

# THE MATTER OF NATIONAL UNITY IN MALAYSIA

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## National unity and the state

National unity in a state becomes a prime concern in two instances. The first is when a state has just been founded. It may be a case where a state has been born completely new with no previous history as a political territory. Of course such an event does not occur anymore, unless a large new island suddenly emerged from the sea, leading to a human population occupying the new land. Or, it may be a case where a state has emerged out of the yoke of imperialism, whether by negotiation or by warfare, in which case the 'new' state is not exactly new because it had existed previously as a territory in some political form before being subjected to imperialism.

The second instance is when a long established state (not, a new state) has new populations of immigrants of whatever type, whether involuntarily as in the case of refugees, or the result of deliberate migration.

Almost all states, whether of the first instance or the second, will definitely comprise more than one ethnicities in their population. Ethnic groups are people of different cultures. Ethnic groups in turn are of two varieties. The first, are the indigenous ones, natives to the land where the state is founded. These are the 'races'. While, there are the second variety, ethnic groups not indigenous to the land (i.e. they are immigrants, or refugees, and their descendants); these are the 'communities' (as opposed to the 'races'). To illustrate: Italian migrants and their descendants are the 'Italian community' in Australia - they are not the Italian 'race' there. The Italian 'race' is to be found in Italy. Thus, the population of Australia today comprises the Aborigines, a 'race' (the only indigenous people), and many 'communities' (of immigrants, refugees, and their descendants).

Identifying 'races' and 'communities' as such is not an assertion of racism. It is simply a necessity in the analysis of social phenomena. In objective analysis, precision in the subject matter examined is absolutely essential in order to be able to really exercise the right appreciation, and hence the right reading of the subject matter so as to bring about the right and absolute conclusions.

National unity is a prime concern of a state because it is the foundation of stability of the state, in particular where the population comprises different races and communities with not only differences in language, but also differences in culture, as well as different histories. And, which would engender different and various expectations and demands. And, the matter becomes more problematic as foreign standards, pressures and interferences, for whatever reasons, also seek to come into play. And, in many a states, national unity becomes a big issue, not just in the 'third world', but also among the developed states in the world such as

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in Europe and elsewhere; in the latter cases, the problem arising from immigration of people of other ethnicities, from other lands.

Naturally, the problem of national unity has brought about formulas to seek to resolve the matter.

Three main formulas have been popularly expressed. One, is the *constitutional/legal formula*, whereby national unity is argued would be realized when the rights of all ethnicities (major or minor, strong or weak, indigenous or not) are placed as equal, as legally provided in the constitution of the state. The rights are not just political, but also socio-cultural, and economic, and so on. In simple terms, it is an equation of legal equality. And, that is suggested as the only true and ultimate justice. But, detractors argue that legal equality is not exactly real justice, considering that different ethnic groups have different histories, and thus different legitimate interests. Thus, the formula is not a solution to the matter of national unity.

The second formula is the *political*. This one does not depart from the notion of constitutional/legal rights, but it is heavily driven by political considerations and inclination, and with a bias toward races and communities deemed 'minorities', 'suppressed', or 'ignored'. More often though, it caters most and especially to 'immigrant minorities', or just immigrants. This formula is about lending the constitution, or national life, a big political push. This formula rests fundamentally on the desire for 'political correctness', mainly expressed by the political elite or the political class in the state. But, almost universally, this proclivity is not shared by the population at large. The population at large is really the indigenous majority who resent the subjugation of their primordial native interests to what they see as unreal elitist political correctness.

