was to the extent of considering Tunku's brother Tun Ya'acob for the position³¹ in an effort to appease the latter, but at last chose Yusof.

The PAP's chosen national anthem of Singapore is also in the Malay language, *Majulah Singapura* (literally meaning Onward Singapore), whereas the coat of arms is written in Malay with a Malayan Tiger holding the crest/shield. Through Lee's cooperation with the British, a Malaysia representative was also appointed to the newly established Internal Security Council in the early 1960s. All of these efforts brought an effective depiction of 'Malayness' in Singapore which not only made the PAP to garner great support from Malays in 1963 General Election,³² but also made the possible merging with Malaya a reality in September 1963. All these moves in principle, "contradict to idea of equality in multiracialism whereby no community should be discriminated or 'preferred' based on any ground",³³ which is also constituted main notion of PAP's multiracialism.³⁴

The spectre of multiracialism would also enable Lee's government to control its main political opponent through the process of depoliticisation,³⁵ and at the same time, justify the use of authoritarian measures against its opponents. The Lee-led PAP elite always depicted Singapore as a fragile multiracial society,³⁷ which would be easily fractured if not heavily guarded by the government.³⁸ For this reason, ethnic appeals and race-based politics, particularly from Chinese nationalists, which Lee epitomised as an attempt to make Singapore as the 'third China',³⁹ as something towards the "undoing of Singapore as multiracial society".⁴⁰ Ironically, within the same period of time (1959 to 1963), Lee was introducing a number of pro-Malay policies in a society that consisted of "three-quarter Chinese", to woo Tunku to the Malaysian Plan.⁴¹ The Chinese nationalists were framed at the official level as "chauvinists" and "communists" that posed threat to "national security" and

³¹ Melanie Chew, *Leaders of Singapore*, Resource Press, Singapore, 1996, p. 183.

³² See, Lily Zubaidah Rahim, 'Winning and losing Malay support: PAP – Malay community relations, 1950s – 1960s', in Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocky, *Path not taken: political pluralism in post-war Singapore*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2008, pp. 95 – 115.

³³ Interviewed with Goh Meng Seng, Secretary-General of Singapore Solidarity Party, Singapore, 18 September 2010.

³⁴ See, Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, p. 99.

³⁵ Cherian George, *Freedom from the Press: Journalism and State Power in Singapore*, NUS Press, Singapore, 2012, p. 107.

³⁷ David Brown, *The state and ethnic politics in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, p. 59.

³⁸ Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, p.10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.7.

“stability” (read: to Lee’s regime).⁴² For these reasons depoliticisation and authoritarian measures were discursively grounded and justified against Lee’s opponents whom he dismissed as “bumps, opportunists and morons”.⁴³ Politics to Lee should be “relegated to the secondary role” and the state should instead be focused on “socio-economic change and progress”,⁴⁴ and Singapore’s survival (read: Lee’s PAP).⁴⁵

In relations to the above functions of multiracialism, bilingual language policy and education were introduced in 1960, beginning with primary schools. Pupils of vernacular school needed to study the Malay language as their first or second language, which was considered by PAP as the lingua franca in Singapore. At the same time Mandarin, Malay and Tamil languages were assigned as the “mother tongue” to the pupils at the respective Chinese, Malay and Tamil schools regardless of the language spoken at home.⁴⁶ The English school pupils were supposed to choose one of the mother tongue languages assigned to their ethnicity as the second language, but due to the lack of trained teachers, the subject was not made compulsory.⁴⁷ This is rather bizarre as on the one hand, Mandarin was the medium of communication to a very small section of the Chinese community in 1960 and not all Indians in Singapore were Tamils. On the other hand, the Malay language was spoken by 14 per cent of the population at that period. To many Chinese pupils who were mostly speaking Hokkien, Teochew or Cantonese at home, the policy forced the learning of two foreign languages, which could be said as a ‘double jeopardy’ for them.

As the result of Anglo-Malay based bilingualism, the PAP’s promise of “equal status of the four kinds of school in Singapore” – the English-medium school and Chinese, Malay and Tamil vernacular schools was extremely uneven in reality as many advantages were accorded to the English-medium schools. Along with the ‘double jeopardy’ in the practice of bilingualism in vernacular schools, it was only natural for the parents to send their children to the English-medium schools, which later witnessed a steady decline of vernacular schools since 1959 in conjunction with the rising domination of English schools in Singapore.⁴⁸

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Lee Kuan Yew, quoted by Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, p. 100.

⁴⁶ Sarah J. Shin, *Bilingualism in Schools and Society: Language, Identity, and Policy*, Routledge, New York and Oxon, 2013, p. 68.

⁴⁷ Lee Kuan Yew, *Lee Kuan Yew, my lifelong challenge: Singapore’s bilingual journey*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, 2012, p. 63.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1-2.

Lee's government also placed some control over Chinese schools through administrative regulations and the provision of financial aid. Together with the bilingual policy which saw significant reduction of Chinese, the move had gradually transformed Chinese transition of the vernacular schools. Chinese schools effectively placed some checks and control on the Chinese-educated opposition and civil society as the schools were then, founded during a time of vibrant political activism in Singapore since the early 1950s. With changing structures of school administrations from being community-funded to government-aided, politics were prohibited and the syllabuses were arranged by the government.

Multiracialism also enabled Lee to 'Malayanise' the government and civil service through the placing of his men and "lieutenants".⁴⁹ Out of the nine appointed ministers of the PAP's 1959 cabinet, at least three of them were Lee's colleague in the Malayan Forum including Toh Chin Chye, Goh Keng Swee and K.M. Byrne. Despite Lee's grip on the executive in this period was not too prevailing and in contrast to the post-independence situation, Lee's personalisation on the appointments of the cabinet members was remarkable. His brother-in-law Yong Yuk Ling was appointed as Minister of Education. Ahmad bin Ibrahim, an independent legislative representative which Lee had co-opted in 1956 following PAP's CEC Election, was appointed as the Minister of Health. When Lee's main threat in PAP after Lim Chin Siong, the Minister of National Development Ong Eng Guan challenged Lee and the party leadership in 1960, Ong was immediately sacked from the cabinet and the party.⁵⁰ Whereas Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan, the main Chinese leaders in PAP that significantly contributed to the party's popularity throughout 1950s, were only appointed as political secretaries. Then in 1963, more and more of Lee's loyalists and confidants were appointed to 'his cabinet'. One of Lee's loyal lieutenants Othman Wok, was appointed as the Minister of Social Affairs and was tasked by Lee to rally Malay support for PAP.⁵¹ Othman recognised Lee as "the man who brought Singapore to what it is today. He is truly an inspiration for all Singaporeans".⁵² S. Rajaratnam, another one of Lee's loyalists was made as his second deputy premier and E.W. Baker, Lee's close associate as his Minister of Law. This image of multiracial leadership, apart from PAP's government effectiveness brought about

⁴⁹ See, Lam Peng Er and Kevin Tan (eds.), *Lee's lieutenants: Singapore's old guard*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999.

⁵⁰ Fong Sip Chee, *The PAP story: the pioneering years, November 1954-April 1968: a diary of events of the People's Action Party: reminiscences of an old cadre*, Times Periodicals, Singapore, 1980, p. 86.

⁵¹ 'Three Old Guard leaders to be honoured at National Day Parade', *The Straits Times*, viewed 26 July 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/three-old-guard-leaders-to-be-honoured-at-national-day-parade>>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

socio-economic change, won the hearts and minds of many Singaporeans, particularly the Malays and Indians, readily endorsing the government in the 1963 elections.

Out of the above political manoeuvres, Lee managed to orchestrate Singapore's entrance to, and later exit from, the Federation. The incorporation of Singapore in Malaysia on 16th September 1963 had placed PAP less from their political expectations.⁵³ They "were trying to mix oil with water".⁵⁴ During the merge, PAP had not only fail to become the main partner in the Alliance, but instead became "only a subordinate part" and "a kind opposition of opposition, without wanting to".⁵⁵ Circumstances of Lee and PAP elites during the merge were greatly changed. They became a strong opposition and had very limited powers in Singapore. Lee's personal goal to be a core leader in the federation was halted by distrust of the Tunku against him and the PAP. As Rajaratnam notes, "we are equal but the Malays (read: UMNO) are more equal".⁵⁶ From there, as early as in 1964 Lee ferociously "challenged" the federation's pro-Malay policy,⁵⁷ which was much less the same to those he promoted in Singapore since 1959, to change the fate of PAP elite. He launched a provoking "Malaysian Malaysia" concept to the federal government based on the notion of "more just and more equal society".⁵⁸ To Lee, no racial group was any more native than the others at this point.⁵⁹ Despite strong Malay responds against such a concept that it even sparked two racial riots in Singapore, Lee continued with this effort which later brought to the separation.⁶⁰ Singapore, however, was not forced out from the federation, a propaganda that PAP's government persistently reproduced even until the death of Lee in 2015,⁶¹ but it was borne out of negotiations and a final agreement between Lee and Tunku through Goh Keng Swee and Razak's correspondences.⁶² Goh convinced Kuala Lumpur that the only resolution "was

⁵³ James W. Gould, *The United States and Malaysia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1969, p. 136.

⁵⁴ S. Rajaratnam, as quoted by Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Leo Suryadinata, *The making of Southeast Asian Nations: state, ethnicity, indigenism and citizenship*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 2015, p. 29.

⁵⁸ Lee Kuan Yew as quoted by Edmund Lim, 'Secret documents reveal extent of negotiations for Separation', *The Straits Times*, viewed 22 December 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/secret-documents-reveal-extent-of-negotiations-for-separation>>.

⁵⁹ Leo Suryadinata, *The making of Southeast Asian Nations*, ibid.

⁶⁰ Albert Lau, *A Moment of anguish : Singapore in Malaysia and the politics of disengagement*, Times Academic Press, Singapore, 1998, Chapter 7 and 8.

⁶¹ 'Three Old Guard leaders to be honoured at National Day Parade', ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

for Singapore to secede, completely” and “it must be done very quickly, and very quietly, and presented as a *fait accompli*”.⁶³

The merger and the exit thus, have perpetuated and re-strengthened Lee’s position as the Prime Minister of Singapore. The “independence of Singapore”, however “marked the end of pro-Malay policy” for a new policy known as meritocracy.⁶⁴ The pro-Malay policies were practically scrapped and the Malays were suddenly treated with extreme caution and distrust by the state, before officially labelled with various negative stigmas by Lee, which will be reflected in the next sections.

In the above examination, multiracial policy has become a tool for the political regime in withstanding the great challenges posed by its political opposition, rather than a more genuine foundation of Singapore’s nation building. The policy has been used and later discarded at whim by Lee for his political mileage. In the cabinet, beyond such a façade of multiracialism was Lee’s operation in personalising the body. All of the cabinet members were of English-educated elites and/or bilingually-educated. Chinese-educated leaders, which were also Lee’s main opponents, were not appointed. Ong was sacked out of his resistance against Lee. The new cabinet members since 1963, was personally selected by Lee from within and outside the party. At the same time, throughout the ‘practice of multiracial policy’ in Singapore from 1959 to 1965, was marked with several contradicting meanings. In 1959 to 1963 it is more towards the pro-Malay policy, but in 1964 to 1965 it changed to a much more equal notion of multiracialism.

⁶³ Goh correspondence to Razak and Ismail on 20 July 1965, quoted in Edmund Lim, ‘Secret documents reveal extent of negotiations for Separation’, *ibid*.

⁶⁴ Interview with Ramli Mohamed, Organising Secretary of National Solidarity of Singapore’s Malay Bureau, Singapore, 30 September 2010.

Lee's PAP Era of Regime Legitimation: The Rise of Meritocratic Policy in Singapore's Nation-Building

“...Singapore shall be forever a sovereign democratic and independent nation, founded upon the principles of liberty and justice and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of her people in a more just and equal society”.

Lee Kuan Yew, 9th August 1965⁶⁵

The full independence of Singapore in 1965 have placed Lee's PAP in different situational dynamics. The opposition had been effectively crippled in 1963 and their presence in the parliament was gradually declining until their complete disappearance in 1966. The pro-Malay policy had only minimal practical value to the regime. The hasty process of separation itself, which Lee depicted as something unexpected, had brought fear and uncertainty to the populace, a sentiment that Lee had frequently utilised in justifying his radical action in Singapore's administration. Singapore's independence in August 1965 marked a turn in the Lee-led PAP's policy in nation-building, from multiracialism to meritocracy ideology although the former ideology was not totally disbanded. But like multiracialism, the meritocratic ideology served Lee for variety of purposes particularly in the heightening of his personal grip over the government and politics of the island.

The separation from the federation created fear among the populace, and Lee was effective in tapping the sentiment to the extent Singaporeans became united, more supportive to Lee, and started to see him as their guardian. Lee reminded the populace in 1966 to be a “rugged society” and pragmatic, willing to take an extreme turn in their lives' direction, with “high discipline” “to survive and prosper” in Singapore.⁶⁶ This hegemonic idea greatly helped to justify the drastic changes and the U-turn in the state's policies throughout Lee's governance until 1990.

⁶⁵ Lee's proclamation of Singapore independence, ‘Mr Lee Kuan Yew's reading of the Proclamation of Independence kicks off National Day celebrations’, *The Straits Times*, 9 August 2015, viewed 22 December 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/mr-lee-kuan-yews-reading-of-the-proclamation-of-independence-kicks-off-national-day>>.

⁶⁶ Lee Kuan Yew as quoted by, Alex Josey, *Lee Kuan Yew*, D. Moore Press. Singapore, 1968, p. 490.

The meritocracy quickly become a new foundation of the so-called “Singapore system”.⁶⁷ It is pervasive in the state and the society, but among the biggest embodiments of Singapore’s meritocracy are its education and political-administrative systems. But beyond meritocracy, lies the personal project of Lee Kuan Yew’s elitism, which did not only transform the structure of the state and society towards its elitist arrangement, but legitimised and entrenched the position of the Lee-led PAP as government.

In the education system from 1965 to the late 1970s, the influenced of meritocracy went along with the widening and deepening of the bilingualism policy. The Malay language, was no more accorded as the first language, but English – the main language of the ruling class - was chosen supposedly due “its importance as the language of international business, diplomacy and technology”.⁶⁸ In 1966, the bilingual policy was extended to secondary schools. English had been assigned with the double weightage for examinations at primary schools in 1963 and later at secondary schools in 1969.⁶⁹ Thus, those with greater English competency, and class privilege, had much better choices in furthering their studies and job prospects. This situation naturally structured the “practical view” of many parents in sending their children to the English schools,⁷⁰ which later saw a steady decline of the vernacular schools until the complete disappearance of the Malay and Tamil schools by 1985. In that year too, only three per cent of the total students enrolled went to the Chinese schools and the remaining were registered in the English schools throughout the state.⁷¹

Beyond the practice of the ‘meritocratic bilingualism’ lies the real project for the PAP’s elite to ‘create English speaking Singapore’,⁷² in closing the stark cultural and class gaps between the rulers and masses. English language, through the policy, had begun to have more material value in the society and started to be admired by many. Those with sound competency in the language were well-regarded by the populace particularly as government leaders with the propagated image of having professional and technocratic abilities as “the scholar”⁷³ in the society. With the selection and relative success of English as the new lingua franca among Singaporeans, the cultural distinction and language disparity between the rulers

⁶⁷ Michael D. Barr, *The ruling elite of Singapore: network of powers of power and influence*, I.B Tauris, New York, 2014, Chapter 1.

⁶⁸ Cheryl Sim, ‘Bilingual policy’, *National Library Board Singapore*, viewed 1 July 2015, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2016-09-01_093402.html>.

⁶⁹ ‘Second tongue compulsory as from 1969’, *The Straits Times*, 15 May 1968.

⁷⁰ Vasil, *Governing Singapore*, p. 101.

⁷¹ Raj Vasil, *Asianising Singapore: the PAP’s management of ethnicity*, Singapore, Heinemann Asia, 1995, p.59

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.52.

⁷³ Barr and Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, p. 179.

and the masses were gradually made less obvious than ever before. At the same time, however, bilingualism essentialised and entrenched racial identities to the populace. While the number of English speakers has been significantly increased with the policy of bilingualism, but the “ethnic boundary”⁷⁴ among the populace was re-strengthened with the application of compulsory subject of mother tongue languages.

Meritocracy is apparently taking place in politics since the second-half of 1960s. The opposition which had totally disbanded the parliament in 1966 and boycotted the 1968 general elections was framed by the PAP as unreliable and dishonest politicians. The act of the opposition had further facilitated PAP domination in Singapore on a much greater level and thus so the masses dependency to the latter. At the same time, Lee-led PAP government focused in dealing with the socio-economic problems in Singapore particularly issues on unemployment, housing and overpopulation.⁷⁵ Through the practice of effective and clean government, strong encouragement for foreign direct investments and the policy of export oriented industrialisation - economic and material development became noticeable in 1970s. The mentioned socio-economic problems were gradually and effectively managed. From 1965 to 1978, the economic “growth averaged 10 % p.a.”, “unemployment rate fell to 3.6 % in 1978” and the manufacturing sector’s share of GDP grew from 14 % in 1965 to 24 % by 1978”.⁷⁶

Lee and the PAP elites propagated the idea that this progress was made possible as the government was administered by those with merit, that being the so-called technocrats which corresponds to the regime’s policy of meritocracy.⁷⁷ It was also made possible with less politicking and unnecessary societal pressure.⁷⁸ Being technocrats rather than politicians, which were assumed to be experts in their own fields, the technocrats were regarded as impartial, professional and above politics.⁷⁹ The economic growth and effective governance of the PAP in regards to socio-economic development did not only justify the authoritarian, elitist and paternalistic style of the PAP government, they also legitimatised the PAP ruling with the absence of a political opposition. Gradually, Singaporeans were shaped to prioritise

⁷⁴ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference*, Waveland Press, Long Grove, 1998, Chapter 1.

⁷⁵ ‘MTI Inside 1965 -1978’, Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore, viewed 15 April 2015, <<https://www.mti.gov.sg/MTIInsights/Pages/1965-%E2%80%931978.aspx>>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, *Singapore politics under the People’s Action Party*, p. 47.

⁷⁸ Kenneth Paul Tan, *Governing global-city Singapore: legacies and futures after Lee Kuan Yew*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2017, Chapter 2.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

material well-being, through the constructed elitist system, rather than political freedoms. In fact, through the enlargement of the public sector, including nationalisation of private corporations, which made the public sector to be the main and the biggest employer in Singapore, the pursuit of material among the populace was structured through the education system and employment with the government, based on meritocracy.⁸⁰ By this form of employment patronage (and discipline), political loyalty and consent to the PAP from the populace became regimented. The competition in the education system, especially with the introduction of the streaming system at schools in 1979, and employment with the government became intense, as it determines ones' success in their material life.⁸¹

In his bid to perpetuate his rule by increasing his personal grip in the government, Lee embarked the leadership renewal policy in 1970s to early 1980s in removing the top-ranked original elite in the executive, known as the Old Guard, usually to other in a less powerful position. This created dissatisfactions for his former ally, but that did not stop Lee from fulfilling his personal interest. When Lee decided to retire Ong Pang Boon, Lee said to Ong "I agree with you. You also had misgivings (about some newcomers), as had the late Dr Toh Chin Chye, over the speed of self-renewal and the effect it was having on the morale of the old guard MPs".⁸² Through this policy and elitism, Lee was able to contain his political threats and appointed his new men, personally selected and cultivated by him, to work for his regime.⁸³ The policy, thus, has not only function to fortify Lee's power and position in the cabinet, but also prolonged his tenure as the top executive as long as he wishes.⁸⁴

It is through the above practice that Lee's protégé Goh Chok Tong and his first son Lee Hsein Loong were recruited to the cabinet in mid-1970s and mid-1980s respectively. Their recruitments exemplify the political-bureaucracy nexus of Singapore's technocracy and elitism. With the containment of politics and party competitions, Lee mainly looked at the bureaucracy and the government-linked company, in search for talent with the "helicopter quality".⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Barr and Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore*, pp. 57-86.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-149.

⁸² See, Lam Peng Er and Kevin Tan (eds.), *Lee's lieutenants: Singapore's old guard*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999, p. 165.

⁸³ See, Barr, Michael D., and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, ethnicity and the nation-building project*, no. 11, NIAS Press, Copenhagen, 2008, Chapter 4.

⁸⁴ Interview with the Young Democrat leaders at Singapore Democratic Party head office, Singapore, 2 October 2010.

⁸⁵ See, Han Fook Kwang, Warren Fernandez and Sumiko Tan, *Lee Kuan Yew, the man and his ideas*, Singapore Press Holding, Singapore, 1998, Chapter 4.

“Singapore must get some of its best in each year's crop of graduates into government. When I say best, I don't mean just academic results. His O levels or A levels, university degree will only tell you his powers of analysis. That is only one-third of the helicopter quality. You've then got to assess him for his sense of reality, his imagination, his quality of leadership, his dynamism. But most of all, his character and his motivation, because the smarter a man is, the more harm he will do to society”.⁸⁶

Apart from the personalisation aspect, racial discrimination particularly against the Malays undermined the quality of Singapore's meritocracy. The introduction of the National Service in 1967 has excluded Malays until late 1970s. With such exclusion, the Malays had difficulty finding employment with the government as the National Service training has become one of the basis for recruitment in the public sector. As a result, they was a significant decrease in Malay representation in the Armed Forces and the police department, “their traditional fields of employment”.⁸⁷ This contributed to the problems of employment among the Malay youth⁸⁸ and other social problems. It had also alienated the Malays from the “PAP government and the Singapore state”.⁸⁹ Despite the Malays were later recruited into the National Service and public sector, ethnic exclusion and racial barring of the community are noticeable to the present day. The Malay personnel in the National Service and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) are excluded from certain sensitive or important departments and units.⁹⁰ In police force, they is also a racial bar unofficially imposed on the Malays and Indians.⁹¹ To date, the Malays are hardly sponsored by the SAF scholarship and face challenges to get funded by the public service⁹² due to the mentioned practice of systemic discrimination against the Malays and other minorities. These setbacks of Singapore meritocracy were continued to the third phase of Lee's rule in Singapore.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Pang Cheng Lian, *Singapore's People's Action Party: its history, organization, and leadership*, Oxford University Press, Singapore, 1971, p. 72.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Tim Huxley (2000) as quoted from, Kamaludeen Mohamed Mohamed Nasir, *Globalized Muslim Youth in the Asia Pacific: popular culture in Singapore and Sydney*, Palgrave Mac Millan, New York, 2016, p. 64.

