

## PATH OF NATIONALISM IN THE FORMATION OF MALAYSIAN POLITICS

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### ABSTRACT

The concept of nationalism is said to have existed in the 12th century, however, this ideology only emerged as an influential political ideology in the 19th century when some colonies began to demand independence from the colonialists. Scholars of western political thought consider the year 1648 to be the turning point for the presence of nationalism as a political ideology. This was evidenced in that year by an agreement that brought an end to the 30-year war in Europe which had implications for the birth of the nation-state concept. The treaty was the Treaty of Westphalia, in which the treaty did not affect the rights of a nation-state, and national sovereignty (Baradat; 1984). This survey study was conducted to examine the journey of nationalists in Malaysia as well as the conflicts that occurred in the formation of Malaysians through several previous studies. The results of this study can be used as a reference to determine the best concept to discuss the aspects of nationalism in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** nationalist, nationalism concept, ideology, review article

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Syed Husin Ali, there are at least two types of nationalism, the first of which is nationalism which was generally found in European countries in the 19th century. While the second is the nationalism found in Asian and African countries that were colonized in the 20th century (Syed Husin Ali; 1983) Nationalism in Europe involves ideology and nationalist movements to build and stabilize the position of the country based on aspects of religion, race and language. which has long existed among the communities involved. While nationalism in Asia and Africa is mostly due to efforts to demand independence from the colonialists. It then formed a new state based on equal citizenship for members of society in the political and socio-cultural spheres.

Nationalism generally means an ideology or national spirit. It is used to describe attitudes and approaches related to the struggle against colonialism as well as the defense of a nation or country. According to Hans Kohn, a scholar from Germany, nationalism is a movement that reflects "a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state ...". In other words, a movement of nationalism is to place one's allegiance only to one's state/country or nation (Hans Kohn, 1965). Smith defines nationalism as an ideological movement, to achieve self-government and independence for a group or part of a group that calls themselves a true nation or a future nation like other nations. Smith also stated 3 things that make up nationalism, namely the

determination of one's own destiny as a group, the assertion of the personality and distinctive nature of the nation and the division of the world according to its own nation state (Suntharalingam; 1985).

## 2.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Elie Kedourie (1966) explained that nationalism is a determination of a group of people to have their own government. He saw the determination of the national self as one of the most important elements of nationalism because the goal of nationalism was the liberation of mankind from any foreign domination and to have self-government. In addition, he stated that nationalism shows that human beings are outwardly divided into those who have certain characteristics such as ethnic, linguistic and religious similarities and the government they want to form is based on their own nationality.

The concept of nationalism in Malaya was divided into two senses: first; nationalism is a reference to a movement of struggle to demand independence. The political and economic subordination of the colonies by the colonial rulers caused the people to stand that independence was the only way to enable them to achieve freedom (Ramlah Adam; 1998). The second meaning, after achieving independence, there is also a nationalist movement that tries to defend culture, language, education, economy and so on. This happened, after the nation-state was successfully formed in a state abandoned by the colonialists. To strengthen the new nation-state, the nationalist movements will play a role in accordance with the desired socio-cultural (Rustam; 2004).

## 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of Malaysia, before achieving independence, nationalism was present with the participation of the struggle to reject the Malayan Union. UMNO is the manifestation of the formation of the Malays are united through a combination of unity and to jointly resist the idea of nation proposed by the British Malayan Union. UMNO succeeded in thwarting the idea of a nation state framed by the colonialists. The string of success, the development of Malay nationalism began to reveal a more interesting when Malay nationalism emerged two schools of right and left with the same aim, namely to reject colonialism in Malaya. The British decided to cooperate with the Malay nationalist movement right because it is more liberal and tolerant than the leftist labeled as pro-communist and socialist. After independence, there was a change in the Malay nationalism but still revolve around the question of the king, language and privileges of the Malays that Umno is the backbone in the fight. These elements all play an important role in influencing the future direction of French politics as a whole.

As is well known, Malaysia is a country with such a diverse social structure. In the context of such a diverse Malaysian society, there are various forms of interpretation in relation to the nationalism of the Malaysian race itself. This can clearly be seen from the explanation made by Wang Gungwu since 1962, namely;

*“Most Malays believe that this common culture should have as its nucleus traditional Malay culture. This would follow if it is recognized that Malayan nationalism has Malay nationalism as its nucleus. But most Chinese and Indians would deny that this is a fair claim. In their view, the Malayan nation should involve only a new political loyalty and not a denial of the multi-cultural basis of the present society. A third minority view, held mainly by the English-educated Chinese and Indians, is that cultural differences may remain so long as most people accept more intensive*

*modernization and come to share a common outlook which is not deeply anchored in any single traditional culture”*