The third formula is the *academic* one, devised in the academia from a peek at society that conjures up a contemporary understanding of societies, very largely devoid of any meaningful historical (the past) context, as a form of social science solution. Introduced are concepts such as 'multiculturalism', 'civic nation', and 'cultural nation' to aid the proposed academic solution to the problem of national unity and nation building. States are said to be constituted of not a single people/nation/race but a multiplicity of these. This multiplicity in its pluralism is suggested in academic theory as to provide an excellent foundation for national unity. But, in real life 'multiculturalism' as state policy for national unity has been widely rejected in the general population in practically all the developed countries that have tried the idea. And, no countries in the world have identified themselves officially as a 'civic nation' or a 'cultural nation' or even a 'multicultural country' despite efforts by liberal elements in the population to do so.

The reality is the notions of the 'civic nation', or the 'cultural nation' are not comprehensible to the ordinary man, nor are these notions appealing as they are highly contrived 'realities'. In real life, free of political correctness, 'multiculturalism' has not been seen to have produced a 'one nation', mindful of the fact that 'unity' is based on the notion of 'one' and of 'one-ness'. Multiplicity is not 'oneness'; it is simply 'multi-ness', and 'many-ness'. In many developed countries 'multiculturalism' has come under very strong criticism as the cause of social division, as it discourages integration.

All the three formulas described above really have a common failure. They have been founded strongly on a false premise, an unexamined assumption.

The unexamined assumption is that these formulas are suggesting that in the matter of national unity we are dealing with a majority - minorities issue, and that national unity is

about the place and rights of minorities in the state. Untrue. The real subject matter of national unity is the relationship between the indigenous population, and the newer populations (immigrants, refugees, and their descendants). This fact has been swept under the carpet because the 'liberal' media (meaning really the one with an agenda) and influential elements in society have been shepherding society toward accepting that the terms 'indigenous', 'native', 'original populations' are politically incorrect in modern conversation; and, these terms are routinely labelled as 'racist'.

The three formulas thus injudiciously ignores the fact that indigenous populations do exist, and they have a native appreciation of their rights, entitlements, expectations, and visions in their own ancestral homeland. And, that their interests would be gravely affected by the overblown considerations for the rights of the newer populations/immigrants and their descendants (those normally referred to as 'the minorities') in many country situations. National unity is not about majority - minorities relationship; it is about original population - newer populations, a consequence of immigration in history.

The indigenous/native populations of the Scandinavian countries for instance (to take the example of some very developed countries), expect their historical and natural rights, entitlements, expectations, and visions in their own ancestral homeland to be predominant in the matter of national unity, while not seeking to deny the human rights of the newer populations in Scandinavia. Else, the identity and interests of the Scandinavian countries would be dictated by the consideration for the 'minorities'.

Thus, in real and essential terms, the matter of national unity has never been truly addressed in the three said formulas.

Hence, deliberations on national unity will have to go back to the real nature of human societies. And, the matter of human civilisations. All human societies are founded on a native population. The progressive development of human civilisations is native based. All states are founded on a native population. And, the state is shaped and defined by the language and particular culture (values, norms, practices and institutions) of the particular native population. And, of course the natives have absolute rights, entitlements and ownership of the state. Foreign people who come into contact with the indigenous people whether in the course of travelling, trade, or whatever are expected to conduct themselves according to the norms and expectations of the indigenous people. Foreign people who decide to live permanently in the state will have to integrate (if not, entirely assimilate) with the native society.

This essay brings forth the fourth approach on the matter of national unity, an approach believed not to have appeared yet in the literature. This approach is named the *civilisational approach*, or the *civilisational formula*.

The civilisational approach to be clear is not novel, for there have always been established and clear norms in relations and rights of individuals and ethnic groups (natives and non natives) in the history of human civilisations, on all continents of the world. This is the essence of the civilisational approach in the matter of national unity and nation building. This formula is further explained and exemplified as we proceed in this essay.

## Man, state and society, a civilisational approach to national unity in Malaya

Applying the civilisational approach, this paper examines the matter of national unity in Malaysia, and offers a finding on the state of affairs in this country.

It is best, as it is very essential, to appreciate the consideration of national unity (as with many other matters of Malaysian affairs) in Malaysia by relating to political developments in Malaya, or to be more exact the Malay States of the Malay Peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as Malaysia is a follow up developments from the history of Malaya.