⁹⁰ Interview with Muhd Khalis Risfan, member of Young Democrat of Singapore Democratic Party, Singapore, 2 October 2010.

⁹¹ Interview with a former policeman (Indian) in Singapore, 3 August 2010.

⁹² ‘Unfair discrimination of Malays in National Service’, *The Online Citizen*, viewed 30 January 2012, <<https://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2012/01/30/unfair-discrimination-of-malays-in-national-service>>.

Lee's Regime Era of Perpetuation and Habituation: From Late 1970s to 1990

Lee's regime perpetuation and habituation would best describe Singapore's nation-state building from late 1970s to 1990. During this period, most of the 'Old Guards' have retired or been replaced with the second generation leader Goh Chok Tong, and PAP's position as the ruling party was well entrenched and consolidated. With most if not all of the executive powers centralised and concentrated in Lee's hands, and the near-absence of an opposition in the political scene, the nature of Singapore's nation-building policy throughout this era were becoming much more towards Lee's idiosyncrasies particularly on his views towards race, culture and genes. Since the late 1970s, ostensibly as a "cultural ballast" against the unhealthy aspects of Western culture (as the results of his own policies particularly by placing English as one of the cores in PAP's nation-building projects), Lee progressively sinicised Singapore – a process which he himself vowed to forbid in 1960s. Through the politics of race, culture and genetics,⁹³ Lee somewhat unashamedly (considering he was extremely against such idea a decade before) exerted much of state policies and programmes heavily based on Chinese-ness and towards the Chinese community.⁹⁴

By late 1970s Harry Lee, as what Lee Kuan Yew wanted to be called in the past, had started to identify of himself as a "Chinaman".⁹⁵ In 1979, the PAP government launched the "Speak Mandarin Policy" to help the Chinese, particularly the younger generation to cope with learning the language. At the same time, Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools have been established to reward students with good competency in Mandarin. The SAP schools are made exclusive for the Chinese or Anglo-Chinese schools and for children of the community only. Later 1982, "eight Confucian scholars were invited by the Ministry of Education to draft" for the syllabus of "Confucian Ethics" before it was introduced to schools.⁹⁶ Since late 1970s to 1990s, Lee also became one of the chief proponents of Asian Values, together with Mahathir and Suharto. They argued that the East have different sets of values the West's liberal democracy.⁹⁷ However, Singapore's version of Asian Values was highly correlated

⁹³ See also, Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, Chapter 6.

⁹⁴ Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew*, p. 137.

⁹⁵ Lee Kuan Yew, 'Mass politics and parliamentary politics', speech to Parliament, 23 February 1977, *Petir*, July 1978, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Christopher Tremewan, *The political economy of social control in Singapore*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1994, p.119.

⁹⁷ See, Barr, *Cultural politics and Asian Values*, *ibid.*

with Confucian values, which later formed the major component of Singapore's Shared Values in 1991.

Since 1980s, the total fertility rate in Singapore was alarmingly low. In 1965 the rate was 4.62 but in 1980 decreases to 1.74.⁹⁸ Lee during the 1983 National Day Rally speech said, "Whilst we have brought down the birth rate, we have reduced it most unequally. The better-educated the woman is, the less children she has".⁹⁹ The main contributing factor was due to heavy population control imposed by PAP since late 1960s through the carrot and stick 'Stop at Two' policy against particularly against the general masses. In response to that, the government introduce the Graduate Mother Scheme in 1984 to encourage graduate mothers to produce more babies for the sake of Singapore future. Lee's government also secretly undertook a marriage programme among the Chinese graduates "in the civil service, statutory boards and government-owned companies" through the "Social Development Unit".¹⁰⁰

Malay support was also structurally weakened, through the massive resettlement programme, changes in electoral boundary, and the introduction of Group Representative Constituency that systemically structured them to be less substantial minority. Malay electoral constituencies were completely wipe-out by 1990s. The minority checks against the majority thus was cripple and the votes from the Malays had become less valuable to Lee in contrast to the 1959 and 1963 elections.

A new set of leaders, with both mastery in English and Mandarin, apart from having the "helicopter quality" were personally chosen and trained by Lee. The selected few, who was close to, and earned Lee's trust were prepared for a new game change in politics, as Lee Kuan Yew's approach in politics had started to be challenged by some quarter of the masses. A new power setting in PAP during the second half of the 1990s was gradually organised between Lee Kuan Yew, his protégé Goh Chok Tong and his first son Lee Hsien Loong. The composition of the setting were maintained until 2011 although the configuration has changed in their respective era of premiership.

This period, thus, was marked by pro-Chinese policy, along with class and eugenic programmes. One's culture, race and genes, apart from their academic qualifications were (and are) matters in the Singapore's system. The undercurrent politics, nevertheless, was the

⁹⁸ 'Did Mr Lee Kuan Yew create a Singapore in his own image?', *The Straits Times*, viewed 24 March 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/did-mr-lee-kuan-yew-create-a-singapore-in-his-own-image>>.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

personal project of Lee in prolonging his position from the threats of within and outside the government. The values in Lee's Asian Values for example, were highly selective and hierarchical in influencing absolute loyalty on the part of the populace to the ruling elite. The pro-Chinese policy was applied in wooing the Chinese support to the increasingly Chinese state of PAP, led rather paradoxically by, Harry Lee Kuan Yew.

Conclusion

The three phases of the Lee Kuan Yew years, from 1959 to 1990, were highly correlated with the attempt on the part of the Prime Minister in clinging to power. As the result, the nation-building policies during his tenure were personalised in organised support towards PAP in general, and to him in specific. During the first phase of his rule (1959 – 1965), various pro-Malay policies were introduced to attract the Malay crowd as he intended to merge Singapore with the then Federation of Malaya. But after PAP's failure to become the main partner in the Alliance, Lee changed his policy, ostensibly towards meritocracy. In the second phase of his rule in Singapore (1965 – late 1970s), the pro-Malay policies was reversed and the Malays have begun to be systematically discriminated, despite the championing of politics of meritocracy in Singapore. Through such politics, a political system of technocracy and elitism was created in legitimising the PAP authoritarian, and later one-man rule. Lee's politics of meritocracy since late the 1970s (the third phase) have been greatly undermined with the enactments of pro-Chinese policy encompassing various programmes, from language, to education system and scholarship. With the weakening of the minority political clout, Lee had structured his government to direct sharp focus in wooing the Chinese voters whom have become much more critical of his administration throughout the 1980s.

CHAPTER 6

Singapore's Nation-Building during the Goh Chok Tong Years

On the day Lee Kuan Yew decided to step down as the Prime Minister in late November 1990, he stepped straight into a newly-established position as Senior Minister. Goh Chok Tong was appointed as his successor, but Lee Kuan Yew's first son, Lee Hsien Loong was assigned to be Deputy Prime Minister. These manoeuvres ensured that Lee Kuan Yew's legacy and interests remained even after he resigned as Prime Minister. Regarding Singapore's nation-building during Goh year, although there are some deviations from Lee Kuan Yew's governing styles, there exist similarities between them. In this chapter, I will unravel how Lee Kuan Yew's legacies—particularly pragmatism, racialism and elitism—are reflected in the introduction of new policies and political practices during Goh Chok Tong's and I will identify the variations between administrations of Goh Chok Tong and that of Lee Kuan Yew.

New Circumstances of the State of Singapore after Lee Kuan Yew's Premiership

Despite the setbacks to Singapore's nation-building under Lee Kuan Yew as highlighted in Chapter 5, the country's development, particularly in the economic and material aspects, was outstanding. It developed, as Lee says, from "Third World to First".¹ The state of the society also transformed fundamentally. Singapore became a full industrial society by the 1990s with large working and the middle classes. There were also significant changes in politics under the new premierships. During Goh's administration, Lee Kuan Yew still possessed substantial influence in the executive despite Goh's dominance. Apart from that, following the constitutional amendment on the powers of the President of Singapore sought by Lee Kuan Yew at the end of his premiership, Singapore's the Head of State since 1991 is no longer merely ceremonial, but wields much more considerable powers in checking the government. The president has "veto powers over the spending of national reserves and monetary policies as well as over the appointments of key positions in the Civil Service,

¹ See Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: the Singapore story, 1965-2000*, Singapore Press Holdings, Singapore, 2000.

government companies and Statutory Boards, appointment of the prime minister, the right to withhold consent for the dissolution of Parliament,” apart from three “additional safeguard roles in Internal Security Act, Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) investigations”.² Even with such checks, by both the President and the Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew (then popularly dubbed “SM Lee”), Goh exercised a lot of authority in steering his cabinet, although not as unrestricted as in SM Lee’s era.

When Lee Hsien Loong took over the premiership from Goh on 12 August 2004, he also faced similar checks, but this time from Goh as Senior Minister and his father as Minister Mentor. Goh fortified his position and networks of power within Singapore’s government and government-linked companies (GLCs) in his fourteen-year rule. These circumstances posed some challenges to his successor as Goh, like his predecessor, refused to fully retire from the cabinet after the premiership.

The society and economy have also undergone tremendous changes after Lee Kuan Yew premiership. Globalisation and rapid technological changes have transformed Singapore into a service-based knowledge economy in tandem with trade and manufacturing, with the emergence of the post-industrial society. The political sphere and the social space that were tightly closed and controlled under Lee Kuan Yew’s and Goh’s administrations have been steadily enlarged by information and communication technology (ICT) during Lee Hsien Loong’s era. These changes posed new challenges to the government, and eventually propelled, among other consequences, the retirements of Lee Kuan Yew and Goh from the cabinet after the 2011 General Election.

² ‘Elected presidency’, *National Library Board of Singapore*, viewed 4 April 2014, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_899_2004-12-24.html>.

Singapore's Nation-Building under Goh Chok Tong, 1990–2004

My mission is clear: to ensure that Singapore thrives and grows after Mr Lee Kuan Yew... I will do this by building on what Mr Lee and the Old Guards have achieved... My stress is on continuity, not a break with the past. I will use the collective talents of my colleagues, and the combined energies of all citizens, to help the Singapore team stay ahead. The Prime Minister's job is a huge one. It has been made even larger by Mr Lee Kuan Yew. Any successor will find the shoes he has left too big. I do not intend to wear his shoes. I shall wear my own, and choose my own stride. I intend to be myself, and set my own style.

Goh Chok Tong.³

Despite ruling Singapore for less than half the period of Lee Kuan Yew's regime, Goh Chok Tong's fourteen years in the administration have never been short of significant policies. Pertaining to the state's nation-building project, Goh proposed not one, but three ideologies, with the first one introduced only a few months after he became Prime Minister. The three ideologies are the Shared Values (in 1991), the Singapore 21 (1997–1999) and the Remaking Singapore (2002–2003). Interestingly, these ideologies were respectively announced at the beginning, in the middle, and towards the end of Goh's administration. These ideologies are significant to this study as they were used to guide, explain, and justify the Goh administration's nation-building policies in general, and Goh's thinking in particular.

There were two opposite signs of his leadership compared to the previous regime: the sign of consistency and the sign of contradiction. On the one hand, Goh vowed that he would ensure "Singapore thrives and grows after Mr Lee Kuan Yew... I will do this by building on what Mr Lee and the Old Guards have achieved".⁴ On the other hand, he also stresses that "I do not intend to wear his (Lee Kuan Yew) shoes. I shall wear my own, and choose my own stride. I intend to be myself, and set my own style".⁵ These two differing signs, as I shall discuss in this section and the next, are repeatedly reproduced by Goh's nation-building ideologies and policies along with his premiership. Therefore, Goh, like his predecessor, is enigmatic and pragmatic. However, in the end, this thesis argues that the contradiction of the Goh years with Lee Kuan Yew's reign is limited in form, while in practice they are mostly consistent with only partial changes that were needed to consolidate and perpetuate PAP's rule.

³ Ministry of Information and the Arts, Speech for the Swearing-In Ceremony of the the Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and His Cabinet in the City Hall Chamber on Wednesday 28 November 1990, viewed 2 January 2014, <<http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/gct19901128.pdf>>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Goh's search for a way to make a distinctive mark on national identity started in 1988 when the government observed that social cohesion was deteriorating ostensibly due to Westernisation influences.⁶ But it was Lee Hsien Loong who was tasked to study and administer the process of the making the ideology, including "consultations" with various ethnic and religious leaders in Singapore. Finally, five main elements were chosen as "Shared Values".⁷ They are: nation before community and society above self, family as the basic unit of society, community support and respect for the individual, consensus not conflict, and racial and religious harmony.⁸

Shared Values became the government's new project to restore communitarianism sentiments among the populace. In parallel with these values, Goh's administration adopted different governing styles from his predecessor's. Goh's administration was more "consultative and consensual" though still limited,⁹ whereby meeting with the people and social organisations were frequently held for consensus building. To reflect the changing nature of contemporary society with its matured industrialised population, Goh recognised the need for the government (PAP) to be much more inclusive to remain relevant and popular.

Goh consultative style is not something unanticipated, as it was more an extension of his "responsive" approach when he was Deputy Prime Minister in charge of the Feedback Unit and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS). In fact, Goh was rigorously trained and tested (for innovation, efficiency and teamwork) by his mentors Hon Sui Sin and Lee Kuan Yew to work with his fellow second-generation leaders and Lee Kuan Yew since 1976.¹⁰ Upon assuming premiership, Goh was hoping the renewed relations through "constructive engagement" between the state and the "civic" (referring the positive attributes of civility, kindness, and public orderliness, in contrast to democratic civil citizenry) society would finally raise the level of social cohesion among the populace and thus become the driver for Singapore's continuing economic progress and survival.¹¹

⁶ Goh Chok Tong, 'Shared values should help us develop a Singaporean identity', *The Straits Times*, 16 January 1991, p. 16.

⁷ 'BG Lee zeroes in on the core issues', *The Straits Times*, 12 January 1989, p. 1.

⁸ Singapore, Parliament, *Parliamentary debates: official report on Shared values*, vol. 56, Government Printer, Singapore, 15 January 1991.

⁹ Jon S.T. Quah, 'Public administration: Change in style and continuity in policy', in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, Singapore, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies, 2009, pp. 50-52.

¹⁰ Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), 'Introduction: A redefined Singapore', *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies: Singapore, 2009, p. 3.

¹¹ See for example, Terence Lee, 'The politics of civil society in Singapore', *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2002, pp. 97-117.

In 1997, Goh laid out Singapore 21 (S21) as a new vision for the state and population of Singapore in facing the greater challenges and uncertainties of the coming twenty-first century.¹² Goh's speech on S21 recognised that Singapore as a nation was not yet realised, even after more than three decades of independence under PAP's rule. To Goh, some residents, including its own citizens born and bred in Singapore, still regarded the country as a transient place.¹³ Thus, the situation has not changed much from the previous state (migratory workers with less identification with Singapore) before PAP rule in 1959.

Goh's S21 was formulated in the wake of globalisation. The old governing styles were no more suited for these dynamics, providing only "hardware" (physical infrastructures) and material benefits.¹⁴ When the material motivation disappears, people will fly away from Singapore. Even more worrying to Goh was *Mastercard's* findings. The company "found 1 in 5 Singaporeans wishes to emigrate, despite Singapore's economic success".¹⁵ Thus, to Goh, the overstress on material progress (by the previous administration) caused the people to lose their "rootedness", regarding Singapore merely as a "hotel" but not a "home".¹⁶ This would affect the state project of having a strong and unified society, as well as Singapore's economic competitiveness.¹⁷ Thus the construction of "heartware", which officially "refers to the intangibles of society – social cohesion, political stability, and the collective will, values, and attitudes of people" instead of just "hardware", was of utmost importance for the state and society.¹⁸ In this regard, there are major resemblances between the Shared Values and S21 particularly in the aspect of building social cohesion (read: communitarianism), consultative government and participative (read: "constructive") citizenry. However, S21 was more specific towards the building of a national identity and a nation, in contrast to values-building in the case of the Shared Values.

Goh's administration in 1999 recognised five dilemmas to the construction of the "heartware":

1. Less stressful life vs Retaining the drive
2. Needs of senior citizens vs Aspirations of the young
3. Attracting talent vs Looking after Singaporeans

¹² Goh Chok Tong, Ministry of Information and the Arts, Speech by the Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in Parliament on Thursday, 5 June 1997, 'Singapore 21 – a new vision for a new era', viewed 4 January 2014, <<http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=1997060503.htm>>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 'Singapore 21: together, we make the difference', Singapore 21 Committee, Singapore, 1999, p. 7,

4. Internationalisation/Regionalisation vs Singapore as home
5. Consultation and consensus vs Decisiveness and quick action.¹⁹

In dealing with such dilemmas, the S21 Committee regarded Singapore's preceding ideals of "meritocracy, racial harmony, strong leadership and a government free from corruption" to be imperative together with "new ideals to add to the future".²⁰ Dubbed by the government as the "five pillars of S21",²¹ the new ideals were introduced, after being discussed with thousands of participants. The ideals were:

1. Every Singaporean matters
2. Strong Families: Our foundation and our future
3. Opportunities for all
4. The Singapore Heartbeat: Feeling passionately about Singapore
5. Active citizens: Making the difference²²

Thus, the S21 strategy of competitiveness through cohesiveness had three interrelated main elements revolving around the idea of the people's centred-ness, namely: consensual government and much energetic civic society; an improved education system that is not too elitist but much broaden to all pupils and students to produce talents in all backgrounds; and enhancing the socio-economic conditions and the quality of the workforce and masses at large through a strategic partnership between public and private sectors.

Two years later in 2001, Goh announced another ideological policy: "Remaking Singapore". Relative to Shared Values and S21, Remaking Singapore was more comprehensive. Although it was initially intended to "reshape the existing political, social and cultural norms of Singapore...away from the "five Cs" – careers, condos, clubs, credit cards and cars – commonly equated with the Singapore Dream",²³ the report issued by the Remaking Singapore Committee in 2003 proposed wide-ranging ideas in rebuilding Singapore's national identity.²⁴

In parallel with the government's effort to "understand the changing aspirations and expectations of the third generation of post-independence Singaporeans",²⁵ Goh appointed

¹⁹ Goh Chok Tong, 'A new vision for a new era', *ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ 'Remaking Singapore committee is formed', *National Library Board Singapore*, 14 February 2002, viewed 15 April 2015, <<http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/17594f70-1a95-4ea8-b209-02104059a140>>.

²⁴ L. Teo, 'New team to take S'pore beyond 5 Cs', *The Straits Times*, 15 February 2015, p. 1.

²⁵ 'Remaking Singapore Committee is formed', *ibid.*

the then Minister of State for National Development Vivian Balakrishnan, also a third-generation leader, to lead the Remaking Singapore Committee.²⁶ Vivian's appointment as chairman of the committee was significant as the state for the first time allowed a member of a minority group to lead the state nation-making project. Both the previous national ideologies under Goh were led by the leaders from the Chinese community (Shared Values was headed by Lee Hsien Loong, while Teo Chee Hean led S21) that constituted the majority in the country. As a result, the 104-page Remaking Singapore Committee's Report, entitled "Changing Mind-sets, Deepening Relationships" was much more inclusive and broad as it was formulated with a more balanced perspective from the minority *vis-à-vis* the Singaporeans at large.²⁷

The committee put forth a set of proposals for "renewal and change", categorised under four themes: A Home for All Singaporeans, A Home Owned, A Home for All Seasons and A Home to Cherish.²⁸ One of the most significant recommendations in the report was to "renew the vision of Singaporean Singapore",²⁹ a derivative of Lee Kuan Yew's vision of "Malaysian Malaysia" in 1965 when Singapore was still in the Federation. Like Malaysian Malaysia, Singaporean Singapore encapsulated the ideas of "the will of the people, equal opportunity, justice and fairness, and values diversity",³⁰ which were downplayed or somewhat forgotten after Singapore's full independence. The committee thus saw the Singaporean Singapore spirit as a must, to be the core of remaking of Singapore.

Nation-building Policies under Goh's Administration

From the introduction of Shared Values at the beginning of Goh's administration to Remaking Singapore in 2003, there exists much consistency. This is especially true in the government's new approach to the public with the politics of consultation and consensus; building the sense of belonging, social cohesion and collective values among the "different" populations in Singapore; the importance of education, talents, and Singapore's economic progress (and survival); and the continuing idea of the people's self-reliance. These aspects are not mutually exclusive, but are interrelated with one another. They constituted part and

²⁶ 'New committee to focus on details', *The Business Times*, 15 February 2002, p. 3.

²⁷ 'The Report of the Remaking Singapore Committee, Changing Mindsets, Deepening Relationships', viewed 29 February 2015, <https://vivianbalakrishnan.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/remaking_singapore_2003.pdf>.