There are three (3) the dominant argument in relation to the concept of 'Malaysians', which is the first element ethnic Malays as the backbone of characterizing and shaping the nation as a whole; second, 'multi-ethnic Malaysia' where each ethnic group in Malaysia maintains autonomy to their respective ethnicities and third, 'Malaysia-Malaysian', where the ethnicity of an ethnicity is irrelevant or applicable in determining the identity of the Malaysian race. These three dominant arguments are often adopted or manipulated by the Malaysian political elite for example;

*“Let us make no mistake-the political system in Malaysia is founded on Malay dominance. That is the premise from which we should start. The Malays must be politically dominant in Malaysia as the Chinese are politically dominant in Singapore. We should ensure that legislations and policies are favourable to the existence and development of the language, education and culture of all ethnic groups in the country as is their Constitution right”*

*The obvious task of a responsible an intelligent political leadership in Malaysia must be...to consolidate our national existence by giving our multi-racial people the firm sense of a common national identity, purpose and destiny”*

The average Malaysian political elite fails to provide a concrete explanation and definition in relation to what form the Malaysian nation wants to form. As analyzed by Cheah Boon Kheng, 'The Alliance parties failed to spell out the features of Malaya's nationality in the Constitution because they were uncertain how to define its national identity'. The concept of race or nation based on 'Malaysia-Malay' can only be fully accepted by the people or the community, but in the meantime will marginalize the non-Malays, thus will create one of the nation unstable from a combination of them. On the other hand, the concept of nation or race-based 'Malaysian Malaysia', will have the support of a majority of the non-Malays, but will receive a negative reaction from the public or the Malays, who form the largest block of society.

This crisis or polemic is clearly reflected in the Malaysian constitution. The Malaysian Constitution is a product of negotiation and compromise among Malaysia's majority political elite. Importantly, the constitution formed during independence, failed to provide a clear definition of the question of national-identity itself. Thus, for example, explaining the equality that exists in the constitution in relation to this, Malaya's citizenship in the 1957 Constitution ... was known only as "Federal citizenship", "Federal citizenship" meant membership of a nation, like a membership of a club with rights and duties. Nationality, however, meant a national identity, which was something else. "In fact, some clauses in the constitution indicate an identity that is contrary to the Malaysian Nation. For example, Article 8 (2) of the constitution explicitly states;

*“Except as expressly authorized by this Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation or employment”*

From the other side, the constitution clearly states that Islam is the official religion (Article 2) and Malay is the national language (Article 152). So also with the position of the Malay aristocratic leaders like Sultan, the rulers who are in a large number of Malay states were laid as a special symbol of the Malay community (Article 32, Article 70). The articles of the constitution clearly state the special

position of the Malays against the community or other communities in Malaysia. In addition, despite the firmness of a clear constitutional commitment 'no discrimination' to religion, race, descent and that in addition, the Malaysian constitution also recognizes the special position of the Malays or Bumiputeras to access to the Malay Reserve Land (Articles 89 & 90) ; quotas in the Malaysian civil service as well as the granting of permits and licenses (Article 153).

National identity is vague and this raises questions of national identity, as if Malaysia is a country of the community; or Negara Malaysia is a country that consists of various races and absolutely Who is said to be Malaysian? Since the political elites at the time of the independence claim were incapable of clarifying and defining this matter, the constitution that was formed was also incapable of giving a concrete answer to this question. Thus, the ambiguity and ambiguity that exists on the question of national identity has created competition and political tension among the political elite and the masses who each construct their own ideology on the question of national identity. In UMNO, the political leadership split that arose, often became an arena of competition in relation to nationalist ideology. UMNO elites construct, manipulate and use nationalist ideology as an answer to the question of national identity in their efforts to legitimize political power or among the competition of UMNO elites themselves often highlight that the nationalist ideology they fight for is rational in the context of UMNO political power management in particular and Malaysia. generally.

The political divisions of the UMNO leadership, often revolve around and between the elite leadership groups that hold party power and the political elite groups that challenge to gain a foothold of political power within the party. The president of the party (UMNO), who at the time was also the Prime Minister, would always put space on the national ideological background; formulate the ideology and make it a political vision of the country. The Prime Minister, as the head of Malaysia's multi -ethnic community, seeks to resolve the question of ambiguity and ambiguity of national identity based on the vision and ideology he has developed. This is done through the process of construction of nationalist ideology in the hope that the same construction process will be able to define national identity. This is explained by Cheah Boon Kheng as follows:

*“All four Prime Ministers upheld and worked the Social Contract of 1955 and 1957 and have attempted to juggle and balance the communal demands and interests of the respective communities. Every one of these Prime Ministers started off their political career as an exclusivist Malay nationalist, but ended up as an inclusivist Malaysian nationalist”*

In this context the position of the nationalist political elite poses a challenge to the national ideological project put forward by the President. This situation is further explained by Cheah, "The fact that UMNO's leaders did not develop their nationalism into an exclusive nationalism of" Malaya "for the Malays", makes the future of the Malaysian nation that wants to be formed will always face pressure, challenges and resistance. either from political elites within UMNO and also from political elites outside UMNO itself.