The term '*Malaya*' does not exactly convey the phenomenon and the *essence* of the land, that is the '*Malay States*' ('*Tanah Melayu*'). '*Malaya*' was merely a short form introduced by the British to refer to the '*Malay States*' in the peninsula. This point about the '*essence*' is crucial in the civilisational approach as we shall see.

The Malay Peninsula since the beginning of human history in this land has been the home of a number of Malay States. Evidences from many disciplines have shown that the Malays and the *Orang Asli* are the natives of the peninsula. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the several Malay States in the peninsula had brought on British administrators to administer the states as British protected States.<sup>1</sup> It was during this time of British protection that immigrants (Chinese and Indians) in large numbers<sup>2</sup> came to the Malay States to work in tin mines, on rubber estates, and as soldiers, and also administrative staff in the British administration in the Malay States.<sup>3</sup>

The Malay States went through the Second World War when the Japanese invaded Malaya in late 1941. Upon defeat of the Japanese in Sept. 1945, the British embarked on a plan to leave the Malay States - and to hand the states back to the natives (the Malays), in a much anticipated worldwide roll up of Western imperialism.<sup>4</sup>

The British created a *Malayan Union* in April 1946, to pave the way toward an independent unified state inclusive of all the Malay States in the peninsula, as well as the British colonies of Malay territories, of Pulau Pinang and Melaka, also in the peninsula. The plan had a short life, as it was vehemently rejected by the native Malays for reasons that should have been very plain from the start:- (a) the Union turned the Malay States into a single British colony from their separate protected states' status; (b) the sovereignty of the Malay Rulers was taken away; and, (c) foreigners were to be given citizenship with equal political rights with the native Malays. All these items combined meant an end to the *Tanah Melayu* as the Malays had known it.<sup>5</sup> The British quickly understood the message conveyed by a united Malay opposition to the Malayan Union, and the Union was abrogated.

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1 *Two Malay territories in the peninsula, Pulau Pinang and Melaka, had much earlier been taken by the British as their colonies.*

2 *These large numbers of foreigners came to escape wars, turmoil, and poverty in their homelands. They came mainly on their own, although some were brought in by the British to work the Malayan economy, and to assist the British in their administration and keeping peace in Malaya.*

3 *In earlier centuries, there were already small numbers of Chinese and Indians, and others arriving in the Malay Peninsula, mainly trading; and, some taking up residence as in the ancient Melaka port, especially.*

4 *The anticipated roll up of imperialism was very much at the instigation of the United States of America, registered to the British in particular, during World War II.*

5 Dr. Oong Hak Ching, "Dasar Malayan Union membayangkan British tidak lagi mempertahankan konsep negeri-negeri Melayu sebagai tanah air orang Melayu", dalam "Dato' Onn Jaafar dan Isu Masyarakat Cina Dalam Pembinaan Negara Bangsa Malaya, 1948-1952". Di Persidangan Kebangsaan Mengenai Dato' Onn Jaafar, 1- 4 Dis. 2006. p. 5.

A *Federation of Malaya* scheme replaced the Malayan Union in Feb. 1948, and that brought self governance to the peninsula following the first general election in 1955. The Federation of Malaya restored the *Tanah Melayu*, bringing back native sovereignty to the land of the Malays, and restoring the special position of the Malays that the British had always recognised and upheld throughout their administration of the Malay States.

In the period of almost a decade to the date *Tanah Melayu* (the official name of which was *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*) would be independent (which came about in 1957), plenty of deliberations took place both formally and informally between Malay political and non political leaders and non Malay political and non political leaders on the issue of citizenship for non Malays in the federation, a matter which the British desired. Indians in Malaya were British subjects, but Britain was not taking them back home. The Chinese in Malaya were not British subjects, but then China also did not want to take them back.