²⁸ 'Remaking Singapore Committee is formed', *ibid*; 'The Report of the Remaking Singapore Committee', *ibid*, pp. 11–13

²⁹ The Report of the Remaking Singapore Committee, *ibid*, p. 24.

³⁰ *Ibid*.

parcel of the Goh administration's nation-building projects. Certain innovative characters, however, were also introduced by the state, in parallel with the state's strategies in dealing with current changes ensure Singapore's future viability.

The government's renewed approach to the people, particularly on the politics of consensus and consultation, was frequently identified by the government and many intellectuals (mainly local scholars) as the most defining characteristic of the Goh years. As Goh stressed many times and at many occasions, he believed that the new Singapore government needed to renew its relationship the masses, particularly in allowing the latter to play a bigger role in the state's nation-building process. Goh saw this renewed relation with the masses as crucial, as it could serve several functions. First and foremost, government policies and decisions could be well-accepted by the public as they were made collectively, in contrast to the old elite-centric style under Lee Kuan Yew. Secondly, government policies and decisions could be much more representative of the Singaporean society comprising different ethnicities, religions, and social classes. Thirdly, a sense of belonging and national identification among the population to the Singapore state could increase significantly as they are given more opportunity to determine the future of their nation-state. This may also lead to its fourth function, that is, the enhancement of the people's identification with the PAP, as many Singaporeans construe the PAP as equivalent to the state or government. All these functions were essential in rebuilding a larger electoral support base for the PAP—a base that was declining at an alarming rate for the PAP elites throughout the 1980s.

All the national ideologies introduced by the Goh administration underwent thorough processes of discussion and consultation with representatives of various backgrounds. Accordingly, each ideology took at least two years before the government presented them. Shared Values took more than two years after being mooted by Goh (then the First Deputy Prime Minister on 28 October 1988).³¹ The Shared Values committee solicited feedback from various ethnic and religious organisations in formulating values that were common and acceptable to all quarters of the population.³² In fact, when Shared Values were mooted in Parliament on 14 January 1991, a rather intense debate ensued. Unlike Lee Kuan Yew's administration, Goh's government considered the arguments put forth by parliamentarians from both sides of the divide, and finally made several quick amendments before introducing

³¹ 'Shared values should help us develop a Singaporean identity', *The Straits Times*, 16 January 1991, p. 16.

³² Singapore, Parliament, *White paper on shared values*, Singapore, 1991, pp. 3–4.

the ideology to the public on the next day.³³ Following debate on the balancing role of individual Singaporean *vis-à-vis* the society as a whole, the proposed value of “Regard and community support for the individual” was amended to “Community support and respect for the individual”.³⁴ Similarly, the proposed use of “contention” in the fourth value, “Consensus instead of contention”, was changed to “conflict,” and thus became “Consensus not conflict”. This followed certain parliamentarians’ concern that the word contention could “imply the suppression of debates and dissenting views”.³⁵ For the S21 national ideology, 6,000 Singaporeans were consulted “from all walks of life” by 83 sub-committee members of various backgrounds within and without the government structure before Goh proposed it in 1999.³⁶ In the case of Remaking Singapore, “70 recommendations were put up by the committees” and more “than 80 percent of the recommendations were adopted with about 11 recommendations not accepted completely or partially”.³⁷

The formulation of these ideologies reflected Goh’s politics of consultation and consensus. In fact, as in the case of Remaking Singapore, almost all recommendations by the members of the five committees involved in the project, were accepted by Goh’s administration. A similar political play by Goh’s administration was evident in the making of some of the government’s decisions. For example, in the cases of the rise of the ministerial pay in 1994 and the proposal of building a casino in 2004, as highlighted by Noh and Tumin, Goh’s government attempted to get consensus from the irritated masses through various channels and media.³⁸ Apart from that, the Feedback Unit and the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) which Goh had helped created in the middle of 1980s, played a major role in providing up-to-date information on the social circumstances of the population to Goh’s administration.³⁹

In contrast to Lee Kuan Yew’s administration, the Goh government’s project of nation-building tried to go beyond material progress. Goh emphasised the social and national

³³ Singapore, Parliament, *Parliamentary debates: Official report on Shared values*, vol. 56, Singapore, 14 January 1991.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Lim Tin Seng, ‘Shared Values’, *National Library Board of Singapore*, viewed 30 June 2016, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_542_2004-12-18.html>; *Parliamentary debates: Official report on Shared values*, ibid.

³⁶ Singapore 21 Committee, *Singapore 21: Together, we make the difference*, ibid.; ‘Singapore 21: Together we make the difference is launched’, *National Library Board of Singapore*, viewed 30 June 2016, <<http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/66f2445b-43c1-407a-a3e8-a89083d6f868>>.

³⁷ Abdillah Noh and Makmor Tumin, ‘Remaking public participation: The case of Singapore’, *Asian Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 7, July 2008, p. 25.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 25 - 27.

³⁹ Jon S.T. Quah, ‘Public administration: Change in style and continuity in policy’, in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, Singapore, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies, 2009, p. 50.

factor, which he termed as the “heartware” in building new Singaporeans with a rooted sense of belonging to Singapore. His politics of consensus and consultation formed one of the ways to achieve this, by allowing the masses to play a bigger role in nation-building projects. Collective values were constructed and reinforced from time to time by Goh’s administration through meticulous consultation with various representatives of multi-ethnic and multi-religious Singapore. For instance, Remaking Singapore was helmed by an Indian leader, instead of a member of the ethnic majority. This was significant not only because the two previous national ideologies under Goh were led by Chinese, but also due to the ascendancy of Chinese-ness, described by Barr as “sinicization of Singapore”, since the late 1970s.⁴⁰ In fact, during Goh’s administration, several community self-help groups (SHGs)—the Association of Muslim Professional (AMP), Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) and Eurasian Association (EA) —were developed and enjoyed good relationship with the government through patronisation.⁴¹ Apart from looking after the welfare of the less-advantaged members their respective ethnic communities, they also represented their communities’ interests in a number of national issues and policies.

The idea of “representation” under the politics of consultation and consensus was also used to justify innovations in the electoral system. The authoritarian governing style of Lee Kuan Yew had become less popular among the electorate in the 1980s, likely due to the force of modernisation and the attainment of a much-advanced standard in social development. In the 1988 General Election (GE), PAP’s popular vote was 77.7 per cent, controlling all the seats in the parliament.⁴² However, it later lost the Anson parliamentary constituency to J.B. Jeyaratnam (popularly knowns as JBJ among the locals) in a fiercely fought by-election in 1981. JBJ’s victory in the by-election was a breakthrough for the opposition as the parliament had been completely dominated by the PAP since the 1968 GE. Subsequently, PAP’s share of votes dropped drastically in the 1984 GE to 64.8 per cent and to 63.2 per cent in the 1988 GE.⁴³ Such a troubling situation caused the PAP to rethink and change their political and electoral game. In this regard, Lee Kuan Yew allowed the younger generation of leaders led

⁴⁰ Michael D. Barr, ‘Lee Kuan Yew: race, culture and genes’, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1999, pp. 145-166.

⁴¹ Walter Sim, ‘The race issue: How far has Singapore come?’, *The Straits Times*, 8 November 2015, viewed 2 January 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/politics/the-race-issue-how-far-has-singapore-come>>.

⁴² James Chin, ‘Electoral battles and innovations: recovering lost ground’, in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years in Singapore*, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies: Singapore, 2009, p. 71.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

by Goh to pursue innovations in reconsolidating electoral support for the PAP. It is in this context that Goh proposed changes in the PAP's governing style towards a more consultative and consensual approach in tandem with contemporary societal development. Goh also recommended some transformations in the electoral system to match the PAP's new politics.

In late 1984, Goh proposed constitutional amendments to introduce Non-Constituency Members of Parliaments (NCMPs). Under this new electoral-parliamentary scheme, "NCMPs go to top opposition losers, up to a maximum six NCMPs".⁴⁴ The primary purpose of NCMPs is not to fill the parliament with more oppositions per se, as the incumbents would not have full authority as the real MPs. It was rather designed to give "more legitimacy and confidence in Parliament since a broad spectrum of views would be represented".⁴⁵ To Lee Kuan Yew, Goh and the PAP, NCMPs also provided the ruling regime with several other strategic and practical functions. First, it would give a message to the electorates in not to have much anxiety to give their full support to all PAP candidates in the election as the Parliament would always be filled with opposition representative(s) through the NCMP scheme. Secondly, NCMP would provide younger PAP MPs with the "sparing partners to sharpen their debating skills".⁴⁶ Thirdly, Lee saw the presence of "some non-PAP MPs would ensure that every suspicion, every rumour of misconduct, will be reported to the non-PAP MPs" and thus would "dispel suspicions of cover-ups of alleged wrongdoings" against the government officials.⁴⁷ Thinking the NCMP as "trick and ploy" on the part of the ruling regime to maintain its hegemony,⁴⁸ and apart from considering NCMP as "second-class MPs",⁴⁹ the opposition rejected the offer for the post in 1984 and took some time to fill its representative(s) as the NCMP(s) after the subsequent general elections.

In 1988, a major change was conducted to the electoral system by the creation of Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs). Instead of the 'conventional' Single Member Constituencies (SMC), some electoral constituencies have been combined and redrawn to form GRC and thus allow the contesting parties to fill several candidates in contrast to only one member in SMC. One of the members in GRC must be of the minority ethnic - officially

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 72.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Singapore, Parliament, Lee Kuan Yew speech during the second reading of the Constitution of Republic of Singapore (amendment) bill, *Singapore parliamentary debates, official report*, , 24 July 1984.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Singapore, Parliament, J. B. Jeyaretnam (Anson SMC) Speech during the second reading of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (amendment) bill, *Singapore parliamentary debates, official report*, vol. 44, 24 July 1989.

⁴⁹ James Chin, 'Electoral battles and innovations: recovering lost ground', in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, 2009, p.72.

defined as Malay, Indian or Others. In the GRC scheme, “the party with the highest share of votes win all the seats in that constituency”.⁵⁰ GRC started out with 39 SMCs grouped into 13 three-member GRCs, making up 39 out of a total of 81 elected seats in Parliament through the constitutional and Parliamentary Elections Act amendments in 1988. This has made Singapore to practice twin constituency’s electoral system (SMC and GRC). Later further amendments were done in 1991,⁵¹ and again in 1996 to increase the maximum number of MPs in each GRC from three to four, and then to six.⁵² In the 2001 general election, there were nine five-member GRCs and five six-member GRCs, making up 75 out of the 84 elected seats in Parliament.⁵³ The official rationalisation given by the government was to ensure the presence of the minority representatives and thus reflected the multiracial character of the society in the parliament instead of just one single race.⁵⁴ Goh argues that without the compulsory requirement of the minority candidate in the GRCs, it will be difficult for the minorities to be represented in the parliament particularly at SMC constituencies.⁵⁵ Thus to the government, GRC would not only act as the safeguard of the minority representation in parliament, but it also guarantees the relative balance of racial make-up in Singapore’s politics.

In 1990, another scheme of parliament representation was introduced. It is known Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP). As the name suggests, the scheme allows the government through the President, to appoint up to six NMPs (in 1997 the number was increased to nine) for a two-year term, “with the option of renewal thereafter”.⁵⁶ The official justification by Goh’s administration on the establishment NMP scheme was to create a more “consensual style of government where alternative views are heard and constructive dissent accommodated”.⁵⁷ To Goh, the opposition had not been constructive as their aim was to discredit and to oust the government rather than giving fair comments and productive

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment) Act 1991, no. 5, 1991; Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act 1991, no. 9, 1991.

⁵² Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment) Act 1996, no. 41, 1996; Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act 1996, no. 42, 1996.

⁵³ Parliamentary Elections (Declaration of Group Representation Constituencies) Order 2006, no. 146, 2006.

⁵⁴ Singapore, Parliament, Lee Hsien Loong (Prime Minister), ‘President’s address: Debate on the address’, *Singapore parliamentary debates, official report*, vol. 86, 27 May 2009.

⁵⁵ Singapore, Parliament, Goh Chok Tong (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence) speech during the second reading of the parliamentary elections (amendment) bill, *Singapore parliamentary debates, official report*, vol. 50, col. 180, 11 January 1988.

⁵⁶ James Chin, ‘Electoral battles and innovations: recovering lost ground’, in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, 2009, p.73.

⁵⁷ Singapore, Parliament, Goh Chok Tong (First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence) speech during the second reading of the constitution of the Republic of Singapore (amendment No. 2) bill, *Singapore parliamentary debates, official report*, vol. 54, cols. 695, 29 November 1989.

recommendations. The NMP scheme, to the government, would provide highly qualified people in Singapore, but not affiliated with any party, to participate in the public policy-making more significantly.⁵⁸ Thus apart from playing the role of representing certain segments of the population in the parliament, NMPs could provide much more independent voices and constructive ideas in the legislative without any intention to oust the government which was more acceptable (desirable) to Goh administration.⁵⁹ Goh reiterates that the NMPs would be able to focus more on the “substance of the debate rather than form and rhetoric”, and provide dissenting and practical views that would contribute to good governance.⁶⁰ Similar to the NCMPs, NMPs can participate in debates and vote on all issues in the parliament except amendments to the Constitution, motions relating to public funds, votes of no confidence in the government, and removing the President from office.

Despite such tendency of Goh’s rhetoric on the heartware, the politics of economic progress and survival were still part and parcel of the government’s bearing on its nation-building projects. As its economy is deeply rooted in the international trade and the global market, Singapore was greatly affected by the new worldwide phenomenon of globalisation since the 1990s. The existence of appropriate human talents in parallel with the new economy was seen more crucial for Singapore’s survival than ever before. For this, Goh saw the needs to reshape the education system and the state’s human resource policy in sailing through the globalisation waves. The education system under Goh’s leadership was re-structure towards a life-long learning scheme. In the previous education policy, many Singaporeans were left out from schools after failing to perform excellently in their primary or secondary examinations.⁶¹ This has to structure them to join the labour force at much early age.⁶² In a way, for a short period, it was parallel with the then Singapore’s economy in the 1960s and 1970s which were heavily based on manufacturing that needed a vast quantity of low-skilled and semi-skilled workers. But as the state’s economy rapidly developing in the 1980s and with the force of globalisation since 1990s, the demand for such workers gradually decreasing in contrast to the call of high-value jobs. Thus the education system was broadened in allowing those who were not academically excellent at the school to have an alternative, viable education programmes to prepare them for a high-value employment

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Interview with Ramli Mohamed, Organising Secretary of National Solidarity of Singapore’s Malay Bureau, Singapore, 30 September 2010.

⁶² Interview with Nor Lella Mardiah Mohamed, Head of Malay Bureau National Solidarity of Singapore’s, Singapore, 30 September 2010.

which is central for the future of Singapore economy. In doing so, a new stream was added to the secondary schools known as the Normal (Technical) or N (T) course in 1993 for “low-track students”.⁶³ With the opening of more seats of the N (T) course and with much lower requirements in contrast to Express and Special streams, many primary school leavers were able to get a place at the secondary schools and thus matched to Goh’s government objective to provide a higher standard of labour force that have at least 10-year of formal education in average. In fact, the government made the objective compulsory in 2003.⁶⁴ In 1992 Institute of Technical Education (ITE) was established to cater the demand of lower technical studies for secondary school students who do not manage to get a place in the university. ITE takes around twenty-five per cents (and more) of annual school cohort.⁶⁵ With the establishment of ITE’s (that later has ten campuses), apart from the Polytechnic, more secondary school leavers can have their tertiary education and later fill up the labour force as semi-skilled or skilled employees.

Goh’s administration also provided large education funds for the working adults to add values to their skills and thus “improve their employability”.⁶⁶ Many of the employee’s development programmes were organised through on-the-job training (OJT) and the Skills Redevelopment Programme (SRP). The objective of SRP was to ensure the employees could effectively meet the new demand and the requirements of the changing economy. Through the increase of the tertiary institutions enrolment, some working adults were given opportunity to pursue an education at the local higher learning institution under “the Open University Degree Programme run by the Singapore Institute of Management”.⁶⁷

Goh’s administration concentration on the education system in the 1990s was reflected in its commitment to spend “25 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) on operating expenditure and around 10 - 20 per cent in the development training such as OJT

⁶³ Masturah Ismail and Tan Aik Ling, ‘Snapshots from the normal(technical) world :a case study of low-track students in Singapore’ in Wendy D. Bokhorst-Heng, Margery D. and Kerry Lee (eds.) *Redesigning Pedagogy : Reflections of Theory and Praxis*, Sense Publisher, Rotterdam, 2006, p. 73 ; Yap Kwang Tan, Hong Kheng Chow, Christine Goh (eds.), *Examinations in Singapore: Change and Continuity(1891-2007)*, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 2008, p. 125.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Education, ‘Compulsory Education’, Singapore, viewed 1 March 2016 <<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-system/compulsory-education>>.

⁶⁵ ‘ITE enrolment on the rise, in spite of smaller cohort’, *Channel News Asia*, 22 Feb 2016, viewed 1 March 2016, <<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/ite-enrolment-on-the-rise/2535856.html>>.

⁶⁶ S.M. Thangavelu, ‘Spreading the benefits of growth and managing inequality’ in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, 2009, p. 233.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

and SRP” annually.⁶⁸ In late 1990, Goh announced Education Endowment (Edusave) programme designed to balance education opportunity among Singaporeans.

In spite of all of the above efforts, including the government’s determination to rebuild the labour force through OJT and SRP, the supply of the labour force, not only high-skilled personnel, but practically at all level were still significantly lacking. Apart from the increasing demand for labour in the market, this situation was also contributed by Lee Kuan Yew’s ‘Stop at Two Policy’ which was practised since the last quarter of the 1960s.⁶⁹ The anti-natalist policy was very effective that Singapore’s population in the 1980s had fallen below replacement levels and thus significantly affecting the supply and the age of the labour force.⁷⁰ To compensate this lacking and to ensure Singapore’s continuous success in the economy, the government has taken a very bold move by not only relaxing, but liberalising its immigration procedure to allow a massive influx of foreign workforce⁷¹ under the name of ‘Foreign Talent’ (FT) policy since the early 1990s. As its name suggests, Foreign Talent policy initially was for getting high-skilled foreign talents which the government regarded as crucial for the Singapore’s economic survival. But later many semi-skilled and low-skilled workers, “without much talents”, were also brought in filling the demand for labour.⁷² According to an official statistic, the number of non-resident had gone up by 9 per cent to 311,300 peoples in 1990 in contrast to almost none in 1980.⁷³ Then it increased by more than double to 754,500 in 2000.⁷⁴ Thus almost half (46.45%) of the population increased in Singapore in that period were contributed by the massive influx of the immigrant populations instead of actual population renewal.⁷⁵ With such high number of non-residents (NR) in contrast to resident population (4,027,900 peoples) at around 1:5 of non-resident/resident in ratio, many new problems eventuated economically, socially and culturally.

Goh’s Singapore 21 (S21) gave ideological responses to the issues brought by its Foreign Talent policy. Goh’s administration acknowledged the local population’s concern

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Interview with Chee Soon Juan, the de facto leader of Singapore Democratic Party at its head office, Singapore, 2 October 2010.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Interview with Wang Gungwu, Professor at East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, 27 September 2010.

⁷² Interview with Goh Meng Seng, Secretary-General of Singapore Solidarity Party, Singapore, 18 September 2010.

⁷³ Singapore Department of Statistics, *Population Trend 2006*, Table 1 (p.1) ad Table A3 (p.19), Singapore, 2006.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Yap Mui Teng, ‘Bolstering population growth: from babies to immigrant’, in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, 2009, p. 266-267.

“that these foreigners will compete with them for jobs, flats and even places in schools”.⁷⁶ A study conducted by the S21 Committee on the government’s Foreign Talent policy “found that graduates (70%) were more supportive than those without ‘O’ Levels (42%)”.⁷⁷ Another survey by *The Straits Times* quoted in the S21 Report found that “85% of those in their 20s supportive, compared with only 68% of those in their 40s”.⁷⁸ The S21 Committee also found that “Singaporeans are also afraid of becoming “second-class citizens” in their own country”.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, the government through the S21 Report discursively reiterated the importance of the Foreign Talent policy for Singapore’s economic survival.⁸⁰ In resolving the dilemma, the S21 “committee feels that there is a need to explain more comprehensively why Singapore needs foreign talent”.⁸¹ The committee highlighted the limited resource of human talent in the tiny island of Singapore and identified the contribution of “foreign talents” to Singapore’s development, from building the MRT to film-making (for the convenience and entertainment of local Singaporeans).⁸² With the government in its “most influential position to change mind-sets among people”, it “can lead the way by shaping its public image accordingly”.⁸³ In the Remaking Singapore report, the committee suggested several ways for Singaporeans to enhance their “ability to integrate new Singaporeans” (naturalised foreigners and foreign residents), such as through “voluntary and charitable work, talks and published guides,” while also reiterating the point made by the S21 Committee that “Singaporeans must also continue to be assured that they have access to opportunities (particularly in education and employment) , and are not being crowded out”.⁸⁴

Even though Goh’s government frequently projected themselves as ‘socially-oriented’ over *‘homo economicus’*⁸⁵ and sought to lead the population in that direction, the government had no intention to become a welfare state or to introduce new welfare policies. At the National Day Rally in 2002, Goh expressed:

Our people’s attitude towards public assistance is changing. Lee Boon Yang said that when he first became MP in 1984, the poor and jobless who went to see him asked for help to get a

⁷⁶ Singapore, ‘Singapore 21 Report’, p. 19.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 20.

⁸⁰ For example, to maintain the society’s “high standards of living” and the imperative of global economics.

Ibid., p. 9.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁸⁴ ‘Remaking Singapore Report’, pp. 29-30.