Indirectly, the political elite challenging UMNO President will always "reflect" that their struggle is aimed to keep the interests of the community in which it failed to do things by the President (Prime Minister) on the basis of party and state policies. Group rivals (the political elite), it is often argued that the nationalist struggle they will create the future better than the Malay leaders who are holding government power. This situation is a political strategy, an elite contender for the goal to mobilize political support Malays to them in order to weaken the existing political leadership.

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION

In Malaysia, apart from debates and discussions on UMNO's political leadership and its symbiotic relationship with Malaysian political developments, debates on nationalist ideology also focused on its relationship with communities and individuals. This debate is closely related to the face of Malaysian politics, which is either authoritarian or democratic. In 1962, Wang Gungwu described the face of Malaysian politics as follows;

*"I already some politicians are asking if democracy is efficient enough for the building of a new nation almost from scratch. (Their questions are) Is nationalism in Malaya compatible with democracy? If we want our people to be indentified solely and fully with Malaya...can we afford to use only the methods of persuasion and education? Do we have the time which we badly need to convert, if not most people of this generation at least the bulk of the next generation, to the national ideal? The modern state machinery can be a powerful weapon, on the one hand, for education and indoctrination and, on the other, for coercion and strict political control"*

In short, in this context it can be explained that, the Malaysian political elite seeks to marginalize the freedom of thought of individuals or question any form of action of the government and the elites in power. In other words, an individual who is contrary to the idealism of the government, is in a situation that tends to be subject to government political action against them. On the other hand, if the political practice of authoritarianism in Malaysia is justified on the basis of political stability as well as national ideology practiced by the ruling political elite, ironically the vision of national identity put forward by Mahathir Mohamed through Vision 2020 has been seen to weaken Malaysia's authoritarian politics.

Mahathir Mohamed's civil and nationalist visions, such as "Bangsa" Malaysia and Vision 2020, which are also accompanied by various forward-looking socio-economic policies as well as Malaysia's encouraging economic growth in the 1990s, have come from a different side. diluting the ambiguity and ambiguity of the question of national identity. Socio-economic policies of the pro-Indonesia since 1970s, has immediate delivery Malay middle class are confident and not afraid to compete with the non-Malays (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2001; Ho, 1994; Khoo; 1999; Shamsul, 1999 Williamson, 2002).

This development has resulted in strong political support of the Malays against the political leadership of Mahathir Mohamed. Support is given an indication or an indication of the changing nature of the Malay political support is support for the loyalty of ethnic politics, the nature of the forms of assistance or support civil berdimensikan Malaysia. Khoo Boo Teik, explained the success of Mahathir Mohamed's nationalist vision as follows, "somehow Malaysians were inspired ... to discover their ability to imagine themselves as a community, and to do so with a sense of the" ineradicable Goodness of the nation ". Mahathir Mohamed's nationalist project or vision has also indirectly reduced political tensions revolving around the question of national identity which seems to have no concrete end or solution.

This development, however, raises polemics or other questions of nationalism, i.e. related issues with the relationship between communities and individuals embodied in the form of political tensions between authoritarian politics and those who oppose it. As explained and briefly touched on above, the success of Mahathir's nationalist vision through Malaysia's proud economic growth, along with the emergence of a Malaysian generation. optimistic, confident and very concerned with the Malaysian socio-political system. Abdul Rahman Embong, explained this matter, "middle class

forward not only with new forms of association, self-expression; initiative, but also with new ideas regarding proper balance among state, market and civil society”.

Thus, these developments have also indirectly raised questions and questions in relation to the need for authoritarian politics and the nationalist assumption that the interests of the community and its will override the will and freedoms of individuals among the ruling political elite. In other words, the nationalist political competition in the era of Mahathir Mohamed’s leadership has undergone structural changes.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

On the one hand it is, the nationalism that underpins the politics of authoritarianism, and on the other hand is the new nationalists who emerged with idealism about the political consciousness of individual freedom, the politics of democracy and also the importance of civil society as an autonomous space for individual freedom. The emergence of this new idealism is indirectly a manifestation of the nationalist principle that prioritizes the interests of individuals over communities or groups. Thus, this new consciousness or idealism is completely at odds with the views and perspectives of political elites who fight for the interests of groups or communities more importantly than individuals.

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