The deliberations were meant to explore ways unity - '*national unity*' - would be forged among the ethnic groups in the independent federation in Malaya.

The British had to ensure the non Malays would be citizens in Malaya, but they were fully aware of the strong misgivings of the Malays on the matter. While the non Malays argued on birth right and contributions to the country, these were not seen as a reason for citizenship to the Malays. The traditional practice of citizenship in the Malay land was that of the *rakyat raja* (the Malays and *orang asli*). That was *jus sanguinis*, citizenship by bloodline, not birth right. The non Malays were completely alien in descent and culture, and furthermore showing no indication of a desire to assimilate with the native peninsula society, and with their loyalty and sentiments clearly toward their own motherlands. Their large numbers, additionally (the combined total bigger than the Malay population), and their overwhelming economic strength compared to the Malays were a grave concern to the Malays.

The British understood the intricate challenge to forge national unity in the independent Federation of Malaya with non Malays as citizens. British officials in Malaya thus initiated and facilitated a series of informal 'frank discussions' between Malay and non Malay leaders to forge an understanding.

The British had conveyed clearly the expectation that the non Malays would '*Malayanise*' themselves upon taking up citizenship. Being 'malayanised' meant, as conceived of by the British, undivided loyalty to Malaya and the Malay Rulers, acceptance of the Malay language as the single common language, adopting '*the ways of the land*',<sup>6</sup> and a very important point, the acceptance of a nation building education system.

What the British had in mind was the assimilation of the non Malays, but most logically not assimilation into the Malay society, but acceptance and exercising the '*norms of the land*'. The 'norms of the land' meant the '*ways of the Malays*'. The term "*sufficiently assimilated into a Malayan way of life*" has been used. And, that "*assimilation determined the rules of federal citizenship in 1948*".<sup>7</sup> Such was "*assimilation ... the decisive criterion*" in the adoption of the principle of *ius soli* in the Malayan citizenship.<sup>8</sup> There was even

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6 Choo Chin Low, "Report on Citizenship Law: Malaysia and Singapore. Technical Report 2017. Cited Carnell, F. G. (1952), 'Malayan Citizenship Legislation', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 1: pp. 504-518.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

seemingly the British belief that the second generation of the immigrants would already have “*assimilated to the federation’s way of life.*”<sup>9</sup> Such was the expectation on assimilation, as it was the *raison d’etre* for the adoption of the *ius soli* as the foundation of citizenship.

In 1951, the British sponsored Barnes Committee on education for the independent Federation of Malaya, proposed an education system of Malay and English medium national schools which it described as “*a school of citizenship, a nation building school ... because we believe that all parents who regard Malaya as their permanent home and the object of their undivided loyalty will be happy to have their children educated in those languages. If any parents were unhappy about this, their unhappiness would properly be taken as an indication they did not so regard Malaya.*”<sup>10</sup>

It was evident that the British were embarking on the civilisational approach to national unity in Malaya, by seeking adherence to the ways of human civilisation.

What are the components and character of the civilisational approach to national unity. These would be:

- i) identification and recognition of the native society and civilization by the newer populations;
- ii) assimilation/integration of the newer populations with the native society/native ways;
- iii) undivided loyalty of the newer populations to the adopted homeland and to the sovereign;
- iv) recognition of the special position of the natives with definite real rights;
- v) recognition of the legitimate interests of the newer populations.

The British themselves had shown the way while they were administering the Malay States. The British administered the Malay States in the name of the Malay Rulers. The British recognised the Malays as the natives of the land, thus recognising the special position of the Malays, and the protection of Malay interests as predominant. The British administrators learned about the Malay culture and Malay history, and not just that, they researched about the culture and history of the Malays, wrote books on them and in the process promoted the growth of knowledge of the Malay culture and Malay history for the administrators, and for the Malays as well.