⁸⁵ Literally means ‘the economic man’.

job. They did not want to be referred to social welfare. But now, even able-bodied young men ask him for monetary help.⁸⁶

In all three national ideologies put forward by Goh's administration from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, self-reliance was clearly a central dimension. The concept of self-reliance was expanded to ethnic groups and at an individual level through various alliances with the communities and programmes during the Goh years.

As aforementioned, the Goh years saw the establishment of self-help groups in practically all communities (under the blanket racial categories of 'CMIO' or Chinese, Malay, Indian and Others), namely: the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP), Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) and Eurasian Association (EA), as well as MENDAKI (the Malay community self-help group founded in collaboration with Lee Kuan Yew's government in the 1980s). With the institutionalisation of the self-help groups (SHGs) and partnership with the government as patron, the problems confronted by the members of the respective communities were structured so as to be resolved by the communities themselves, while the government would still lend some support, particularly financial, for the communities to achieve their objectives. The government, however, would not provide full financial support, but rather encouraged the community's self-reliance through a strategic financial arrangement. Every local Singaporean was required to make a monthly financial contribution to the less-advantaged group in their respective communities through the government-controlled Central Provident Fund (CPF).⁸⁷ In addition, the government would make annual "top-ups" as and when necessary. These top-ups were usually given on a dollar-to-dollar basis (one dollar by the government for every dollar contributed to the respective SHGs) for every SHG except for CDAC (likely due to the Chinese status as the majority population). CDAC received a one-off government contribution of SGD 10 million for the 1992–1997 period (when it was first set up), and another SGD 10 million for 2014–2018.⁸⁸

At the individual level, Goh's administration introduced programmes and incentives for the public to be more self-reliant. Besides various education schemes such as Edusave as explained above, the government also "restructured" the national healthcare system. As the

⁸⁶ Goh Chok Tong, National Day Rally address at the university cultural centre National University of Singapore, 18 August 2002, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, viewed 2 January 2016, <<http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/speeches/view-html?filename=2002081805.htm>>.

⁸⁷ Central Provident Fund Board, 'Contributions to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and SHARE Donations', Singapore, viewed 2 January 2016, <[https://www.cpf.gov.sg/Employers/EmployerGuides/employer-guides/hiring-employees/contributions-to-self-help-groups-\(shgs\)-and-share-donations](https://www.cpf.gov.sg/Employers/EmployerGuides/employer-guides/hiring-employees/contributions-to-self-help-groups-(shgs)-and-share-donations)>.

⁸⁸ 'Self help groups get more government funding help', *The Straits Times*, viewed 31 August 2014, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/self-help-groups-get-more-government-funding-help>>.

cost of operating and maintaining public hospitals was expected to rise due to better healthcare programmes and the growing population, the government devised a financial arrangement whereby Singaporeans would bear their own healthcare costs, but with certain assistance from the government. Goh played a significant role in this innovative healthcare plan as Minister of Health (1981–1982), Second Minister of Health (1982–1985), and First Deputy Prime Minister (1985–1990) before he was appointed as Prime Minister in late 1990.⁸⁹ Besides wanting the people to be more self-reliant in this regard,⁹⁰ the government apparently sought to encourage healthy lifestyles (to prevent the high cost of medication and hospitalisation), thereby avoiding the country from becoming a welfare state.⁹¹ Goh was in charge when the Medisave health programme was introduced in the early 1980s. A small proportion (at least 6 per cent) of the CPF of each Singaporean employee is deducted on a monthly basis and credited to their personal Medisave saving accounts.⁹² When the fund is needed to cover their (or their family members’) medical bills (of significant amount) or for hospitalisation, they will be allowed to withdraw some of the money in their Medisave accounts. To Phua Kai Hong, “these objectives were consistent with the preserving the traditional values of self-reliance and strong family ties, promoted as the primary support for the care of the sick and the aged”.⁹³

Further on, as the cost treating of major or catastrophic illnesses was usually much higher than the individual’s total savings in Medisave, Goh in 1990 announced another health programme, namely Medishield. Medishield offered another type of alternative medical financing for Singaporeans through insurance coverage. Like Medisave, Medishield would be funded by the employees’ CPF accounts, but the costs of hospitalisation and medication (of major illnesses) would be borne by a third party. Unlike Medisave, participation in Medishield is not compulsory.

While the purposes of restructuring of the healthcare system were to reduce the government’s burden of public spending and to “[reward] individual for staying well”, “special measures were taken to address the needs of the poor” through another medical savings scheme, namely Medifund.⁹⁴ Set up in April 1993 with an initial capital of \$200

⁸⁹ Phua Kai Hong, ‘Prescribing New Economic Medicine for Healthcare’, in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, Singapore, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies, 2009, p. 254.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

million as a safety net for patients who face financial difficulties, “the government will inject capital sum into the fund from time to time, e.g. when budget surpluses are available. The interest income generated from the capital sum is used to provide financial assistance for healthcare bills” of the needy.⁹⁵

Reflections of the Goh Years: Continuity or Change?

Goh’s fourteen-year rule, from 1990 to 2004, was a spectacular era for Singapore. Despite the two major setbacks of the Asian financial crisis in 1997-98 and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003 that rattled the country’s economy, and the substantial challenges of globalisation, Goh managed to drive Singapore to become one of the best economies in world, thus making it possible for Singapore to achieve developed-state status. Although there are many criticisms levelled at Goh as the “seat-warmer”⁹⁶ for the real transition to Lee Kuan Yew’s son Lee Hsien Loong, particularly at the start of Goh’s tenure, Goh proved that the allegations baseless through many of his new programmes and policies. His governing style originated from his own thinking across his years as premier. Goh also decided to relinquish his premiership only at his own discretion.⁹⁷ Like his predecessor, he managed to ensure his repositioning in Lee Hsien Loong’s new cabinet as a Senior Minister, which was the second-most senior position in government. Despite the repeated uproar over regime change under Goh’s premiership, his administration had more continuity with the preceding Lee Kuan Yew regime. In this section, I offer arguments to substantiate this reflection.

As detailed in the previous section, PAP’s leadership saw the need to change their political game after the party lost a parliamentary seat for the time since Singapore’s full independence in 1965, in the 1981 Anson by-election. This belief was further strengthened by significant drops in the party’s share of the popular vote, and in losing another seat to a new opposition party (SDP) in the 1984 GE. Fully aware that the results might indicate an increase in popular discontent towards his rigid governing style, Lee Kuan Yew then carefully devised and implemented a strategic plan for a political transition that would suit his ambition for power while ensuring PAP’s continued dominance in Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew

⁹⁵ Singapore’s Ministry of Health website, ‘Medifund’, viewed 4 April 2015, <https://www.moh.gov.sg/content/moh_web/home/costs_and_financing/schemes_subsidies/Medifund.html>.

⁹⁶ Interview with Chee Soon Juan, the de facto leader of Singapore Democratic Party at its head office, Singapore, 2 October 2010.

⁹⁷ Interview with Albert Lau, Senior Lecturer National University of Singapore, 28 September 2010.

decided to take the back seat and allow the new generation of leaders to take the lead, yet still maintained rather close monitoring. For Lee, it would take a new generation of leaders to match the new generation of voters in the post-1980s Singapore.

Goh was made Deputy Prime Minister along with Ong Teng Cheong in 1985, but Goh held the first position. Under Lee Kuan Yew's monitoring and tutelage until he was appointed premier in late 1990, Goh was allowed to introduce and to work on a number of key policies of nation-state building, from the new political projects to socioeconomic restructuring. There was a limit to Goh's "space of innovation" in the political administration. Goh was allowed to implement innovations as long as they resided within the traditional structure shaped by years of Lee Kuan Yew's rule. In fact, Lee was present to ensure that his successor would not significantly disturb his traditions (norms and values which Lee believed to be Singapore's success formula), but would also "live" in them. This was not a very difficult task for Lee as Goh hailed from a new generation of Singaporeans brought up with the prevailing societal norms as structured by Lee's regime. Furthermore, Goh underwent the tremendous process of personal monitoring by Lee ever since his recruitment in the mid-1970s. Thus, the five years of Goh DPM-ship showed clear evidence of hybridisation between Goh's "new politics" and Lee's old politics. Together, they made of a very good team and complemented each other's strengths and weaknesses. Goh new governing style that was more consultative and consensual made it easier for Lee's old norms and values, particularly pragmatism, elitism, and racialism, to be reproduced through the administration's new character. Hence after five years of supervising DPM Goh, Lee did not hesitate to surrender his premiership to Goh, reappointing himself as Senior Minister in Goh's administration to ensuring his "legacies" would continue. By the term "legacies," this researcher means not only Lee's regime norms and values, but also the political ascendancy of his son Lee Hsien Loong.

In the political sphere during the Goh years, there were at least three innovations that defined Singapore's politics under Goh. These were the three national ideologies (Shared Values, Singapore 21 (S21) and Remaking Singapore); the new politics of consultation and consensus; and changes to the electoral system. Although all the innovations took place during Goh's term as premier, some had started much earlier. The idea of having a national Shared Values was promulgated in 1988,⁹⁸ the new politics begun in the mid-1980s (marked

⁹⁸ Ministry of Culture Singapore, 'Speech by Mr Goh Chok Tong, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the PAP Youth Wing Charity Night, at Neptune Theatre Restaurant' (pp. 5–6), 28 October 1988, viewed 4 February 2016, National Archives of Singapore website, <<http://archivesonline.nas.sg>>.

by the establishment of the Feedback Unit and the Institute of Policy Studies),⁹⁹ and the new election schemes of NCMPs and the GRC came into existence in 1984 and 1988 respectively.¹⁰⁰ For this reason, Goh's innovations could not escape Lee's influence. It is therefore unsurprising that these innovations were later maintained or improvised by Goh without much resistance from Lee when Goh became the Prime Minister. This is in stark contrast to their Malaysian counterparts, where Abdullah Badawi and Najib Razak projected different visions of the nation in contrast to Mahathir Mohamad's Vision 2020.

In *Shared Values*, Lee's idiosyncratic "beliefs", as termed by Michael Barr,¹⁰¹ of elitism, racialism, and pragmatism were clearly identifiable. The first (nation before community and society above self), the third (community support and respect for the individual), and the fourth (consensus, not conflict) Shared Values were undoubtedly elitist in nature. It stressed the idea of the supremacy of the state/government (of the façade of the "nation") and that individuals (notably the elite) in the country should not be antagonistically challenged by the ruled. While the idea of elitism is more commonly associated with Lee, the word "consensus" in the fourth value clearly marked the incorporation of one of the Goh's philosophies in the Shared Values. The fifth value of "racial and religious harmony" replicated Lee's politics of multiracialism; while the second value of "family as the basic unit of society" reflected Lee's pragmatic idea of self-reliance at the family level. Overall, the values were pragmatically selected to remind Singaporeans of their "national identity" against the background of "Western lifestyles and values" that were haunting Singapore since the 1980s.¹⁰² This selective character was obvious not least when the Shared Values Committee led by Lee Hsien Loong purposely excluded "political values such as democracy" on the grounds that "the focus of the shared values was the relation between the individual and society", and "some of the core political values were already enshrined in the symbolism of the national flag".¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Jon S.T Quah, 'Public Administration: Change in Style and Continuity in Policy', in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, Singapore, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies, 2009, p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ James Chin, 'Electoral battles and innovations: recovering lost ground', in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, 2009, pp. 71-73.

¹⁰¹ See, Michael D. Barr, *Lee Kuan Yew: the beliefs behind the man*, Curzon Press, Richmond, 2000.

¹⁰² 'Speech by Mr Goh Chok Tong, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, at the PAP Youth Wing Charity Night, at Neptune Theatre Restaurant', *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Singapore, Parliament, 'White paper on shared values', Singapore, Paper cmd. 1 of 1991, p. 9; 'Shared Value', *National Library Board Singapore*, viewed 4 February 2016, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_542_2004-12-18.html>.

There were similarities and connections between Shared Values, S21 (1997 to 1999), and Remaking Singapore (2002 to 2003). There were also some variations and certain new components, as S21 and Remaking Singapore were promulgated at later and at different historical stages of Singapore, which had begun to be seriously confronted with the challenges of globalisation.

The fourth of the Shared Values, that is, “consensus, not conflict”, was noticeably reproduced in the fifth dilemma of S21 which is “consultation and consensus vs. decisiveness and quick action” and at the first point of Remaking Singapore, that is, the “A Home Owned” that “called for the further relaxation of rules to encourage the growth of spaces for expression and experimentation” in Singapore.¹⁰⁴ The second of the Shared Values (“family as the basic unit of society”) also transcended and reappeared in S21 and Remaking Singapore respectively as “needs of senior citizens vs. aspirations of the young” and “A Home to Cherish” that “recommended more financial measures to help the needy as well as the enlargement of social safety nets”.¹⁰⁵ The latter proposed theme in Remaking Singapore was also closely linked to its other theme of “A Home for All Seasons” that “pressed for greater gender equality as well as more pro-family practices in the workplace”.¹⁰⁶ Despite such improvisations in the later ideologies, they were essentially based on strong conservative and hierarchical family values as espoused in the Shared Values that emphasised the responsibility of each of family to respect and to look after each other.

Furthermore, the third of the Shared Values, “community support and respect for the individual” was innovatively revised to “attracting talent vs. looking after Singaporeans” in S21 to cater for the government’s growing need to respond to globalisation, particularly by liberalising its immigration policy to allow the influx of foreign talents to the island. The S21 dilemma of “attracting talent vs. looking after Singaporeans” was not only a rather new component (with its “attracting talent” policy) with historical links to the Shared Values (on the contribution of talented individuals), but also closely related to another S21 dilemma on “internationalisation/regionalisation vs. Singapore as home”.

The multiracial dimension of the 1991 Shared Value of “racial and religious harmony” was reinvoked with a newer and enriched theme about twelve years later in the 2003 Remaking Singapore as “A Home for All Singaporeans” that “called for the

¹⁰⁴ ‘Remaking Singapore Committee is formed -14 February 2002’, *National Library Board Singapore*, viewed 15 April 2016, <<http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/history/events/17594f70-1a95-4ea8-b209-02104059a140>>;

‘Remaking Singapore Committee’s Report’, 2002, pp. 40–51.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, ‘Remaking Singapore Committee’, 2002, pp. 62–79.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–61.

strengthening of the Singaporean identity and social cohesion” including “introducing greater diversity and customisation in the school system”.¹⁰⁷ Like the deliberately-excluded democratic values in the Shared Values, a number of “sensitive” recommendations proposed by the Remaking Singapore subcommittees were rejected, although most were accepted by the Goh administration.¹⁰⁸ Unsurprisingly, the proposal for the government to define the “political” out-of-bound (OB) markers was not accepted by Goh’s administration; and the suggestion to create designated performance venues “where specific rules can be relaxed to facilitate expression and experimentation” was vetoed.¹⁰⁹

On the part of Goh’s politics of consultation and consensus, the public participation was never intended to empower or to equalise the positions of people or their representatives with that of the government. Despite creating new formal structures to better integrate the representatives of the main communities and groups with the government, these structures were asymmetric and elitist. As with the case of the production of three national ideologies during the Goh years, the representatives could only offer suggestions or recommendations. They did not have the authority to make their decisions binding. What they had was the power to influence the administration. At the end of the day, it was Goh’s government that was the final arbiter. Apart from functioning strategically for the PAP in providing more direct societal opinions from the various communities in Singapore, as was crucial for the reconsolidation of the PAP government under Goh, the new structures of public participation were also used by the government to ratiocinate with the people (and their representatives) on their decisions. At times the government had already made the decisions although, interestingly, the public were still allowed to express their views on the subject matter. Noh and Tumin highlighted this limitation in the case of the ministerial pay (of 1994) and the opening up a casino (of 2004).¹¹⁰ Public resentment remained very strong against what they perceived as a “proposal” to peg the ministerial pay with the corporate sector (that would make Singapore’s cabinet enjoy one of the highest remuneration schemes in the world), and also the “proposal” to build the country’s first casino.¹¹¹ Civil society was allowed to express

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 22–39.

¹⁰⁸ More than 80 percent of the recommendations were accepted with about 11 recommendations rejected completely or partially. See, Abdillah Noh and Makmor Tumin, *Remaking public participation: The case of Singapore*, *Asian Social Science*, vol. 4, no 7, July 2008, p. 25.

¹⁰⁹ National Archives of Singapore, Remaking Singapore Committee Recommendations Government Response, ‘Update on Remaking Singapore committee’s recommendations government says ‘yes’ to majority of recommendations’, 15 April 2004, p. 33, viewed 30 June 2016, <<http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/20040415-MND.pdf>>.

¹¹⁰ Abdillah Noh and Makmor Tumin, ‘Remaking public participation’, pp. 20-32.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

their views to the government, but in the end, the government used its old conventional politics of “persuasion” to influence the public to accepting both proposals by claiming that they were vital for the economic survival of Singapore.¹¹² In fact, even without such persuasion, Singaporeans did not have much option other than to “accept” the pre-determined proposals, given the hegemonic power and the superiority of the government.

Goh’s politics of consultation and consensus have given rise of the idea of “out of bound markers”, more popularly known in Singapore as the OB markers. Coined by the then Minister of Information and the Arts Brigadier-General George Yeo in early 1990s, the marker, like in the game of golf, indicates the area beyond which playing (that is, politics) is not allowed, or out-of-bound. But unlike golf, the OB markers for political discourse in Singapore have never been defined. It was only in 1994 that the state’s OB marker constructions became popular when Goh’s government was criticised in writings by Catherine Lim in the *Straits Times*. In that year, two of her articles took aim directly at Goh’s politics and administration. The first article was published on 3 September 1994, titled *The PAP and the people: A great affective divide*; and the second on 20 November, titled *One government, two styles*.¹¹³ Her first article reflected concerns among citizens over the lack of emotional dimension on the part of the government in dealing with the people.¹¹⁴ In her second piece, Lim argued that Goh’s administration was only different from Lee Kuan Yew’s in style.¹¹⁵ Lim pointed out that over “the years, a pattern of governance has emerged that is not exactly what was envisaged. Increasingly, the promised Goh style of people-orientation is being subsumed under the old style of top-down decisions”.¹¹⁶

Due to the nature of open (being published in one of the most popular newspapers in Singapore) and straight criticism against Goh’s claims that his administration practiced consultative and consensual government, the administration struck back and told Lim that “novelists, short-story writers and theatre groups would not be allowed to set political agenda outside the political arena”.¹¹⁷ Lim was told to join the opposition if she would want to do so.¹¹⁸ The government reactions invited further criticisms from the public including in the Forum section of the *Straits Times*. Jimmy Tan wrote that complaints to the Feedback Unit

¹¹² Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹³ Catherine Lim, *Straits Times* 3 September 1994; Catherine Lim, *Straits Times*, 20 November 1994.

¹¹⁴ Catherine Lim, *Straits Times* 3 September 1994

¹¹⁵ Catherine Lim, *Straits Times*, 20 November 1994

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ K.S. Rajah, ‘Negotiating boundaries: OB markers and the law’, in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, Singapore, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies, 2009, p. 108.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

were inadequate in building a great society.¹¹⁹ To Russell Heng, both of the articles were merely personal expressions which should be under the ambit of political openness as promised by Goh administration.¹²⁰ In projecting the OB markers, Goh was reported to stress that “there was a distinction between expressing on the political issues and destroying the respect accorded to the prime minister by “denigration and contempt””.¹²¹ The debate on the OB markers was later brought to the parliament by Dr Kanwaljit Soin. She asked Goh on “how the concerned citizens would know what the out-of-bound markers were and their limit”.¹²² Kanwaljit also “questioned whether the markers would make the citizen reluctant to speak up”.¹²³ Goh replied: “It is not possible to demonstrate the boundary clearly. Use your common sense”.¹²⁴ The application of OB markers under Goh administration reproduced the practice of self-censorship among the public like in the previous highly regulated Lee Kuan Yew’s regime.¹²⁵ It was thus, in a way, a mockery to Goh’s politics of openness particularly when the markers were not defined and kept changing.¹²⁶ Even to the former editor-in-chief of the *Straits Times* Cheong Yip Seng, one of the PAP’s official mouthpieces, OB markers were regarded as “bewildering”.¹²⁷ This was because certain which that did not have any connections with race or politics were also considered out of binding by the government including “Stanley Gibbons, the stamp dealer; carpet auctions; monosodium glutamate or MSG; Feng shui; unflattering pictures of politicians and scoops”.¹²⁸

To James Gomez, Singapore’s activist-politician turned academician wrote in 1999 “the fact that such OB markers exist unconstitutional. People need to understand that by subscribing to the idea of OB markers, they are abandoning their rights in the constitution or having such rights abused”.¹²⁹ He also points out that the “executive should not be given an unrestricted hand to define the boundaries of political participation”.¹³⁰

Thus, Goh’s politics of consultation and consensus through public participation were rather symbolic and less substantial. In Noh and Tumin words, it was a “pseudo” or “partial”

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., p. 109.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Singapore, Parliament, *Parliamentary Debates Official Report*, 23 January 1995.

¹²⁵ See for example, James Gomez, *Self-Censorship: Singapore's Shame*, Singapore, Think Centre, 2000.

¹²⁶ George Yeo, *Straits Times*, 26 May 1999.

¹²⁷ Paul Ananth Tambyah, ‘Frightening details of press interference: review of ‘my straits times story’, viewed 15 July 2016, <<http://yoursdp.org/publ/perspectives/2-1-0-1179>>; See also, Cheong Yip Seng, *OB Markers: My Straits Times Story*, Singapore, Straits Times Press, 2012.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ James Gomez, ‘The Singapore 21 report: a political response’, May 21, 1999, viewed 15 June 2015, <<http://www.singapore-window.org/sw99/90521jgz.htm>>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

form of public participation.¹³¹ Despite the promise of openness and political inclusiveness, the public space in Singapore under Goh failed to go beyond the controlled and the structured context, but was heavily guarded and policed.