### **The tale of national unity in Malaya**

There was no ambiguity in the approach chosen by the British to forge national unity among the disparate ethnic groups in the independent *Persekutuan Tanah Melayu*. *Persekutuan Tanah*

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9 *Ibid.*, citing Low, C. C. Low, ‘Immigration Control during the Malayan Emergency; Borders, Belonging, and Citizenship, 1948-1960’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 89 (1), 2016, pp. 35-59.

10 *Federation of Malaya, Report of the Committee on Malay Education (Barnes Report)*, Kuala Lumpur, 1951.

*Melayu* was the chosen official name of the federation (roughly translated as the *Federation of Malaya*). The position and dignity of the Malay Rulers, the marker of the Malay civilization, enshrined in the federal Constitution. The special position of the Malays too clearly written into the Constitution. Malay established as the national language. All these details ensconced in a modern democratic space laid out by the Malayan Federal Constitution, in a form of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy, weaving together traditional Malay civilisational values and institutions, and contemporary political practice.

National unity is about oneness. It is predicated on being ‘one’. Even in the midst and reality of a multiplicity of languages and cultures - in fact, a more compelling need. Upon independence, the Malay led Malayan government stoutly embarked on a policy of forging that oneness, without eradicating the multiplicity. It was a policy of integration in a multiplicity that the Malay led government took, very much in line with the path of ‘assimilation’ that the British had projected for - not assimilation into the Malay society, but assimilation to the ‘*ways of the land*’.

Living in an environment of diversity is not an experiment, nor a novelty for the Malays of the Malay Archipelago as for thousands of years the archipelago has been a massive native society of multiplicities - with hundreds of sub ethnicities, languages and cultures spread across thousands of islands. A healthy archipelagic civilisation has always been in being, and a Malay language the *lingua franca*. The unity registers itself in the archipelago as the *rumpun bangsa* - a historical archipelagic phenomenon.

There was far less multiplicity in the independent Malayan scenario compared to the archipelagic scene. In fact, the term ‘multiplicity’ was unreal in Malaya as there were only the Malays and the non Malays. The difference however, was that the multiplicity in Malaya was composed of archipelagic and continental populations; the archipelagic being the Malays, and the continental populations being the Chinese and the Indians, meaning two diametrically opposite ethnicities and cultures. Still, that could not have been considered a barrier to the acceptance of the civilisational approach to national unity, the civilisational approach precisely being about *integration* as per the civilisational norms.

But, national unity did not come into being in Malaya, by any standard.

The problem was very clear: the refusal of a very large section of the non Malays right from the start, in particular the Chinese to ‘malayanise’, that important component of the civilisational formula. Which betrayed the fervent hope and express wish of the British administrators of Malaya, when they nudged the Malays into accepting citizenship for the non Malays. And, this failure to ‘Malayanise’ despite Chinese leaders expressing willingness of the Chinese to uphold undivided loyalty to Malaya in their frank discussions with the Malay leaders in the series of informal meetings organized by the British administrators from the late 1940s - the late 1950s; as well as, the formal understanding between the Malay and non Malay political leaders .

The British had clearly conveyed the meaning of ‘*malayanise*’ as adopting ‘*the ways of the land*’. That would be as expressed in the well known Roman adage, ‘*when in Rome, do as the Romans do*’, and the more colourful Malay adage, ‘*masuk kandang kambing membebek, masuk kandang kerbau menguak*’ (‘*when you are in the goat pen, you bleat; when you are in the buffalo byre, you grunt*’).

Clearly, the term ‘*malayanise*’ as was the term ‘Malaya’, was derived from fact of ‘malay’. To ‘malayanise’ would have meant adopting the ways of the Malay society and

civilization in the land, which would have meant acceptance of the Malay language as the national language, and adherence to the values and expectations of the Malay culture and civilisation,<sup>11</sup> recognition of Malay history, and the Malay identity as the identity of the land, as the British administrators themselves had once exhibited.

As the British quickly laid out the plans to facilitate the non Malays to ‘malayanise’, Chinese rejection of the ‘malayanise’ expectation was explicit and quick too. Not a good omen. In 1951, just as the Chinese were getting their citizenship, well before Malaya became independent, the Chinese flatly rejected the British commissioned Barnes Committee education proposal for the establishment of an education system in Malaya using Malay and English as the medium of instruction, to institute what the committee called “*a school of citizenship, a nation building school ...*”, obviously aimed at forging national unity. Tan Siew Sin, a prominent leader of the Chinese in Malaya quickly shot down the proposal, rather inexplicably (that was a long 70 years ago) characterising the “*school of citizenship ... nation building school*” as “*embodying the maxim of racial bigotry, racial intolerance ...*”.<sup>12</sup>

And, in the following year in 1952, the rejection was fully confirmed, as a subsequent committee, focussing on Chinese education in Malaya, in a report known as the Fenn-Wu Committee Report, contained a phrase that in no uncertain terms registered the Chinese sentiment in Malaya, five years before independence. The committee reported that “*to most Chinese in Malaya, ‘Malayanisation’ is anathema*”.<sup>13</sup> ‘Anathema’ was the chosen word. ‘Anathema’ as the dictionary would define it means ‘vehemently disliked’.

Thus, what transpired in Malaya was the non Malays took the citizenship, but rejected the ‘Malayanise’ part. Hence, the foundation for national unity as envisaged by the British, and in line with civilizational norms, did not show up, even as the land was proceeding towards independence.

The phenomenon that came about in Malaya was the non Malays who called themselves ‘*Malayans*’ were so only in the sense that they carried the Malayan identity card and the Malayan passport. They were not ‘*Malayans*’ in the sense of having ‘*malayanised*’, adopting the ‘*ways of the land*’, and absorbing the *essence* of the land. They were ‘*Malayans*’ by document, not ‘*Malayans*’ by *essence*.

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11 *Not all non Malays are disrespectful of and argumentative on the “ways of the land”. Example, M. Kayveas, in a letter to a newspaper about a beer festival in Kuala Lumpur wrote, “The debate over the non-approval of the Better Beer Festival 2017 continues to be more than a thorn in the side of Malaysians ... put aside our differences and preferences and challenge ourselves to look at the fundamentals. Non Malay and non-Muslim communities have the freedom to patronise drinking holes. No Muslim or Malay has protested in public ... Despite being a 60 per cent Muslim nation, non-Malays and non-Muslims continue to have their non-halal spreads in restaurants... Where is the extremism that we are screaming and hurling in every direction, in the wake of this dispute over a beer festival in public spaces, if I may ask? ... The Better Beer Festival could have been organised in a private space, and would not have infringed on our fellow Muslim citizens.... Asian values demand self-restraint and respect for the community within which we live and die ... (the) badge of prudent registration of harmonious coexistence down the centuries ... why do we fight over our so-called “right” to have a beer festival in a public space ...?. “Respect the community we live in”, Letter to New Straits Times, 30 Sept. 2017. (Underline, mine)*

12 Dr. Oong Hak Ching, p. 41.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

### **‘National unity’ in Malaysia**

Having traversed the history of man and citizenship in Malaya, and the tale of national unity or rather its absence, would enable one to understand the ‘national unity’ scene in Malaysia better.

The vast chasm between the archipelagic population (the Malays) and the continental populations (Chinese, and Indians) that showed up very dramatically from the beginning of the 1950s in Malaya, while intense preparations were being made for the independence of the land, has remained in the passage to Malaysia. The continental populations do not wish to integrate with the archipelagic population. Their expectation is for the archipelagic population (Malays and other natives) to adjust to their presence in the archipelago, instead. And, that has seemed to be the dominant view among the academics in Malaysia. With the tectonic chasm in the country’s population remaining dire, national unity has become a distant dream.