On the amendments to the electoral system with the introduction of NCMPs, GRC and NMP, each of these schemes were designed to refortify PAP's perpetual rule rather than to level the playing field among contesting parties. The NCMP and NMP schemes gave an idea to voters that there is a lesser need to vote for the opposition as there would be a number of opposition-designated seats in Parliament, even when the opposition lost all at their contested constituencies. Rather than being an effective machinery to check the government's power, NCMPs and NMP wielded such limited powers that ultimately, they may only serve the purpose of the ruling party in utilising them, in Lee Kuan Yew's words, as the "sparring partners" for the younger, technocrat PAP parliamentarians who were less exposed to real political contestation.¹³² In this respect, the NCMP and NMP schemes did not only re-trench the idea of elitist and technocratic rule in Singapore, but also helped the young PAP technocrats become better politicians.

Of the three new electoral schemes, the GRC scheme introduced in 1988 was the most fundamental. It not only involved an extensive re-delineation of electoral boundaries, but also significantly redefined and changed the nature of the electoral system and its competition. First and foremost, in conjunction with the resettlement projects in the 1970s and 1980s,¹³³ the GRC abolished minority-control parliamentary seats, particularly Malay-dominated constituencies, through mergers with larger Chinese-dominated seats. The Malays, since the "Sinification of Singapore" in the late 1970s, have naturally become much more critical towards PAP's government, out of their unhappiness with such policies. Using the politics of race and multiracialism, both Lee Kuan Yew and Goh argued that this move (the abolishment of minority-control constituencies) was needed to prevent from the practice of ethnic voting and racial politics during an election.¹³⁴ This argument seems to contradict his earlier statement at the same event, where Lee questioned one of the opposition members in a debate of the electoral system in 1988:

¹³¹ Abdillah Noh and Makmor Tumin, 'Remaking Public Participation', p.19.

¹³² Singapore, Parliament, Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister) speech during the second reading of the constitution of the Republic of Singapore (amendment) bill, *Singapore parliamentary debates, official report*, 24 July 1984, vol. 44, cols. 1724–1726.

¹³³ Phang Sock-Yong and Matthias Helble, 'Housing Policies in Singapore', *ADB Working Paper Series*, no. 559, Asian Development Bank Institute, March 2016, p. 17.

¹³⁴ See, Meet the younger LKY having a nice chat with his friends (c1988)!!, *Youtube*, viewed 3 January 2016, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6NTRAOaIwU>>.

Would you contradict me if I tell you that we have got here not by suppressing or pretending that racial differences, language differences, culture differences did not exist but they can co-exist without the majority obliterating or pressing the minority? That's how it has been done...¹³⁵

In contrast to adopting Singapore's multiracial policy, this move has denied the practice of genuine multiracialism by systematically "obliterating" minority constituencies and "pressing" them to take the subordinate positions in the GRC group memberships. In the new system, expressions among the minority leaders could be made limited as they were contesting in the newly created Chinese-majority seats through the gerrymandering of the GRC scheme. While this might play down racially-based political expressions among the minorities but merging their electoral constituencies with dominant ethnic constituency did not in any mean could neutralise racial politics. After all, the new constituencies were not just GRC constituencies, more importantly, they since then have become the new Chinese-majority constituency. This has strengthened the Chinese community and their dominance at a much greater level of the loss of the minority. Through this scheme, Malay votes have become much less significant to the ruling party. Consequently, there would be lesser needs for the PAP's government to look up to Malay demands and interest as the latter do not control any constituency anymore. Although the GRC scheme in a way would guarantee minority representation in the parliament, but their positions as subordinate in the Chinese-dominated constituency will be more meaningless. Rather than ensuring the spirit of equality and coexistence-ness of Singapore's multiracialism, the scheme embedded the idea of 'minority-ness' and dependent-ness to the non-Chinese.

Lee's and Goh's arguments on the minority constituencies practicing racial politics are debatable. All PAP minority candidates have regularly won since independence; the only two MPs to lose their seats (before the introduction of GRC) in 1984 were Chinese. In fact, one of them was beaten by a minority candidate, J.B. Jeyaratnam, in Anson.¹³⁶ JBJ of the Workers' Party won the 1981 by-election in Anson, which was a primarily Chinese constituency. Furthermore, the first elected Chief Minister of Singapore was David Marshall who was Jewish—one of the smallest minority communities. As the size of GRCs increased over the years during Goh administration, the minorities have had less representation overall

¹³⁵ Lee Kuan Yew, Speech during the second reading of the constitution of the Republic of Singapore, 24 July 1984, *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Christopher Tremewan, *The Political Economy of Social Control in Singapore*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1994, p. 157.

as the proportion of minority MPs per GRC has decreased. Since minority MPs are a numerical minority in Parliament, their political clout has also been severely reduced.¹³⁷

It is also difficult to evade suggestions that GRC was partly a gerrymandering exercise. The PAP has won all the elections in GRCs, usually with an increase in popular vote, in 1988 and throughout the Goh years (in 1992, 1997 and 2001). Because of these victories, the number of GRCs has expanded during the Goh years, from about fifty per cent in 1988 to more than eighty per cent of the overall number of parliamentary seats since the mid-2000s, at the expense of SMCs. In fact, in the 1988 General Election, the Anson parliamentary constituency was merged with Tanjung Pagar, which was Lee Kuan Yew's stronghold, to form a new GRC. The seat, held by the opposition since 1981, was lost during the election and had the opposition winning only one seat in 1984 despite reaping a much larger share of the popular vote.

Goh recognised that the GRC scheme benefits the ruling party as they can put together "stronger teams".¹³⁸ Seeing it useful for PAP's recruitment efforts, Goh publicly stated in 2006 that "Without some assurance of a good chance of winning at least their first election, many able and successful young Singaporeans may not risk their careers to join politics".¹³⁹ PAP's big guns (cabinet ministers) would usually head the GRC constituencies, and this allows the new and inexperienced PAP candidates to be "free-riders" during the electoral contest.¹⁴⁰ The advantages of the ruling party come at the expense of the opposition parties and the electorate. The GRC scheme has increased the financial cost by several times due to the larger number of candidates. With foreign sources made illegal and local sources needing to be declared, the opposition during the Goh administration found it difficult to contest in the GRCs. Since the introduction of GRCs in 1988, the boundaries, the constructions, and reconstructions of GRCs and SMCs, and the number of candidates in the GRC have been changed many times, in almost every consecutive election. This practice has also troubled the opposition, particularly on their political plans and strategies in confronting the PAP in the coming election.

To the Singaporean electorate, the practice of having different constituencies, that is, the GRC and SMC, have created unequal voting powers among them. One vote in the GRC is

¹³⁷ See, Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *The Singapore dilemma: the political and educational marginality of the Malay community*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998.

¹³⁸ Hussin Mutalib, 'Constitutional-Electoral Reforms and Politics in Singapore', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, no 27, vol. 4, November 2002, p. 665.

¹³⁹ Li Xueying, 'GRCs make it easier to find top talent: SM: without good chance of winning at polls, they might not be willing to risk careers for politics', *Straits Times*, 27 June 2006, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ See, Bilveer Singh, *Politics and governance in Singapore: an introduction*, McGraw-Hill, Singapore, 2006.

reflected in several seats in Parliament, in contrast to only one seat in SMC (if their candidates win the election). As the GRCs are represented by the group, there were concerns of weakening relations and individual accountability between each MP in the GRCs and the electorate.¹⁴¹

Goh's projects in building a stronger sense of belonging among the Singaporean population were met by huge challenges. These hurdles strongly related to the issues of Singapore's emigration, Foreign Talents policy, and educational system. The massive trend of Singaporeans' emigration to the Anglophone countries, particularly Australia, the United States, and Canada since the 1980s was very alarming.¹⁴² This significantly impacted the nature of governance under Goh's leadership in many dimensions. As most of the emigrants were educationally and economically well-off, it brought a significant economic loss to Singapore. In 1988 alone, Singapore's economist Chew Soon Beng estimated that the total annual cost of the brain drain at around \$235.45 million.¹⁴³ Despite the government's denials of its rigid authoritarian system as one of the factors driving the emigration,¹⁴⁴ the fact that the government modified its approaches to the people by opening more political space under Goh's politics of consultation and consensus suggests otherwise. Furthermore, the underlying reasons influencing Singaporeans to emigrate were not merely "a fiction of Western journalists" as claimed by Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew in rubbishing the findings,¹⁴⁵ but were highlighted by local intellectuals. Yap Mui Teng's research, for example, found that the feelings of "helplessness and fear in the face of an overpowering political and power structure that the average person cannot hope to participate in, penetrate, or even understand" as the push factor among the Singapore's emigrants.¹⁴⁶ Social scientists Tan Ern Ser and Chew Seen Kong's study identified political alienation a significant factor of emigration among Singaporeans.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² See, Leong Chan Hoong, and Debbie Soon, *A study of emigration attitudes of young Singaporeans (2010)*, Institute of Policy Studies National University of Singapore, Singapore, 2011.

¹⁴³ See, Chew Soon Beng, 'Brain drain: issues and prospects', *Singapore Economic Review*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 54–77.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Gerard Sullivan and S. Gunasekaran, *Motivations of migrants from Singapore to Australia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994, pp. 38 and 88. In Sullivan and Gunasekaran's investigations, Singaporean migrants to Australia cited a lower level of civil liberties or "individual freedom" in their country of birth as a strong push factor (p. 38).

¹⁴⁵ Leong Chan Hoong, and Debbie Soon, *A study of emigration attitudes of young Singaporeans (2010)*, ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See, Yap Mui Teng, 'The Singapore State's Response to Migration', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1999, pp. 198–211.

¹⁴⁷ Tan Ern Ser, and Chew Seen Kong, 'Emigration orientation and propensity: the Singaporean case', *Asian Migrant*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1991, pp. 93–99.

As mentioned in the previous section, apart from promoting three ideologies to socially and nationally root the population, particularly the advantaged groups, with Singapore, there were two principal policies enacted by Goh's government. Firstly, the Foreign Talent policy is one of the most liberal immigration policies in the world, designed specifically to draw massive numbers of "foreign talents" to countervail the brain drain and the low fertility rate (below the replacement level). The policy later developed to include "less talented" and low-skilled foreign workers to fill up the abundance of low-level job vacancies in the island. Secondly, for breeding new talented Singaporeans, the Goh's government also invested many state resources in improving the education system, particularly at the post-secondary and tertiary levels based on the concept of lifelong learning. Despite the energetic roles played by Goh's administration however, the flows of emigration among Singaporeans continued to remain high. In the 2000's OECD Report on the "Emigration Rates by Country of Origin, Sex and Educational Attainment Levels", Singapore had the third-highest rate in Southeast Asia, after Brunei and Laos.¹⁴⁸ In 2002, Singapore "experienced the most elevated out-migration rate in the world".¹⁴⁹ An official report by the government stated that "the country also witnessed a rate of citizenship renunciation among its skilled nationals averaging around 1,000 cases per year between 2000 and 2010".¹⁵⁰ The persistence of these problems may explain why several national ideologies were introduced by the Goh administration one after another to rebuild Singaporeans.

This thesis contends that the problems were structural rather than technical. What Goh's administration achieved were basically technical, and not so much fundamental, improvements of the system that did not substantially correspond to the real problems. These problems in the system are the state's utmost obsession with elitism, racialism, and pragmatism practices in building and rebuilding the Singaporean society. As indicated by

¹⁴⁸ 'Emigration rates by country of origin, sex and educational attainment levels', Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2000, p. 2, viewed 1 June 2016, <<https://www.oecd.org/migration/46561284.pdf>>.

¹⁴⁹ Seah Chiang Nee, 'Migration: a people under restructure. as a new population of foreigners settles in, many of Singapore's own defence-trained talents are moving abroad', *Little Speck*, 2010, quoted in J.S Fetzer and B.A. Millan, 'The Causes of Emigration from Singapore: How Much Is Still Political?', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 47, issue 3, 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14672715.2015.1057029>>.

¹⁵⁰ 'DPM Teo on S'poreans emigrating', *Channel News Asia*, 10 January 2012, viewed 15 September 2014, <<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/1175732/1/>>, quoted by Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Lin Weiqiang. 'Chinese migration to Singapore: discourses and discontents in a globalizing nation-state', *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, vol. 22, no.1, 2013 p. 35.

numerous studies on Singaporeans' emigration including Tan and Chew (1991),¹⁵¹ Sullivan and Gunasekaran (1994),¹⁵² Yap Mui Teng (1999),¹⁵³ and a much recent examination by Fetzer and Millan (2015),¹⁵⁴ the lack of civil liberties and democratic life, and the rigid, extreme sociopolitical control over the population formed a major push for emigration. Goh's administration in fact conceded these realities by responding to the problems through his politics of consultation and consensus that opened more political space to encourage active citizenry, while at the same time obtain feedback in improving his administration. In practice however, the authoritarian structures and practices of the PAP government under Goh basically remained intact albeit with certain, essentially superficial, modifications. The introduction of the OB markers, the structured procedures of public participation,¹⁵⁵ and the government's unresponsiveness over certain fundamental issues among the citizens, such as the ministerial pay and the building of the casino, were reflections of this situation. Hence, it was only natural for critics to conclude that the political projects engineered by Goh's administration were "pseudo" or at least "partial".¹⁵⁵

Such an elitist character was also revealed in other government structures. In the education system, despite the additional establishment of post-secondary institutions to cater to the increasing number of school leavers and globalisation, the capacity of the local universities during the Goh years remained very limited.¹⁵⁶ This not only conserved the highly competitive nature of the education system but also structured the continued emigration of students from privileged backgrounds, and perhaps their families as well, to developed countries. Goh's much-publicised Edusave programmes were essentially elitist in nature. Based largely on the academic performance (in contrast to financial need) of school students, these programmes benefited those from well-to-do families more than the less well-off. While these programmes may motivate many to work harder, the real need to empower the children of the less fortunate through education and the large financial resources of the state—and thus promote upward social mobility, an equal society, and patriotism—was

¹⁵¹ Tan Ern Ser, and Chew Seen Kong, 'Emigration orientation and propensity: the Singaporean case', *Asian Migrant*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1991, pp. 93–99.

¹⁵² See, Gerard Sullivan and S. Gunasekaran, *Motivations of migrants from Singapore to Australia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994.

¹⁵³ See, Yap Mui Teng, 'The Singapore State's Response to Migration'. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1999, pp. 198–211.

¹⁵⁴ J.S Fetzer and B.A. Millan, 'The Causes of Emigration from Singapore: How Much Is Still Political?', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 47, issue 3, 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14672715.2015.1057029>>.

¹⁵⁵ Abdillah Noh and Makmor Tumin, 'Remaking public participation', p.19.

¹⁵⁶ Fetzer and Millan, 'The causes of emigration from Singapore', *ibid*.

largely unmet. Hence, although the programmes offer equal opportunity for Singaporean children to obtain the state's educational funds, yet stark differences in class background¹⁵⁷ meant that the programmes, more often than not, had unequal outcomes. Edusave programmes promoted high competition among the students at an early stage (particularly through the Edusave Scholarships for Primary Schools for Primary 5 and Primary 6 pupils),¹⁵⁸ as they were "eligible for the... Scholarship if they are among the top 10% of students of their level based on their overall school examination results for the year".¹⁵⁹ More importantly, the competition for the scholarships has intensified and reinforced the elitist and *kiasu* (Hokkien word for "afraid to lose out") values among Singapore's schoolchildren, along with the embedded early streaming scheme in the education system.

The Singaporean education system is where the government's practice of elitism intersected with racialism. Through various scholarship schemes at the secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels, foreign students who were considered academically "talented" were brought in substantial number to Singapore, particularly since the 1990s. The Ministry of Education (MOE) ASEAN Scholarships were responsible for recruiting around 150 of the top students from Southeast Asian countries at its selected secondary schools and post-secondary institutions, and around 170 students for the undergraduate courses annually.¹⁶⁰ It goes without saying that most of the recipients were Chinese. Nonetheless, many more Chinese students were brought in via direct recruitment between the selected schools in Singapore and the elite schools in People's Republic of China (PRC) through another scheme known as A*STAR Scholarships, introduced in 2000.¹⁶¹ A*Scholarships also sponsored thousands of scholarships at the undergraduate and graduate levels, mostly to the PRC Chinese at local universities. In 2008 for instance, they were 36,000 students from the PRC at

¹⁵⁷ 'The rich are always with us: but we don't like them that much', *The Economist*, 18 July 2015, viewed 19 July 2015, <<http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21657611-we-dont-them-much-rich-are-always-us>>.

¹⁵⁸ The Ministry of Education website stated that, "All Singaporean students in primary 5 or 6 in a Government or a Government-aided school, are eligible for the Edusave Scholarship for Primary Schools if they are among the top 10% of students of their level based on their overall school examination results for the year. The value of the award is \$350". Singapore, The Ministry of Education's website, 'Edusave Scholarships', viewed 1 June 2016, <<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/edusave/edusave-scholarships#sthash.U4Jc1cdD.dpuf>>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Singapore, Parliament, Foreign Scholars, Official Report – Parliamentary Debate (Hansards), viewed 1 April 2016, <http://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/topic.jsp?currentTopicID=00076409-WA¤tPubID=00076400-WA&topicKey=00076400-WA.00076409-WA_5%2BhansardContent43a675dd-5000-42da-9fd5-40978d79310f%2B2>.

¹⁶¹ P. I. De Costa, *The Power of Identity and Ideology in Language Learning: Designer Immigrants Learning English in Singapore*, New York City, Springer, 2016, p. 71.

all levels of education in Singapore.¹⁶² In 2006 alone, there were around 7,800 “study mother” pass-holders, about two-thirds of whom were PRC citizens.¹⁶³ These pass-holders looked after their children who received the A*STAR scholarships, particularly in secondary schools, while taking up part-time work to sustain their financial needs in Singapore.¹⁶⁴ Rationalised on the grounds of “Singapore’s decreasing fertility rates”, seeking “to better develop...talent pool” and to “maintain... economic competitiveness and... raise the standard of living of our people”,¹⁶⁵ this elitist policy assumed a racial framework under the PAP, as the PRC Chinese were considered to fit “within (Singapore’s) CMIO model that is currently under threat of ‘imbalance’ due to varying fertility rates among local groups”.¹⁶⁶ Based on academic performance, scholarships for the secondary and post-secondary levels could be extended to the university level with the respective A*STAR Scholarships programmes.

This policy has created some discontent among Singaporeans. Some local Chinese were infuriated by the fact that millions in taxpayers’ money were spent every year on the foreigners.¹⁶⁷ The recruitment of top students from China (and from neighbouring countries) in selected secondary schools, local colleges, and universities, and later in the employment world in Singapore, also meant that much fewer places were left for their children, heightening the level of competition and decreasing their chances for success in Singapore.¹⁶⁸ Many Malay parents also felt the same, but with additional dissatisfaction over the policy’s racial dimension.¹⁶⁹

The same intersection between elitism and racialism were reproduced in the Foreign Talent policy. Based on the same claim that the PRC Chinese fit to the CMIO model and could level the racial imbalance, massive numbers of Chinese from the PRC were brought in since the 1990s, such that “the population of PRC migrants in the city has also grown significantly over the last two decades, from only “several thousand” in the 1990s to “close to

¹⁶² Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, ‘Chinese migration to Singapore’, pp. 38 - 40

¹⁶³ ‘Who owes them a living?’, *The Straits Times*, 9 July 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, ‘Chinese migration to Singapore’, p. 41.

¹⁶⁵ Parliament of Singapore, Foreign Scholars, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, ‘Chinese migration to Singapore’, p. 36

¹⁶⁷ ‘Exclusive: Ex-MOE PRC Scholar Chose U.S. Instead of Singapore to Pursue his Tertiary Studies’, *Temasek Times*, 1 March 2012, viewed 2 Mei 2015, <<http://temasektimes.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/exclusive-ex-moe-prc-scholar-chose-u-s-instead-of-singaporeto-pursue-his-tertiary-studies/>>.

¹⁶⁸ See for example, ‘Frustrating numbers: scholarships for foreign students’, Yawning Breed, viewed 1 June 2015, <<https://yawningbread.wordpress.com/2012/02/22/frustrating-numbers-scholarships-for-foreign-students/>>.

¹⁶⁹ Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, ‘Chinese migration to Singapore’, p. 44.

one million”,¹⁷⁰ and thus “making them one of the largest and most visible communities in Singapore”.¹⁷¹ The elitist nature of the policy was glaring as the PRC Chinese working at the professional level were very much welcomed with relaxed regulations for them to apply for permanent resident status. Together with the successful graduates of A*STAR and ASEAN Scholarships, this group of PRC Chinese professionals were encouraged to take up citizenships through various economic and immigration schemes to fill up the Singapore Chinese racial category and thus become the “new Chinese” in the government’s project of population renewal (read: Singapore Chinese).