The blame for the failure of national unity in Malaysia has however been placed squarely on the ‘racial bigotry’, ‘racial intolerance’, ‘racial discrimination’, ‘extremism of the Malays’, and ‘inequality’ and ‘injustice’ in the country. With integration (or, ‘assimilation’ as the British had suggested in Malaya), if it had happened, the non Malays having already ‘Malayanised’ by 1963, when Malaysia was formed, would have learnt to understand the Malays better, rather than bent on ‘labeling’ the Malays and British as ‘racists’ as early as 1951, as Tan Siew Sin did in reacting to the Barnes Report.

That vast chasm aggravated in Malaysia especially after Lee Kuan Yew’s fiery speeches in his campaign for ‘*Malaysian Malaysia*’ from 1963. The aggravation developed as the rejection to ‘Malayanise’ that showed up from the early years of the Federation of Malaya morphed into a challenge to everything Malay in Malaysia.

The non Malays have moved toward rejecting the indigenoussness of the Malays in the land, rejecting the reality of a Malay race, and rejecting the existence of a Malay world and a Malay civilization. The history of the country is also rejected as being ‘Malay centric’, and alleged to be a lie. The identity of the country as Malay is also rejected, and the term ‘multiracial country’ has been used instead to refer to Malaysia and its identity. All these stance combined hardened the refusal to learn or know anything about the Malays, Malay culture, and Malay history. Hence, ignorance of the Malays as the native population of the land has become overwhelming. The non Malay notion of the Malays has become one of complete negativity.

A complete opposite to the attitude of the British in Malaya. The British recognised the Malays as the natives of the land, and the British sought to learn everything about the Malays. Hence, the British understood the Malays - their character, their culture, their sensitivities, their aspirations and their fears. Credit to the British, they recognised everything they found in the land, while the vast majority of the non Malays refused to recognize anything they found in the land.

Having known the Malayan citizenship story thus described, one can easily recognize the refusal to ‘Malayanise’ among a large majority of the non Malays has developed into the refusal to ‘Malaysianise’ from 1963. A refusal to adopt the native ‘ways of the land’, which in the case of Malaysia would refer to the ‘ways of the Malays, and the native peoples of Sabah and Sarawak’, meaning learning and knowing the native languages

and cultures of the land, and recognizing the primacy of these identities in the land.

In the midst of all these scenarios, there have been parading in Malaysia a phenomenon of many non Malays especially the politicians making spectacular claims that they are '*Malaysians first*'; hailing themselves as the true patriots of the country - the true Malaysians - as opposed to the Malays whom they label as racist '*Malay firsters*'. It is theatrical that the very people who refuse to *malaysianise* are the ones parading themselves as the paragons of the '*Malaysian*'.

The Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak are naturally first and foremost Malays, Kadazans, Muruts, Ibans, Orang Hulus, and so on. Together they are peoples of the *Malay stock* (the academic name of which is '*Austronesians*'), and they make up the base of the Malaysian people. '*Malaysian*' is derived from the name of the land, '*Malaysia*'. And, '*Malaysia*' in turn is derived from the '*Malay*' (and, the *Malay stock*) as the natives of the land. Without the Malays there cannot be a '*Malay-sia*', and there would not be even a single '*Malay-sian*'. On the other hand, even without the non Malays, there will always be a '*Malay-sia/n*', a country and an identity. Thus, the identity of the land is that founded on the '*Malay*', and '*the ways of the land*' of Malaysia are the '*ways of the Malays and the Malay stock*' in the Archipelago. That is the *essence* of the matter. And, it is this *essence* that the non Malays as the newer populations have to acculturate themselves to for national unity, and to be '*Malay-sians*'. The Chinese and Indians need to *Malaysianise* to absorb that *essence*. And, having done that (if they have) they will perforce have to declare themselves '*Malaysians first*' (and, only secondarily and distantly Chinese, or Indians). Definitely not '*Chinese first*', or '*Indian first*', a declaration of which would make them belong to another land.

Not having '*Malaysianised*' themselves, these '*Malaysians first*' non Malays exist only as '*Malaysians by document*', carrying the Malaysian identity card and possessing the Malaysian passport. They are not '*Malaysians by essence*'. In other words, they are not the model Malaysians they claim to be - rather, a 'low grade' Malaysian.

As continental populations who have found themselves in an archipelagic world, it cannot be for these continentalists to lead the way in determining who are '*Malaysians*'. The determination lies in the archipelagic world. That would hark back to the story of Malaya. Tunku Abdul Rahman in his first address to the UMNO General Assembly in Aug. 1951, upon winning election as the party president, poured scorn on those declaring themselves '*Malayans*', and who wanted to play the big role in the independence of Malaya. He asked rhetorically '*Who are these 'Malayans'? Let the Malays decide who they are*'.

The three earlier approaches on the subject of national unity (the constitutional/legal approach; the political approach; and, the academic approach) eschew the matter of the *essence* in the identity of the '*Malayan*' and '*Malaysian*'. To these approaches, the matter of being citizens is purely one of eligibility per legal description, or political correctness, or theoretical prescription.

### **Where is Malaysia today in the matter of national unity**

A state of *assimilation* would mean the non Malays abandoning their languages and cultures, and adopting the Malay language, and the Malay and native cultures of Malaysia. Not here.

There is no assimilation in Malaysia, and that has never been intended by official policy since the independence of Malaya more than 60 years ago.

*Integration* would mean the non Malays recognising the Malay language as the national language and upholding its prominence, while they are free to learn and keep their own languages; and, Malay and native cultures as the national culture, while the non Malays free to keep and practise their own. Not exactly the case in Malaysia today. There is only passive acceptance of the national language by the non Malays, and poor prominence given to it. And, increasingly, more non Malays do not even speak the language.

*Anti integration* is a state where the Malay language as the national language is challenged in practice, and Malay and native cultures are rejected as the national culture. This is the situation in Malaysia today - a state of *anti integration*.

*Reverse integration* is a state whereby the natives instead are being called upon to integrate with the newer populations. This is the situation in Singapore where the sentiment, as has sometimes been publicly expressed by the political elite, is that the Malays as the natives have to integrate with the 'mainstream' society, meaning the Chinese, who are the newer population; and, 'multiculturalism', so highly considered by some sections of the Malaysian population, is imperceptibly being made *passee* in Singapore, as the Singapore society is stealthily mandarinised by the Chinese elite. Such stratagem is being played out in Malaysia too by some sections of the Chinese.

A state of *anti integration* is the absolute anti-thesis of national unity. While, *reverse integration* is clearly counter civilisational, absolutely against the grain (contrary to natural inclination) of civilized behavior, whereby new populations adapt to, or integrate with, the indigenous society. The classic cases of *reverse integration* have been the takeover of North America, Australia, and other territories by Europeans settlers achieved by straight forward conquest of the indigenous populations. The North American and Australian natives have had to adapt to the conquerors instead. Conquest is an ultimate act of counter civilization. Other than conquest, *reverse integration* will be attempted when the newer populations seek to dominate the indigenous people in all fields of national life by demanding 'equality' and 'meritocracy' in a completely *laissez faire* system, which disfavour the indigenous population, and which would surely result in the language and culture of the dominated indigenes becoming devalued and ultimately marginalised.

Thus, the civilisational approach/appreciation of the subject matter of national unity has revealed the above developments in Malaysia. The three earlier approaches (the constitutional/legal; the political; and, the academic) merely stake out the boundaries of a legal community, a political community, or a theoretical community, all of which are claimed to be a basis of national unity; little consideration given to attitude, sentiment and *essence*, whereas, it is these (the unifying ones) or lack of them that build or forestall national unity.