The government’s thinking on the cultural relatability between the PRC Chinese and the Singaporean Chinese did not reflect well at the everyday level. According to Jones, “High levels of immigration... have instead [led] Singaporeans [to] complain of feeling like strangers in their own country, of crowded subways and buses, rising house prices, heightened competition for school places, and dealing with shop assistants who cannot communicate with them”.¹⁷² Thus Chinese Singaporeans:

View these ‘new’ immigrants as belonging to a different culture, and adhering to a foreign set of social rules. Stories on the Straits Times citizen journalism blog, STOMP, are indicative of this sentiment, as they are often replete with (derogatory) narratives of shady business practices, exotic appetites for certain foods, sexual decadence, and breaches of intellectual property rights in China, reinforcing a certain stereotypical understanding of Mainlanders. Such caricatures may also be extrapolated to migrants in Singapore, who, besides being ridiculed for their (mythical) custom of eating dog meat, are further described as “loudmouthed,” “rude,” unhygienic, smelly, and inept in English.¹⁷³

In an interview with four members (two Chinese and two Malays) of the Young Democrats from the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) in 2010, the Chinese respondents told this researcher that the Singaporean Chinese do not carry themselves in similar fashion to the PRC Chinese in many aspects beyond culture and language.¹⁷⁴ To them, the PRC Chinese are very different as they are not born and bred in Singapore like local Singaporeans who

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 35 – 6; ‘5 Waves of Chinese immigrants in Singapore’, *The Straits Times*, 22 November 2008.

¹⁷¹ Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, ‘Chinese migration to Singapore’, *ibid.*

¹⁷² Gavin W. Jones, “Population Policy in a Prosperous City-state: Dilemmas for Singapore”, *Population and Development Review*, vol. 38, no 2, 2012, p. 328.

¹⁷³ Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, ‘Chinese Migration to Singapore’, pp. 44-5; S’poreans voted ‘most disgusting’ in China blog: balik kampong lah, says STOMPer’, *STOMP*, 21 June 2011, viewed 11 January 2014, <http://singaporeseen.stomp.com.sg/stomp/sgseen/what_bugs_me/667496/sporeans_reply_to_chinese_nationals_who_say_were_disgusting.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with the Young Democrat leaders at Singapore Democratic Party head office, Singapore, 2 October 2010.

grew up with *nasi lemak* (a traditional Malay food), *roti paratha* (a traditional Indian Muslim food) and *teh tarik* (a popular Indian Muslim milk tea in Singapore and Malaysia), or underwent National Service.¹⁷⁵ In this regard, many Singapore Chinese saw themselves as similar to other Singapore communities (for instance, Malays and Indians) than the “foreign talents,” whether from China or other parts of Asia. Most likely, by experiencing similar problems and miseries caused by the massive intake of foreign immigration into the tiny island—from communication problems to the increase in the cost of living—the sentiment of nation-ness among local Singaporeans from various ethnicities was increasingly thickened such that Goh’s successor, Lee Hsien Loong, paid the price. In the 2011 General Election (GE), the PAP only managed to garner 60.14% of the popular vote, which was its “worst ever electoral performance” since independence.¹⁷⁶ The opposition won at two constituencies, including one GRC for the first time, resulting in six MPs in Parliament. This researcher, through direct observation and interviews in Singapore in 2010, found that the Foreign Talent policy and its repercussions were the main thrust behind these results. The election officially ended Goh’s and Lee Kuan Yew’s political occupancies in the cabinet after serving for more than three and five decades respectively.

From the pragmatism perspective, the Goh administration’s education programmes and Foreign Talent policy may be perceived as practical moves. In particular, they formed part and parcel of remaking Singapore’s Chinese makeup by introducing and integrating the new class of professional PRC Chinese. Through such “importation” of foreign Chinese talent, not only could “the racial balance” be maintained, but also the number needed for Singapore’s continued economic growth and the PAP/Chinese hegemony in politics.

The Goh administration’s pragmatism also could be seen in its Medisave programmes and the establishment of self-help groups, apparently to promote the culture of self-reliance among the citizens, and thereby substantially reducing the government’s financial and political burdens. Since the mid-1980s under Goh’s stewardship, the public healthcare system was gradually privatised, such that most of the cost was borne by citizens through various schemes such as compulsory personal savings and insurance. Through a systematic plan of “restructuring”, the government’s burdens in the public subsidisation of the healthcare system were significantly reduced. While the government promised the public a better “public”

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Singapore election: People's Action Party returned in sweeping victory’, *Cable News Network*, 12 September 2015, viewed 15 December 2015, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/12/asia/singapore-election-2015/>>.

healthcare system through these innovations, many Singaporeans, particularly of the working class, found the new healthcare system strenuous. Not only did they have to cut their small salaries for medical savings, among others, but when it is time to use the medical savings, these savings are often insufficient due to the elevated costs of the now-privatised public hospitals. As reflected in a number of studies by several the media, many Singaporeans “are not afforded to get sick” because “the finances are too tight”,¹⁷⁷ and “due to high medical costs”.¹⁷⁸

The Goh years noted the growth of the ethnic-based self-help groups (SHGs). In response to the establishment of the government-sanctioned Malay self-help group in 1982, the Indian community in Singapore, the second-largest minority in the island, also demanded a similar group of their own. Hence, SINDA was set up in August 1991. Seeing the usefulness of the minority-group SHGs in educational advancement, family support services, and community development, some quarters within the Chinese community, which constituted the majority, demanded their own SHG. Eventually, Goh’s administration endorsed the establishment of CDAC in 1992. Later, the Eurasian Association (EA), established in 1919—whose members are considered as not belonging to the Chinese, Malay or Indian racial categories—was accorded the SHG status by Goh in 1994. Both CDAC (the majority) and EA (with many members of the middle- and upper-classes) played roles similar to the minority SHGs (Mendaki and SINDA) for their respective communities.

All these government-sanctioned self-help groups have “helped” the government in various ways. First, they discharged the government from the social burden and responsibility of taking care of the minority/community problems. Practically, issues among the minorities were no longer regarded a “national dilemma”, but instead were community-level problems. The government viewed it best for each community to solve their own problems, rather than through government intervention—a view also accepted by many quarters in society. The SHGs also played a representative role for their respective communities in the Goh administration. But more importantly, as the SHGs are patronised and given financial assistances by the government from time to time, they were also expected to play some

¹⁷⁷ ‘How do Singapore's poor families get by?’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News*, 27 February 2014, viewed 2 January 2015, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26349689>>.

¹⁷⁸ Mindshare, a global media and marketing services firm, found in a survey last year that 72 percent of Singaporeans felt they “cannot afford to get sick due to high medical costs”. See, Kevin Lim, ‘As Singapore gets richer, more people left behind’, *Reuters*, 23 December 2013, viewed 2 January 2016, <<http://in.reuters.com/article/singapore-poor-idINDEE9BM00X20131223>>.

communicative (read: political) roles for the government in their respective communities, particularly on certain issues affecting the entire society or their individual communities. In addition, the SHGs reinforced the idea of race as racial identification is used in the operation of SHGs, whereby allocation to communities and individuals were based on their racial categories.

Conclusion

As detailed above, this thesis contends that the changes by the Goh administration were done out of pragmatism, ultimately to preserve PAP's elite rule in Singapore, rather than out of any much more genuine motive. Political pragmatism, elitism, and ethnicity came into play in Goh's policies, in almost-like manner to Lee Kuan Yew's administration. Hence, the changes during the Goh years compared to his predecessor and mentor were more of style rather than substance. The changes were not only "partial", but perhaps "pseudo" as explicated by Noh and Tumin,¹⁷⁹ and still "authoritarian" as per Rodan.¹⁸⁰ The Goh administration was unable to break from the past due in part to three factors. First, because Goh was carefully selected and trained as a political man personally by Lee Kuan Yew himself. Second, because Lee Kuan Yew remained ever present as the second-most powerful minister in the Goh administration throughout the latter's premiership. Third, because Goh was one of the best by-products of Lee Kuan Yew's system, nurtured through meticulous academic examinations (meritocracy), an authoritarian structure, pragmatic thinking, and rigid (fixed) societal norms shaped by years of PAP rule. Therefore, the changes made during the Goh years were not so much "changes", but were more "variations" or "modifications" or perhaps an "upgrade" from Lee Kuan Yew's regime. In other words, Goh's administration was more a game change rather than regime change. As correctly surmised by Lee Hsien Loong in November 1989, a year before Goh was appointed as Prime Minister:

"Singapore's transition of leadership from Mr Lee Kuan Yew to Mr Goh Chok Tong will see a change in the style and tone of Government, but not in the substance on fundamental policies".¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Abdillah Noh and Makmor Tumin, 'Remaking public participation', p. 19.

¹⁸⁰ Garry Rodan, 'Goh's consensus politics of authoritarian rule', in Bridget Welsh, James Chin et al. (eds), *Impressions of the Goh Chok Tong years*, National University of Singapore Press and Institute of Policy Studies: Singapore, 2009, p. 61.

¹⁸¹ Brigadier-General (Res) Lee Hsien Loong in an interview with *The Straits Times*. See, Paul Jacob, 'S'pore's change in leadership will only be in style and tone: BG Lee', *The Straits Times*, 9 November 1989, viewed 2 January 2016, <<http://ourstory.asia1.com.sg/dream/politics/headline/polh1.html>>.

CHAPTER 7

The State of Nation-Building Policy in Singapore under the New Lee

On 12th August 2004, Lee Hsien Loong was appointed as the third Prime Minister of Singapore. On the same day, his father, Lee Kuan Yew, assumed a new position known as the ‘Minister Mentor’ while Goh Chok Tong became a Senior Minister – both of which were actually the top two positions in Lee Hsien Loong’s cabinet. The regime configuration was thus based on a tripartite governance, whereby the networks of power and influences are shared and divided among the three individuals. Lee Hsien Loong as I will explicate here, has both the persona of Lee Kuan Yew and the character of Goh Chok Tong. Like his predecessors, Lee’s enactments of nation-building policy are connected to the electoral pressures faced by his administration, particularly the 2011 and the 2015 General Elections. Before the 2011 General Election, he implemented pro-capital policies such as the opening of two mega casinos and the reviewing (increased) of the consumption tax. Lee however underestimated popular disapproval, particularly of the rising costs of living which mainly contributed by the Foreign Talent Policy. This eventually saw his party producing the poorest electoral showing in PAP history in the 2011 election. The abysmal outcome also resulted in Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong retiring from the cabinet. Lee Hsien Loong himself stressed the need for “soul-searching” upon learning the results. After some revisions to the state’s nation-building policy for the 2015 election, the PAP under the new Lee bounced back to becoming much more popular and hegemonic by winning almost 70 per cent of the popular vote. This chapter is, therefore, divided into three sections: the rise of Lee Hsien Loong, Lee Hsien Loong during the transition years, and his governance and nation-building policy after the 2011 General Election.

Lee Hsien Loong: rise of ‘the chosen one’?

Lee Hsien Loong was born on 10th February 1952. He is the eldest son of Lee Kuan Yew through the latter’s marriage with Kwa Geok Choo. Seeing Lee Hsien Loong (and their other children) as a potential leader of Singapore in the future, the couple provided Lee Jr. with a lot of practical knowledge, particularly in politics, for his future. Kwa used English to

communicate with her children while Lee Kuan Yew used Mandarin – the language of the majority in Singapore, though Lee, a Baba Chinese, was more comfortable with English.¹ In the similar vein (preparing the young Lee Hsien Loong for a political career), the Lee children, including Lee Hsien Loong, were sent to Chinese-medium schools.² At the age of 3, Lee Junior was sent to Nanyang Kindergarten before attending Nanyang Primary School. Lee Kuan Yew hired a Malay teacher to provide tuition in the Malay language and Jawi script for Lee Junior when he was six.³ Besides that, Kwa allowed Lee Hsien Loong to join the Scouts at the primary school, “so [that] he has the opportunity to interact with Malay children”.⁴ Lee Junior was later sent to Catholic High School, another Chinese-medium school. He was one of the top performers in high school, although his Mandarin was average.⁵ He was, at this stage, a product of his father’s national policy of meritocracy and bilingualism.

In the late 1960s, he entered and became the first batch of the newly-founded National Junior College.⁶ In 1970 he was awarded the President’s Scholarship (arguably the most prestigious scholarship) and this allowed him to study in a foreign university.⁷ Probably due to Lee Senior’s advice, he voluntarily joined the National Service (NS), although as a scholarship holder he could get an exemption.⁸ At the government level, Lee Kuan Yew had then started looking for new talent to boost PAP government leadership in his effort to develop and entrench an apparently “technocratic” political system in Singapore. Lee Senior began to look outside the political arena that has been totally dominated by PAP since 1968. Apart from the public and administrative services and government-linked companies, Lee Senior also looked for new talent in the Singapore Armed Forces and, of course, from among the prestigious scholarship holders.

In fact, based on Singapore’s history, a number of President’s Scholars (before independence it was known as the Queen’s Scholarship) had achieved political ascendancy later in their life. Lim Boon Keng who received the Queen’s Award in 1887 “was appointed

¹ Lee Kuan Yew, *My lifelong challenge: Singapore’s bilingualism journey*, Straits Times Press, Singapore, p. Chapter 1, viewed 2 January 2015, <<http://ifonlaysia.blogspot.my/2011/11/mr-lee-kuan-yew-tells-of-his-struggle.html>>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘BG Lee’s poor grades for Chinese language’, *The Straits Times*, 21 January 1999.

⁶ Michael D. Barr, ‘Beyond Technocracy: The culture of elite governance in Lee Hsien Loong’s Singapore’, *Regional Outlook*, Paper no. 6, 2005, p. 15, viewed 15 April 2016, <https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/18232/regional-outlook-volume-6.pdf>.

⁷ ‘PSC chooses eight new President’s Scholars’, *The Sunday Times*, 31 May 1970.

⁸ ‘President’s Scholar Lee to do national service stint first’, *The Straits Times*, 1 June 1970.

as a Chinese member of the Straits Settlements Legislative Council” in 1895,⁹ at the age of 26.¹⁰ Then in 1946, Edmund Barker received the similar award and went to study law in Cambridge where he met Lee Kuan Yew. He became Lee’s partner in the latter’s legal firm *Lee & Lee*. Later, when Lee became Prime Minister and ran out of talented candidates due to the party split-up in the early 1960s, he persuaded Barker to join the PAP in 1963 to fight against the formidable opposition in the form of the *Barisan Sosialis*.¹¹ In 1964, Barker was appointed as the Minister of Law until his retirement in 1988.¹² In the case of Lee Hsien Loong, Barr noted that:

As “luck” would have it, his decision to start his National Service early served him well. While doing his National Service the Ministry of Defence initiated a system of SAF Overseas Merit scholarships and Lee was in the inaugural group of five men to win one for his study in Cambridge. Upon his return to Singapore in 1974 the SAF initiated a scholarship and leadership programme for serving officers. Unsurprisingly, Lee Hsien Loong was in the first intake.¹³

Despite a short period of service with the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), Lee Hsien Loong managed to rise through the ranks. He was promoted to the rank of a Brigadier General in middle of 1984, despite only serving for about seven years. From 1971 to 1974 he went for his undergraduate studies (in Mathematics and Computer Science) at Cambridge and in 1978 to 1980 he pursued his post-graduate studies in the United States. Notwithstanding the huge investment in him, and his fast track promotion by the SAF,¹⁴ he left the force for politics in September 1984,¹⁵ claiming he was recruited by Goh Chok Tong.¹⁶

His ascendancy in politics was “even more rapid”.¹⁷ Only few months after he joined his father’s party, the PAP, he was placed as a candidate in the General Election in late December 1984. Just after the election, in early January 1985, he was appointed as the

⁹ ‘Lim Boon Keng’, *Singapore National Library Board*, viewed 3 March 2016, <http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_855_2004-12-27.html>.

¹⁰ E. H. Khor, *The public life of Dr Lim Boon Keng*, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1958, p. 12.

¹¹ Susan Sim, ‘The Eurasian who drafted Singapore’s separation documents’, *The Straits Times*, 15 August 2015, viewed 16 January 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-urasian-who-drafted-singapores-separation-documents>>.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Michael D. Barr, ‘Beyond technocracy’, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Michael D. Barr, ‘Beyond technocracy’, *ibid.*

¹⁵ ‘Lee Hsien Loong to leave the army’, *The Straits Times*, 1 September 1984.

¹⁶ Lee Hsien Loong, National Day Rally, 22 August 2004, viewed 2 February 2016, <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/newsroom?field_article_date_partial_month=8&year=15&field_media_category_tid=All&combine=>>.

¹⁷ ‘Lee Hsien Loong Facts’, *Your Dictionary*, viewed 4 April 2016, <<http://biography.yourdictionary.com/lee-hsien-loong>>.

Minister of the State in two key ministries: the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) and Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI).¹⁸ In the cabinet, Lee Junior worked closely with Goh who was also the minister of both ministries. At the same time, both of them were monitored by Lee Kuan Yew. Later that year, Lee Hsien Loong was appointed as the Chairman of the Economic Committee, an important body that was tasked to study and propose on economics restructuring for Singapore's future.¹⁹ In 1987, with only around two years of political experience, Lee was promoted to Minister of Trade and Industry and Second Minister of Defence. In 1989 he was appointed as the Second Assistant of Secretary General of PAP. And in 1990, only after about six years in politics, he was appointed as one of the Deputy Prime Minister following his father's resignation as the Prime Minister, stepping into the position left by Goh.²⁰

While this researcher does not dispute the capability of Lee Hsien Loong to be at the top, his meteoric rise in the SAF and then in the PAP government would be much less probable without any influence from, and connection with, the supreme leader of Singapore who is also his father - Lee Kuan Yew. Lee Junior's path in becoming a future leader of Singapore, as briefly sketched above, seems to have been planned and predetermined by his father in the latter's pragmatic efforts in continuing his legacies, and perhaps to linger much longer, in Singapore's politics.

Lee Hsien Loong's First Phase: The Transition Years

Unlike Goh's administration which came with many new policies and national ideologies, Lee Hsien Loong's government during its first phase (from 2004 to 2011) was more inclined towards maintaining the policies and governing styles of his predecessors, particularly that of the Goh administration. This was largely because Lee was put in-charge of some of Goh's policies, thus he was part of Goh's policy-making when the latter was Deputy Prime Minister. In the late 1980s, for example, although it was Goh who proposed the idea of having a national ideology of Shared Values, the Committee (of Shared Values) was led by Lee Hsien Loong. It is almost the same with the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). While it was Goh's administration that imposed the new consumption tax in 1994, it was Lee who recommended the introduction of GST in balancing the reduction in the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ 'Committee set up to review economy', *Singapore Monitor*, 14 March 1985, p. 11.

²⁰ Ibid.

personal and corporate taxes, while he was head of the Economic Committee in the mid-1980s.²¹

This was the nature of amalgamation and cohabitation of leadership transitions between Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong and Lee Hsien Loong. Instead of excessively competing against each other, the three of them had formed a formidable team and became the locus of powers and influence in the government, though relations were not without strains,²² particularly between Goh and the two Lees.²³ Each of them was relying on the ideas and support among themselves in almost every single policy of the PAP government since 1985, spanning through three administrations, at least until 2011. In fact, even after Lee Senior and Goh had decided to quit their cabinet posts following the poor electoral performance of PAP in the 2011 GE, they were quickly 're-appointed' by the younger Lee to be Senior Advisors for important government agencies.²⁴ This is what Kenneth Jayaretnam had strongly dismissed as "seamless transition" involving "nepotism" and "cronyism" in the political leadership.²⁵ Consequently, continuity is much more noticeable than changes between Lee Hsien Loong and his predecessors. In fact the continued presence of Goh and the older Lee in the Lee Hsien Loong government had also complicated the possibility of any fundamental change of the latter administration, which is another consequence of the regime amalgamation. The possibility of "change" during Lee Hsien Loong's transition years was thus essentially limited to policy modification and certain updates.

In the management of the economy, there are clear illustrations of the continuation of Lee Hsien Loong's pro-business policies as proposed by the Economic Committee (Lee was the Chair) in mid-1980s. In the case of the introduction of the GST, which was one of the proposals by the Economic Committee and imposed by Goh's government in 1994 at the rate of 3 percent, the new Lee Hsien Loong administration in February 2007 made a bold

²¹ 'Lee Hsien Loong', *The Famous People*, viewed 2 January 2016, <<http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/lee-hsien-loong-6891.php>>.

²² See, Michael D. Barr, *The ruling elite of Singapore: network of powers of power and influence*, I.B Tauris, New York, 2014, pp. 99-101.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 'Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong appointed Senior Advisors', *Asia one*, 18 May 18 2011, viewed 2 June 2015, <<http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110518-279454.html>>.

²⁵ Kenneth Jeyaretnam, Lee Kuan Yew 'nepotism': PM Lee Hsien Loong is history, says opposition leader Kenneth Jeyaretnam, *International Business Times*, 26 March 2015, viewed 28 March 2015, <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/lee-kuan-yew-nepotism-pm-lee-hsien-loong-history-says-opposition-leader-kenneth-jeyaretnam-1493727>>.

announcement: increasing the GST to 7 per cent.²⁶ Interestingly, it was Lee, as the Minister of Finance and the Chair of Economic Review Committee (ERC - set up in 2001), who revised the GST rates to 4 per cent in January 2003 and to 5 per cent only after a year later (2004).²⁷ The increments were to offset his pro-business policies in light of dealing with a globalised economy. As part of the effort to attract foreign direct investments (FDI) and talent to Singapore, Lee proposed for personal income tax and corporate taxes (direct tax to them) to be reduced significantly,²⁸ and in balancing the loss of income, GST had to be increased.²⁹ In 1987, Lee Senior's administration accepted Lee Junior's proposal to reduce the corporate tax from 40 per cent to 33 per cent. The trend continued across Goh and Lee Junior's administrations, until in 2010 it was capped at a mere 17 per cent,³⁰ a far cry from most European and Asian countries.³¹

The same trend was applied to the personal income tax which was capped at 55 per cent in early 1980s before being reduced to 40 per cent and later, in 1987, to 33 per cent. In 1992, the Goh administration announced that the personal income tax would be reduced to 30 per cent.³² Under Lee Hsien Loong's government the tax was reduced even further in 2006, and since then has been capped at a very interesting 20 per cent.³³ Despite these bold moves (reducing the direct tax and imposing GST), Lee Hsien Loong was cautious and shrewd enough to announce the personal income tax cut before the 2006 GE but increased the GST after. To cushion public sentiments against the tax hike, Lee cleverly offered other "offset packages" for the people who were worth SGD 4 billion over a period of five years.³⁴

The pragmatism is also apparent in his approach to restructuring the economy in the age of globalisation: the legalisation of the age-old taboo of having a gambling casino in Singapore. In 2006, Lee Hsien Loong's government sustained Goh's administration decision to allow the establishment of what was termed as "Integrated Resort", not just one but two

²⁶ 'Changes from July', *The Straits Times*, 30 June 2007, p. 87.

²⁷ '1% GST hike to go ahead', *The Straits Times*, 29 August 2003, p. 1.

²⁸ Ministry of Trade and Industry, *Report of the Economic Review Committee*, 'New challenges, fresh goals-towards a dynamic global city', Singapore, February 2003, p. 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁰ 'Singapore tax system & tax rates', *Guide Me Singapore*, viewed 1 June 2016, <<https://www.guidemesingapore.com/taxation/topics/singapore-tax-rates>>.

³¹ Kyle Pomerleau, *Tax Foundation*, 'Corporate Income Tax Rates around the World, 2015', 1 October 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://taxfoundation.org/article/corporate-income-tax-rates-around-world-2015>>.

³² Robert G. Carling, 'Fiscal and monetary policies', in Kenneth Bercuson (ed.), *Singapore: a Case Study in Rapid Development*, International Monetary Fund, Washington, February 1995, p. 22.

³³ 'Singapore personal income tax rate 2004-2016', *Trading Economics*, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/singapore/personal-income-tax-rate>>.

³⁴ Ministry of Finance, 'GST offset package overview', Singapore, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.mof.gov.sg/gstcredits/Overview.htm>>.

record-size casinos. Lee was practical enough to announce the continuation of such a big, but unpopular policy after the 2006 GE. Had the announcement been made before the election, the PAP's electoral result could have suffered more significantly.³⁵ The first announcement was made only three weeks after the election. The U.S.-based gambling business giant, Las Vegas Sands Corporation, was selected as the winning contractor at the Marina Bay. Renamed as the Marina Bay Sands, the corporation invested around USD 5.5 billion for the construction of the resort, which was also "the most expensive resort ever built".³⁶ Another gambling corporation, this time was from Malaysia - the Genting Group, won a contract to build another resort on Sentosa Island. The Resorts World Sentosa cost Genting around USD 4.93 billion in total investments, thus making it the third most expensive building in the world after Abraj Al Bait (Saudi Arabia) and the Marina Bay Sands.³⁷ The need of having hefty amount of foreign investment and diversified economy in the challenging age of globalisation had clearly motivated Lee Hsien Loong's government, including Lee Senior, to make a U-turn against the old policy of anti-gambling in its projection of clean and self-restrained government. Thus in the case of the introduction of GST (as the offset to the reduction of personal income and corporate taxes) and the Integrated Resorts, Lee Junior was in sync with Lee Senior and Goh's administrations' practices in prioritising pro-capital rather than pro-social policy, despite certain regulations were apparently placed to discourage Singaporeans from gambling at the casinos.

In 2007, ministerial pay once again became a big issue in Singapore when Lee Hsien Loong's administration decided to spike salary levels by 60 per cent starting in 2008.³⁸ Lee Hsien Loong was of the opinion that the cabinet ministers, including himself, were being underpaid.³⁹ The average pay of USD 1 million seemed to be inadequate, according to the

³⁵ The popular vote for PAP in 2006 GE was around 66.6 per cent, a drop by almost 9 per cent from the previous election in 2001.

³⁶ Alice Young, 'The 10 most expensive buildings in the world', *Construction Global*, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.constructionglobal.com/top10/717/The-10-most-expensive-buildings-in-the-world>>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Seth Mydans, 'Singapore announces 60 percent pay raise for ministers', *New York Times*, 9 April 2007, viewed 1 June 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/world/asia/09iht-sing.3.5200498.html?_r=0>.

³⁹ Ibid., according to the newspaper, "Under the government's formula, ministers are to be paid two-thirds of the median of the top eight earners in each of six professions: accounting, law, banking, engineering, multinational companies and local manufacturing. There has been no public sign of discontent among the men and women who run Singapore, but last month the prime minister noted that they were earning just 55 percent of this benchmark".

government, thus the revised salary was increased to USD 1.26 million or SGD 1.9 million.⁴⁰

According to the *New York Times*:

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will see his pay jump to 3.1 million Singapore dollars, five times the \$400,000 earned by President George W. Bush.⁴¹

The raise included the salary of Minister Mentor (and Senior Minister Goh) who was reported to enjoy SGD 2.7 million annually under the previous scheme.⁴² The same rationale was given by the government in 1994. Lee Hsien Loong's Defence Minister Teo Chee Hean argued in public, "We don't want pay to be the reason for people to join us. But we also don't want pay to be the reason for them not to join us, or to leave after joining us".⁴³

This extraordinary raise to the already extraordinary - several times higher than the salaries of the heads of governments in the developed countries - salary scheme predictably invited substantial public uproar. This was particularly due to the stark problem of income stagnation among many Singaporeans at the bottom and middle levels of society since early 2000s. According to the government's report in 2011, "The bottom 20 per cent of working Singaporeans saw their pay stagnate over the last 10 years" (from 2001 to 2010).⁴⁴ Their nominal income rose marginally from SGD 1,200 in 2001 to SGD 1,400 in 2010.⁴⁵ Their real income, thus, "only rose by 0.3 per cent over the decade".⁴⁶ Many members of the middle class group were affected with their incomes trapped. The real median income for Singaporeans in the middle was found to have grown only "by 11 per cent over the decade, from \$2,000 in 2001 to \$2,588 in 2010".⁴⁷ This situation was rather embarrassing given the government's frequent projections of Singapore being a developed country and also due to the fact that Singapore is one of the richest countries in the world. Income stagnation inevitably became one of the major issues for the new leadership. Looking at the extraordinary pay rise in disfavour and as unfair, the opposition regarded such a scheme as a form of 'formalised corruption' or in their own terms, a "LEE-galised corruption".⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Report released by Ministry of Manpower, quoted by, Fann Sim, 'Low-wage earners' pay stagnated over last decade: MOM', *Singapore Yahoo News*, 12 October 2011, viewed 1 June 2016,

<<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/mom-report-finds-lower-income-s-poreans--pay-stagnated-over-last-decade.html>>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Political observation at Singapore Democratic Party rally at Commonwealth Avenue, Singapore, 2 May 2011.

Nevertheless, despite the glaring contrast in income gap between the elite and the masses, Lee Hsien Loong's proceeded with the ministerial pay spike in 2008.

In these three issues - the GST, IRs and the ministerial pay - the paternalistic, elitist and pragmatic characters of Lee Hsien Loong's regime were clearly evident. Regardless of widespread discontent against the government's proposals in the above issues, Lee Hsien Loong ensured that the original plans moved ahead—bold moves with a great price in the 2011 GE. Even when faced with staggering social costs, the well-being of the national economy remained the main priority. In the case with IRS, despite the government's pragmatic “management of sin” (gambling activities) over the casinos, in 2010 when they first opened, the average visit by Singaporeans and PRs was 20,000 people per day.⁴⁹ A study by *The Economist* in 2013 estimated that “the average adult resident in Singapore lost approximately S\$1,189 in 2013”,⁵⁰ putting Singapore at the second top on the global charts in terms of per capita gambling losses after Australia.⁵¹ Almost “half of this amount was estimated to be lost in casinos, with the remainder going to lotteries, non-casino gaming machines, betting and offshore gaming websites”.⁵²

The income inequality and stagnation in Singapore were both caused by external and internal factors. Globalisation, as the external factor, particularly with the then new open-door policy in China and the economic transition to knowledge economy, have affected many countries, including the globally-linked Singapore economy. Being a manufacturing-based economy for the export market, Singapore in the past offered competitive labour costs for its semi-skilled and low-skilled workers. This had attracted many FDI to Singapore and it became one of the factors behind Singapore's economic growth in the past. The opening up of China's economy, however, with cheaper labour and production costs, has significantly reduced Singapore's competitive advantage in the manufacturing industry. The low of number of highly-skilled workers, crucial to a knowledge-based economy, worsened the situation.

The problems were also triggered by several internal factors, particularly the ‘side effects’ of a number of PAP's policies namely the Foreign Talent (FT) policy, meritocracy

⁴⁹ Tan Shin Bin, ‘Managing the sin in Singapore's casinos’, *Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy*, National University of Singapore, p. 13, 14 April 2014, viewed 10 September 2015, <<https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/20140814-Managing-the-Sin-in-Singapores-Casinos.pdf>>.

⁵⁰ J.S. and L.P., ‘The house wins’, *The Economist*, Feb 3 2014, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2014/02/daily-chart-0>>.

⁵¹ Tan, *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*

and taxation policy. While the massive influx of foreign immigrants into Singapore, since the liberalisation of the immigration policy in early 1990s, has contributed to more competitive labour costs in the island republic and the development of knowledge economy which are viewed favourably by the state elites, this has however resulted in substantial impact on the income of locals at the lower and middle income groups. As the supply of labour significantly increased, job competition became ascended to cut-throat levels as employers are spoilt for choices. The abundance of supply of semi-skilled and low-skilled labours also means that employers have less incentives to revise their compensation packages, particularly in attracting new and preserving their current employees, as recruitment has become less problematic. This has contributed to the problem of income stagnation.

The age-old policy of Singapore's meritocracy partly contributed to the problem of income disparity. As remuneration is used to reflect one's 'talent and ability' in an extreme continuum, income inequality became structural and inevitable. Based on the above information, Lee Hsien Loong (and other party-states elites) is one of the top breadwinners in this system. His position as the Prime Minister, which is projected as very challenging and important for Singapore's success and survival, is in itself 'justifies' his income raised in 2008 to SGD 3.1 million. In contrast, to the other extreme composing of the population without any qualifications (the working class), their average income in 2010 was only SGD 16800 per year or SGD 1400 per month.⁵³ By way of comparison, Lee Hsien Loong's annual salary in 2008 was 184 times higher than the average working class within a similar time-frame. This income inequality was extraordinary and less natural. Even when the *New York Times* compared Lee's salary with the then U.S. President George W. Bush, it was "five times" higher than the most powerful person in the world.⁵⁴ In fact, before Singapore's ministerial pay was revised by Lee's administration in 2007, the compensation scheme (for government service) was already the most lucrative in the world (and the revision has made their salary scheme even better). Hence the administration in reality has less justification for the revision. On the contrary, the structural limitation of income increment among the working and middle class which needed to be restructured and be the focus of the government, went neglected. The prevailing elitist ideas and values might have refrained the party-state elite from seeing this perspective, prompting them to, rather unashamedly, increase their own salaries without any solid justification.

⁵³ Report released by Ministry of Manpower, quoted by, Fann Sim, 'Low-wage earners' pay stagnated over last decade: MOM', *ibid*.

⁵⁴ Seth Mydans, 'Singapore announces 60 percent pay raise for ministers', *ibid*.

The practice of meritocracy in Singapore's education system, particularly the exercise of early streaming, contributed to the situation. Early streaming, as studied by many scholars, gives many advantages to well-to-do families than the less well-off.⁵⁵ As access to sound financial standing is a factor to attaining academic success in the system – including going to better kindergarten for better facilities and teachers, having private tuition classes; buying exercise books, past year examination questions and forecast examination questions; academic workshops and seminars (to name but a few examples) – the “equal opportunity” offered by the policy of meritocracy in Singapore is less meaningful as it does not translate into the equality of outcomes. The government has indirectly recognised the importance of access to funding by offering a number of Edusave packages starting in the primary schools since 1990s. The academic streaming in the primary schools in the education system has an important role in deciding the path of life of the children. Those in the fast track streams have many options when they reach secondary school, including having better chances to be sponsored by the state (though they are coming from the privileged families). Those in the lower track streams do not have such privilege, and would have to settle for low or moderate values jobs in the future, as semi-skilled workers. In the end, social mobility becomes inherently limited and the meritocratic practice in the education system a mechanism of class reproduction, and thus creates the problem of income disparity among the populace

Lee Hsien Loong's pro-market taxation policy is also a factor, albeit an indirect one, to the persistent problem of income disparity. While business corporations and the economically well-off segments of society have enjoyed significant tax cuts since the late 1980s, the GST was introduced to off-set the loss of revenue. Thus, while the rich could save more (thus getting richer) through the generous tax cut (from 40 percent before 1980s to only 20 by 2010), the public at large are burdened with the gradual increment of GST tax rate from 3 per cent in 1994 to more than double (7 per cent) in 2007. This burden is in addition to the restructuring of subsidies, including within the healthcare system and significant compulsory saving packages through the CPF.

The continuing intensity of the FT policy under Lee Hsien Loong's leadership has brought other socio-economic effects apart from income stagnation and higher job

⁵⁵ See for example, Michael D Barr and Zlatko Skrbiš, *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, ethnicity and the nation-building project*, no. 11, NIAS Press, Copenhagen, 2008; Lily Zubaidah Rahim, *The Singapore dilemma: The political and educational marginality of the Malay community*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur 1998.

competition. In 2000, the total resident population (including those were born in Malaysia) was 81.3 per cent or 3,272,363 persons, but later dropped to 74.3 per cent although the actual number increased to 3,771,721.⁵⁶ On the contrary, both the percentage and the number of non-resident population on the island increased substantially within the same period: from 18.7 per cent in 2000, or around one fifth of the total population, to 25.7 per cent (or 1,305,011 people), one fourth in 2010.⁵⁷ This created a host of associated problems, as I have highlighted in the Goh's era, among them the higher cost of living due to increasing demand in the market particularly for properties. It also created the increased feeling of instability and vulnerability among the local population. Income stagnation and high costs of living have caused many to delay their retirement. It is common to see elderly workers at the lower level hospital jobs in the city-state during the 2000s. As a result of job insecurity, low wages, high cost of living, morale is low not only among the low-skilled and aged segment of society, but certain quarters of the younger working class segment and even fresh graduates. They were the "new poor" according to James Gomez,⁵⁸ and probably constitute the new underclass segment – a by-product of systemic marginalisation largely due to pro-capitalist policy at the expense of pro-social programme.

The element of 'comfort' among Singaporeans in the 1990s, as coined by Cherian George,⁵⁹ was substantially affected during Lee Hsien Loong's term in the 2000s. Public transports were frequently crowded as the island now had more inhabitants than it could support. During rush hour, many commuters had to wait for more than one MRT train before they could board.⁶⁰ Thus, if in the past commuters were competing to get a seat on the trains during rush hour, since the 2010s, because of over-population, the competition is now about boarding an already packed train.⁶¹ To add to the level of discomfort, daily communication among the population gradually become a major problem in Singapore as many foreign workers who lack English competency are hired in the service sectors, from bus transportation to grocery shops. Ethnic relations and social (and national) sentiments were

⁵⁶ Brenda Yeoh and Weiqiang Lin, 'Rapid Growth in Singapore's Immigrant Population Brings Policy Challenges', *Migration Policy Institute*, 3 April 2012, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/rapid-growth-singapores-immigrant-population-brings-policy-challenges>>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ James Gomez, 'Singapore's Fresh Graduate: A New Poor', *Asia Monitor Resource Centre*, 1 April 2002, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.amrc.org.hk/content/singapores-fresh-graduate-new-poor>>.

⁵⁹ See, Cherian George, *Singapore: The Air-conditioned Nation: Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control, 1990-2000*, Landmark Books, Singapore, 2000.

⁶⁰ This researcher's observation while doing a field trip in Singapore and Malaysia in 2010.

⁶¹ Ibid.

also strained due to the racial component of FT policy, particularly governmental obsession with having racial balance in the composition of the non-resident populace and educational assistances given to thousands of foreign Chinese in the education system.⁶² Government assistance to the elite children of foreign Chinese also caused displeasure among local Chinese particularly those from the lower and middle class.⁶³

The accumulated public discontent against Lee Hsien Loong's administration policies was capitalised by the opposition parties several month before the 2011 GE on 7th May. It was the best possible chance, since the independence, for the opposition to increase its seats in the parliament due to the existence of serious and credible issues against Lee's administration.⁶⁴ To this end, the opposition launched the "*Tak Boleh Tahan*" (Malay for "can't take it anymore") electoral campaign to organise the public against the PAP's government and its policies. Realising that they have a substantial chance, the opposition in the election form an alliance and fielded candidates in 82 out of 87 parliamentary seats.⁶⁵ It was the highest number of contested seats in the electoral history of Singapore since its independence. This resulted in Lee Hsien Loong's administration failing to be returned as the government on the nomination for the second time after the 2006 GE. The PAP still relied on the old tactics of intimidation and "vote-buying" (or strategic budget?) as in the case of 2006 GE.⁶⁶ Lee Kuan Yew in an electoral campaign at one of the opposition strongholds reminded the voters that they would have "five years to live and repent... We accept the verdict of the people, but they must also accept the consequences of their actions You must expect the PAP to look after PAP constituencies first".⁶⁷ The government during Budget Day in February 2011 announced a disbursement of "up to \$800 each in Growth Dividends as part of a \$3.2 billion Grow and Share Package, which the Government said was aimed at helping

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ 'Is bond-free S'pore scholarship just 'a stepping stone' for China students?' *Asia One*, 20 November 2008, viewed 13 April 2015, <<http://news.asiaone.com/News/Education/Story/A1Story20081119-101728.html>>.

⁶⁴ This researcher's observation while doing a field trip in Singapore and Malaysia in 2010.

⁶⁵ '82 out of 87 seats contested', *Asia One*, 27 April 2011, viewed, 1 June 2016, <<http://news.asiaone.com/News/Elections/Story/A1Story20110427-275845.html>>.

⁶⁶ Lee Hsien Loong announced a SGD 2.6 billion "progress package" for Singaporeans on the Budget Day, just three month before the 2006 General Election. From the package, some cash handouts were given to many quarters of Singaporeans in early May 2006 which was just few days before the balloting.

⁶⁷ 'Singapore Vote Lifts Opposition', *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703864204576310774027709228>>.

lower- and middle-income families cope with the higher costs of living”.⁶⁸ The disbursement was made “on May 1, just in time for the election on May 7”.

Combined with the heavy use of social media like *Facebook*, *Twitters* and *YouTube*, the opposition rallies during the campaign were frequently crowded with hundreds or thousands of people, reminding of the vibrant political contestation in the 1950s and 1960s. Lee’s administration, drunk with past victories, had failed to realise the gravity of the situation. In the historic “watershed” election,⁶⁹ PAP recorded its worst electoral result since independence. 6.46 per cents of the voters swung against the PAP from the 2006 elections to 60.14% in the popular vote.⁷⁰ It was also the first time the opposition won in a GRC and winning at Hougang SMC, ending up with six members of Parliament (excluding NCMP and NMP members), the best electoral performance by the opposition. Two cabinet ministers, Foreign Affairs Minister George Yeo and Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office Lim Hwee Hua, “were bumped from their seats by Workers’ Party candidates”.⁷¹

⁶⁸ ‘Is it an election budget?’, *The Straits Times*, 22 February 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/is-it-an-election-budget>>.

⁶⁹ ‘Singapore Election watershed may ease PAP’s political hold’, *Bloomberg*, 9 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-05-08/singapore-s-election-watershed-may-loosen-political-hold-of-lee-s-party>>.

⁷⁰ Kevin Brown, ‘Singapore opposition makes historic gains’, *Financial Times*, 8 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<https://www.ft.com/content/ac59d4aa-7924-11e0-b655-00144feabdc0>>.

⁷¹ ‘Singapore vote lifts opposition’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703864204576310774027709228>>.



35,000 supporters were estimated at the SDP and WP's election rally at Raffles Place on 5th May 2011.

The result surprised, shocked and disappointed the PAP, particularly its top three men in the leadership. For Lee Hsien Loong, the electoral result “marks a distinct shift in our political landscape, which all of us must adjust to”.⁷² He remarked that, “[m]any [Singaporeans] wish for the government to adopt a different style and approach”, and “to see more opposition voices in parliament to check the PAP government”.⁷³ Lee said the PAP would have to “undergo some "soul-searching" and expressed willingness to work with lawmakers from the opposition”.⁷⁴

Looking back, the 2011 GE was indeed a ‘watershed’ election in Singaporean politics in many dimensions, but the result was arguably expected (rather than unexpected) considering the many signals of the incoming tide. In the case of the 2006 GE alone, many early warnings had been given to Lee Hsien Loong’s administration. First, for the first time since independence, PAP had failed to become the government on nomination day. Unprecedented numbers of supporters were reported to attend the opposition rallies during the 2006 Election. The use of Internet, notably blogs, forums, and online media (such as *The*

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ ‘Singapore opposition make 'landmark' election gains’, *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 9 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13313695>>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Temasik Review and *The Online Citizen*) recorded a rapid growth in readership, especially among the middle class and the younger generation. All in all, the PAP only managed to win 66.6 per cent of the popular vote, after garnering 75.3 per cent in the previous election in 2001 under Goh's administration.

Lee Hsien Loong's administration has basically ignored all of the warnings, including those in GE 2006 and the situational reports from the media. Perhaps, they were too confident that the popular sentiment in 2011 GE will get the better of that in 2006 GE, based on their experience during the Goh years which saw a gradual shift in public mood from one to another general election. Perhaps they were also too caught up with past success and believed that their system, values and approach would always work. After all, PAP has been in power since 1959 and have only lost two seats to the opposition in 2006. Consequently, Lee Hsien Loong's administration did not change much in its style of governing Singapore after the GE 2006 - unresponsive, paternalistic style of government, coupled with pragmatic policies with strong flavours of elitism and racialism. It was already too late when they realised that their system, values and approach are slowly losing favour and are not working as well as in the past. The truth is, everything the PAP holds dear are increasingly challenged by the dynamics of the new generation of Singaporeans.

Lee Hsien Loong's Second Phase: The Post-Transition Years (2011 and beyond)

While voters have given the PAP a strong mandate, many voters—including some of those who voted for us—have also clearly expressed their significant concerns, both on the issues and our approach to government.

Lee Hsien Loong, 8 May 2011.⁷⁵

The results of the 2011 GE was a big blow to PAP. It was the “first major shake-up [for PAP] after 50 years in power”,⁷⁶ and was even bigger than the early 1980s when the opposition first made a re-entrance to Parliament. The PAP underwent a ‘soul searching’, an in-depth

⁷⁵ Lee Hsien Loong's media statement after the release of the 2011 GE's result in, ‘Singapore vote lifts opposition’, *The Wall Street Journal*, *ibid*.

⁷⁶ ‘Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding father, retires from cabinet’, *The Guardian*, 18 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/18/lee-kwan-yew-singapore-retires>>.

discussion, reflection and re-calculation of their political viability. They recognised that their age-old paternalistic governing style and the political “triumvirate of ‘the father, the son and the holy Goh’”⁷⁷ may no longer be appropriate. Hence, the first and foremost, it was observed that the PAP system had to be overhauled. To this end, the creator of the system, ‘Lee the father’, and his right hand man Goh (the guardian) needed to exit cabinet and allow for “a clean fresh slate” for their mentee, Lee the son, to take over the reins of the administration for post-2011 politics.⁷⁸ The decision to leave the cabinet was made by Lee Kuan Yew and Goh themselves.⁷⁹ Lee Senior also noted that “his age distanced him from younger voters and that a “younger team of ministers [should] connect to and engage with this younger generation in shaping the future of Singapore””.⁸⁰ Lee Hsien Loong took several days to think about the decision made by his mentors, before accepting the decision and reappointing them as “Senior Advisors” at two key government agencies (in the investment and the monetary control).⁸¹ Following the advice of his father, Lee Hsien Loong also carried out a major revamp in his line-up, in line with father’s leadership renewal policy. On 18th May Lee Hsien Loong announced a new line-up of Ministers after a “fresh slate after a watershed election”⁸² with “11 out of 14 ministries now with a new minister in charge and 9 ministers from the previous team stepping down”.⁸³ Lee Hsien Loong also stressed that his new government will “review existing policies and approaches” and “engage a new generation of Singaporeans”.⁸⁴

For these reasons, improvements were made to the unpopular policies which were the main factors behind the 2011 electoral results. First, the government announced some ‘cooling measures’ to curb the rising cost of properties (and thus the rental) which is one of the major factors of the high cost of living on the island. Its liberal immigrant policies, which also contributed to the high cost of living and the PAP’s poor electoral result in 2011, were reversed.⁸⁵ The net inflow of foreign workers was also gradually reduced by the government,

⁷⁷ Sheryn Lee, ‘The end of the Lee dynasty?’, *Singapore Diaries*, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/blogs/singapore-diaries/2011/05/19/the-end-of-the-lee-dynasty/>>.

⁷⁸ Lee Kuan Yew’s media statemen quoted in, Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s founding father, retires from cabinet’, *The Guardian*, *ibid*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

⁸¹ ‘Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chok Tong appointed Senior Advisors’, *Asia One*, 18 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Singapore/Story/A1Story20110518-279454.html>>.

⁸² ‘Singapore Prime Minister Lee reshuffles cabinet after polls’, *Bloomberg*, 18 May 2011, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-05-18/singapore-prime-minister-lee-reshuffles-cabinet-after-polls-1->>.

⁸³ Sheryn Lee, ‘The end of the Lee dynasty?’, *ibid*.

⁸⁴ ‘Singapore Prime Minister Lee Reshuffles Cabinet after Polls’, *Bloomberg*, *ibid*.

⁸⁵ ‘Singapore tightens curbs on foreign labor’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 February 2013, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323384604578325940594344014>>.

from 60,000 new workers in 2011 to 16,000 in 2014.⁸⁶ The new labour policy stated that its purpose is now “to create incentives for innovation and productivity, rather than allow companies to rely on cheap labour”.⁸⁷ In 2014, Lee partly ‘restructured’ the public healthcare system with ‘Pioneer Generation Package’ and later in 2015 with the introduction of ‘MediShield Life’. As a result, “government spending on healthcare was projected to rise from SGD 5.8 billion in 2013/4 to SGD 7.1 billion in 2014/5, an increase of 22 per cent”.⁸⁸ The move is actually a reversal of the privatisation of public healthcare since 1980s.

On the ‘hot button issue’ of the ministerial pay, in January 2012 Lee declared that there would be substantial cuts.⁸⁹ His own income as the Prime Minister will be reduced by 36 per cent from the previous year.⁹⁰ The method used to calculate ministerial compensation was also modified to a more acceptable version.⁹¹ Lee stressed that:

“Politics is not a job or a career promotion...It is a calling to serve the larger good of Singapore. But ministers should also be paid properly in order that Singapore can have honest, competent leadership over the long term”.⁹²

In February 2015, Lee’s government announced a “jubilee budget” to celebrate Singapore’s 50th year of independence. Many believed that the budget was also an election budget as there were many goodies allocated for the masses. Among the goodies announced were financial assistances of various schemes, medical benefits, more savings in CPF, GST vouchers, waiver of school examinations fees, road tax rebate, more affordable childcare centres and several more.⁹³ The main focus of the budget was to ease the financial burden on Singaporeans, particularly the lower-income, elderly and young Singaporeans, while at the same time empowering their positions in society through the various schemes.

A month later, on 23 March 2015, Singapore was shocked and deeply saddened with the passing of Lee Kuan Yew. More than a million of Singaporeans visited to pay their last

⁸⁶ ‘Singapore to tweak policies toward foreign workers’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 February 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/singapore-to-raise-taxes-of-top-earners-1424697943>>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Mark Britnell, *In Search of the Perfect Health System*, Palgrave, London, 2015, p. 43.

⁸⁹ ‘Singapore Cuts Ministers’ Pay After Wealth Gap Irked Voters’, *Bloomberg*, 4 January 2012, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-01-04/singapore-to-cut-ministers-pay-on-panel-recommendations-after-2011-polls>>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ ‘Singapore Budget 2015: 15 things to cheer about (and 4 things which some won't)’, *The Straits Times*, 23 February 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/singapore-budget-2015-15-things-to-cheer-about-and-4-things-which-some-wont>>.

respects to the late Lee.⁹⁴ A few weeks later, the rumour in town was that the general election will be held later in that year. The year 2015 marked 50 years of independence since being separated from Malaysia in 1965. As with the jubilee budget, a ‘Singapore (SG) 50’ rally and celebrations was held from August and September. With the demise of Lee Kuan Yew, the SG 50 celebration was expected to be much more patriotic, unifying and expressive.⁹⁵ After all, many Asian countries, including Singapore, were in economic crises and uncertainties due to fluctuating petroleum prices. Two out of three elections during the Goh years were held during a time of crisis, namely in 1997 and 2001.⁹⁶ In both occasions Goh’s administration produced better results. Thus having an election, particularly in September, the month of Singaporean independence, was a sensible and strategic move to tap into all the good sentiments which were deemed positive toward the government.⁹⁷

Whether it was just a coincidence or by design, on 25th August 2015, the President of Singapore Tony Tan, on the advice of the Prime Minister, dissolved Parliament to give way to a new general election. Polling was set on 11th September, just two days after Singapore’s Independence Day (Singapore’s Independence Day (9th September). The expectation was that Lee’s government would perform much better than it did in the 2011 election, despite fierce competition. For the first time since independence, the oppositions fielded candidates in all seats and thus there was no walkover for any PAP candidate. Lee and his team went all out deploying the SG50 rallies for PAP’s electoral campaign. In one of the SG50 rallies, Lee stressed that:

If you are proud of what we have achieved together, if you support... the future that we are building, then please support me, please support my team, because my team and I cannot do anything just by ourselves.⁹⁸

Despite a spirited showing put forward by the Singaporean opposition, Lee’s administration’s decision to pay heed to the voters’ voices in 2011 GE paid off. This, in addition to the unifying sentiments among the populace as a response to Lee Kuan Yew’s

⁹⁴ ‘1.2 Million Singapore Residents Pay Last Respects to Lee Kuan Yew’, *Sputnik News*, 29 March 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<https://sputniknews.com/asia/20150329/1020156565.html>>.

⁹⁵ ‘Not just an SG50 Rally, an election rallying call too’, *The Straits Times*, 24 August 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/not-just-an-sg50-rally-an-election-rallying-call-too>>.

⁹⁶ ‘Goodies seen for SG50, election year’, *The Straits Times*, 19 February 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/goodies-seen-for-sg50-election-year>>.

⁹⁷ See for example, Eugene K.B. Tan, ‘Why the PAP won big this GE’, *Channel News Asia*, 12 September 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/specialreports/sgvotes2015/latest/why-the-pap-won-big-this/2121770.html>>.

⁹⁸ Lee Hsien Loong, quoted in, ‘Not just an SG50 Rally, an election rallying call too’, *The Straits Times*, 24 August 2015, *ibid*.

demise, economic crisis, SG50 Jubilee and the Independence Day' mood, saw the PAP winning a landslide victory. Lee won the highest popular vote at 70 per cent, giving him 83 out of 89 parliamentary seats. The opposition was cut down to six MPs. Low Thia Kiang of the Workers' Party Singapore observed that the voters' "swing to the PAP can be attributed to a more responsive government".⁹⁹

Conclusion

In the case of Singapore's nation-building policy under Lee Hsien Loong, his administration has become much more responsive particularly after the 2011 GE. However, despite such changes, the main norms and values of the system, inherited from the years of Lee Kuan Yew, have remained steadfastly within both of his successors' administrations. Norms and values such as pragmatism, paternalistic elitism and racialism through the politics of meritocracy, multi-racialism and survival still make up the major parts of the 'Singaporean system' even after demise of Lee Kuan Yew. Since the mid-1980s Goh had tried to 'change' the system, making it much more acceptable.

The key issue in the many PAP-led transformation programmes under Goh and Lee Hsien Loong is that the transformation was limited in form, but not in essence. They were also more modification or improvement than fundamental changes. The change was also made out of pragmatism, for achieving a better electoral result, rather than out of a new consciousness. The supreme leaders in PAP during the Goh and Lee Hsien Loong years still had put much faith in the age-old Singapore system. During the Goh years there were slight changes in style, and under Lee Hsien Loong, the administration was forced to made improvements after the 2011 GE. Part of the problem was the seamless political transition project from Lee Kuan Yew to Lee Hsien Loong. The major policies which were also the major concerns of the voters were only tinkered to make it more acceptable. Thus it was not a major 'overhaul' as what Lee Hsien Loong's had declared after the 2011 GE, just a major 'service' in the Singaporean system.

⁹⁹ 'PAP wins 83, WP takes 6 seats', *Asia One*, 12 September 2015, viewed 1 June 2016, <<http://news.asiaone.com/news/general-election/live-updates-ge2015-results-night>>.

PART IV : CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

This thesis aims to provide an alternative analysis of nation-building policies in Malaysia and Singapore using the eclectic approach, particularly of the class analysis. In this study, I have unravelled the volte-face, contradictions and inconsistencies in the states' nation-building policies as it is not cultural motive that propels the elites' direction in their national vision, but more political ones.

In Singapore, the three phases of the Lee Kuan Yew years (1959 – 1990) were correlated with the attempt on the part of the Prime Minister in clinging to power. As the result, the nation-building policies during his tenure were personalised in an organised support towards PAP in general, and to Lee Kuan Yew in specific. During the first phase of his rule (1959 – 1965), various pro-Malay policies were introduced to attract the Malay crowd as he intended to marry Singapore with the then Federation of Malaya. But after PAP's failure to become the main partner in the Alliance, Lee changed his policy, ostensibly towards meritocracy. In the second phase of his rule in Singapore (1965 – late 1970s), the pro-Malay policies was reversed and the Malays have begun to be systematically discriminated, despite the championing of politics of meritocracy in Singapore. Through such politics, a political system of technocracy and elitism was created in legitimising the PAP authoritarian rule. Lee's politics of meritocracy since late the 1970s (the third phase) have been greatly undermined with the enactment of pro-Chinese policies encompassing various topics, from language, to education system and scholarship. With the weakening of the minority political clout, Lee had structured his government to direct sharp focus to woo the Chinese voters whom have become much more critical of his administration throughout the 1980s.

Both Goh Chok Tong's administration (1990 – 2004) and Lee Hsien Loong's administration (2004 – date) were confronted with a much more sophisticated society which significantly differed from Lee Kuan Yew's era. The modernisation process, globalisation and the rapid advances in technology and communication are among the factors that has had

a profound impact on the new generation of Singaporeans. Changes in the political landscape can be seen, beginning 1981, when the opposition made a historic entry into the Parliament after 16 years, followed by the 2011 General Election (GE) when the opposition garnered almost 40 per cent of the popular vote.

During Goh's administration, the change of leadership style was evident. The government seemed much more open in politics with Goh's political style of consultation and consensus. In the case of Lee Hsien Loong, his government had become much more responsive particularly after the 2011 GE. However, despite such changes, the main norms and values of the system, inherited from the years of Lee Kuan Yew, have remained firm throughout the administration of both of his successors. Norms and values such as pragmatism, paternalistic elitism and racialism through the politics of meritocracy, multi-racialism and survival still form the main components of the 'Singaporean system' even after the demise of Lee Kuan Yew in 2015. Since the mid-1980s, Goh had tried to 'change' the system, making it much more acceptable. He was happy enough to proclaim that his work has paid off, in the form of better electoral performance in the 1991 and 2001 elections. The 2011 GE, however, revealed that the three top leaders in the PAP government did not make any material changes to their style of governance.

The key issue of the many PAP-led transformation programmes under Goh and Lee Hsien Loong is that the transformations were limited in form, but not in essence. There were also more modifications and/or improvements as oppose to fundamental changes. The changes were also made up of pragmatism, for achieving a better electoral result, as oppose to new consciousness. The supreme leaders of PAP during the Goh and Lee Hsien Loong years had also place a lot of faith in the age-old Singapore system. During the Goh years, there were slight changes in style, whereas under Lee Hsien Loong, the administration was forced to made improvements after the 2011 GE. Part of the problem was the seamless transition in power from Lee Kuan Yew to Lee Hsien Loong. Lee Kuan Yew and Goh, despite tendering their resignations in 1990 and 2004, never really left the cabinet. In fact, their influence after resigning were only second to the Prime Minister himself. Their cohabitation in their successor's administration(s) has limited the possibility of significant changes in the new government(s). After all, Lee Kuan Yew was their mentor and senior in PAP and he oversaw the PAP's government under the leadership of his successors like a 'father in a family'. Hence, no major policies were altered even after 2011, despite the fact that Lee Kuan Yew and Goh had left the cabinet for good and with 75 per cent of cabinet

ministers consisting of new faces. The cardinal policies, which were also the major concerns of the voters were only tinkered to make it more acceptable. Thus, it was not a major ‘overhaul’ as what Lee Hsien Loong’s had declared after the 2011 GE, as it was only a major ‘tweak’ to the Singaporean system.

The Singapore system also gave rise to widespread allegation of ‘dynastic politics’ among the Lee families, an allegation that was also made by Lee Hsien Loong’s own sister Lee Wei Ling recently in April 2016. This is due to the continuous rule of the Lee family in politics. Lee Kuan Yew himself held important positions in the cabinet from 1959 until 2011. In fact he was still a parliamentarian and was appointed as a Senior Advisor for a key Singaporean investment arm before his demise. Lee the father, played a crucial role for Lee the son’s entry into politics and political supremacy. With the outstanding electoral performance by Lee Hsien Loong’s administration in the 2015 GE, he is expected to stay in power for much longer. In 2011, he has embarked on a leadership renewal process by swapping the leaders of his generation for younger ones. It should be noted that this was practiced by Lee Kuan Yew in the 1970s to discourage challenges within the party to prolong his tenure as premier. Many of the members in the new cabinet looked to Lee Hsien Loong for guidance and wisdom, given their limited level of experience in politics. Consequently, Lee Hsien Loong could stay in power as long as he wanted to if his health permitted him to or if there was another major show of support for the opposition. The latter is however, less probable in the short run as the electoral system is shaped in a way that it is practically impossible for the opposition to defeat the ruling party through election.

With regard to Malaysia, I have examined how state power is used as powerful tool in shaping the cultural content of Malaysia. UMNO and Malay hegemony is clearly evident through the making of the Malay-led government involving the appointment of politically-linked Malays as top bureaucrats and rapid Malay-nisation of the public service particularly since the Razak’s administration.

The General Election, nevertheless constituted influential checks in pressuring the respective Prime Ministers to the extent that it could influence the policy of the on-going nation-building. The Chinese pressure and the UMNO divide during the Mahathir era for example, had coerced the government to be much more open to the community to broaden the regime’s support base.

Despite the ethno-nationalist turn in the Malaysian nation-building trajectory since the early 1970s, beyond the politics of Malayness – there is operation of class rule and interests. By patronising the Malay development, the dependency of the Malay masses were structured and restructured to the UMNO elites. Through the offerings of the state’s lucrative rents, the politically-connected figures were given large access to the state’s wealth. The state, thus, had direct control of the making of this class which was labelled with many terms like the “statist-capitalists”, “political businessmen” or “projectians”. As the practice is wide-scale, it has transformed the nature of the Malaysian economy to crony-capitalism. In fact, the channelling of the state’s funds to the right cronies through the ‘production’ of state projects (in justifying the spending of the state’s fund) are crucial not only for the personal interests of the powers, but are also to be used as the ruling party’s political and operation costs. In spite of the intensity of the Malay politics in UMNO, the creation of the ‘new rich’ is not only confined to the highly connected Malays, but also to well-connected non-Malays.

Nation-state building in Malaysia under Najib’s administration resembles a pendulum. It swings forwards and backwards between progress and the status quo. Politically, Najib’s administration was apparently moving towards democratisation before the 13th GE, albeit with some limitations. However, Najib’s administration later gradually headed towards fuller authoritarianism or perhaps dictatorship by introducing and using draconian laws against its opponents.

At the heart of the pendulum is Najib’s pragmatism in retaining power as Prime Minister. He knows the structural limitations and opportunities surrounding his position and cunningly responds to them. Realising that society wanted change and progress, Najib “supplied” these aspirations with his transformation programmes. Later, when he came under great attack due to his involvement in relation to 1MDB-related issues and especially after much of the government’s rhetoric fell on deaf ears, Najib started to use authoritarian measures to combat his opponents.

The development of state and society is “arrested” between the politics of development and the development of politics. While the former has caused an unequal distribution of national wealth, the latter suggests improving the situation towards a more just and equal society. On culture and ethnicity, the government was, for part of the time, open and inclusive, as can be seen in the implementation of the 1Malaysiaconcept. For the other part, however, it resorted to ethno-racial politics to win the support of Malay conservatives.

The above conclusions have dissected the politics behind the changing nation-building policies in Malaysia and Singapore since late 1960s to date. With the centralisation of power by the executive, the state of nation-building in those countries, particularly Malaysia, are greatly correlated with the personal situations and interests of the respective Prime Ministers. Interestingly, although both Malaysia and Singapore are authoritarian countries, and to date much akin to a dictatorial system (one-man rule), however the electoral competition, particularly since the 1990s have been competitive to the extent that the rulers have to bend their nation-building policies to woo voters. These are among the structural and unsettling problems of the state of nation-building in Malaysia and Singapore whereby they are shaped by both short-term politics and the ruling class interests.

In conclusion, this thesis has revealed that nation building does not have to be perceived exclusively as a cultural phenomenon, which is a position that sits in contrast with most studies of the subject matter, particularly for Malaysia and Singapore. I have demonstrated that nation building can even be studied through the prism of class. Both post-colonial regimes in Malaysia and Singapore, as examined in Chapter Two to Chapter Seven, have manipulated the state nation building policy for various purposes that benefited the ruling class. The New Economic Policy in Malaysia (see Chapter Three) and meritocracy in Singapore (Chapter Five) for examples, have structured a steady support and dependency of Malaysian Malay and Singaporean Chinese population towards the ruling class in their respective states. The new and increasing enactment of draconian laws (see Chapter Two) in both states have enabled the ruling class to dominate the civil space and thus hegemonies the class of the ruled – a position which now is highly contested particularly since the advent of internet and communication technology since late 1990s (Chapter Four). Both of the above exercises (the ruling class political patronage and the use of draconian laws) practically has shaped the character of the population more as a loyal political subject (subject building) to the ruling class, rather than as a vibrant patriotic nation to the state. Lastly, the practice of crony capitalism in Malaysia and elite-based state capitalism in Singapore as explored in this thesis substantively indicates the operation (and the fulfilment) of ruling class interests through the skilful productions and manipulation of state policies and practices.

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P. Ramasamy, Deputy Chief Minister II Penang, Georgetown, 29 June 2010,

Ramli Mohamed, Organising Secretary of National Solidarity of Singapore's Malay Bureau, Singapore, 30 September 2010.

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