



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i11/15651> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i11/15651

Received: 04 September 2022, **Revised:** 06 October 2022, **Accepted:** 24 October 2022

Published Online: 09 November 2022

In-Text Citation: (Zakaria et al., 2022)

To Cite this Article: Zakaria, J., Yaakob, A. F., & Zawawi, H. Y. (2022). Social Cohesion for Community Development in Malaysia: Impact to National Integration. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(11), 1293 – 1305.

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Vol. 12, No. 11, 2022, Pg. 1293 – 1305

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Social Cohesion for Community Development in Malaysia: Impact to National Integration

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Abstract

Malaysian population is made up various segments. Over the years, it has developed unique characters that have become part of the make-up or the identity of Malaysia. Other than its multi-ethnics composition, such an identity has consequently given rise to political and cultural hegemonies that lead to the inevitability of conflict between the ethnics, seen as the major hurdle of the community and developmental policies. Not only has the ethnic conflict stifled socio-economic development, but it has also as well interrupted developmental policies, apart from causing extreme socialization of ethnic politics marred with prejudice and bloody skirmishes among the communities. Pursuant to that, this article examines the background of the conflict to identify the factors that influence the dynamics of the Malaysian community conflict. Hitherto, numerous literatures over the subject have pointed to the applicability of the theory of social cohesion deemed to suit Malaysia's multi-ethnic characteristic of the community. In this regard, social cohesion will be applied as a tool to measure the level of national integration among Malaysians. This study argues that the theory of social cohesion, for all intents and purposes, is defective as it fails to end ethnic conflict. As such, it is only appropriate that the theory needs to be improved to allow for accurate comprehension of the causes of ethnic conflict, and other problems that hamper national community development. At the same time, this qualitative study also offers significant opportunity for future research that seeks to resolve the problem of ethnic unity of the country. The fact is, community development and its involvement in the implementation of the related policy, are integral to preserve national harmony and political stability. More so since the system of punishment, the supposedly permanent means to make national integrity stronger, is no longer reliable due to its vulnerability to political abuse.

Keywords: Community Development, Social Cohesion, Ethnic Politics, Socio-economy Class, Hegemony, Political Identity.

Social Cohesion and Ethnopolitics

As far as the context of this study is concerned, it is paramount to take cognizance and understand social cohesion so as to appreciate its integral role vis-a-vis national integration.

Easterly (2006) argues that social cohesion is fundamental for the success of public institution or for the government to be more effective in carrying out the policy of development. Furthermore, Ester's study also indicates that developing countries had notably significant national bond which helped successful implementation of a policy and efficient functioning of the public administration. Yet, overly fervent ethnic politics will usually lead only to discord, dispute and conflict. More so since the discourse on ethnic politics has brought about the politics of identity that Fukuyama (2018) has deliberated much on through his as many writings. Indirectly, this also gives rise to prejudice between ethnic classes with elements of staunch ethnocentrism especially amongst the members of a heterogeneous community. Hussein (2016) strongly supports this contention, arguing that competition between the economic classes and social status recognition usually constitute two of the biggest issues in ethnic relations. Such a prejudice also comes to the fore when minority ethnic becomes dominant in economy as opposed to the majority ethnic or the natives (Chua, 2003; Jomo, 2013; Mustafa, 2014).

In the meantime, social cohesion has become a key criterion for community development for many developing countries. Due to the fact that the multi-ethnics feature of the community can always become a major obstacle to the policy of development, the resulting conflict will most likely upset political stability and disrupt social ethnic relations. Social cohesion can be defined as a strong degree of social bond between and amongst certain groups of the community. The variety of the social backgrounds, and the resulting conflicts that usually follow can be overcome by a resolute attachment between the social groups of the community, for which a stable relationship between the members can be created. As a result, close cooperation of the social groups of various categories can be in harmony despite the uninhibited prevalence of high, omnipresent primordial elements. According to Stanley (2003), social cohesion forms the voluntary and willingness of the community members to work with each other to attain peace and development. Moreover, social cohesion also involves pluralism consolidation process within the community, which then helps with reducing imbalances and closing the socio-economy disparities therein (Manca, 2014).

For Amri (2014), social cohesion can be realized via three basic things i.e., founded on certain principles or indicators: firstly, acculturation of cultural acceptance or other elements of some particular groups by certain other groups or individuals. It is important to note that the acceptance of a new culture or element by a certain group will neither make another group to give up its identity nor will it disappear. Besides, it is only materialistic in nature. Secondly, amalgamation; cultural amalgamation or cultural synthesis between different ethnics will lead to the formation of a new group. Thirdly, assimilation; fusion or integration of certain groups or ethnics to the extent of creating new identity. As such, Shamsul Amri notes, social cohesion needs to reach a certain level before unity in its true sense can be realized in a society. This however does not disprove the fact that the Malaysian society had reached a particular level of unity which contributed to its winning independence from the colonial power through a political concord. In addition to that, as far as each and the rights of every individual and group are concerned, social contract agreement as it is embedded in the Federal Constitution, serves as a foundation of integration that was agreeable by all parties. Nevertheless, such a level of unity faced its strongest test yet when a nationwide ethnic riot broke out on 13th May 1969. It turns out that the existing level of unity was so fragile that an

ethnic conflict of such a magnitude had shattered the peace and harmony all parties had worked so hard for following the independence (Comber, 2011).

Ethnocentric behaviours, born out of compelling attachment to ethnic primordial elements, have led to deepened prejudice between members of the community. It is aggravated by ethnic hegemony, which by nature, has the tendency to defend and preserve one's own identity (Jazimin, 2019). Nonetheless, the administration of MAGERAN that lasted 20 months i.e. 16th May 1969 – February 1971, had successfully brought back political stability and peace to the country. Following the restoration of Parliament, the government headed by Tun Razak pursued policies of development aimed to address and resolve the problem of unity. As a result of that, social cohesion, on literal and practical terms, was visible through the objectives of Razak's New Economic Policy (DEB). Apparently, the elimination of ethnic-based economy and the restructuring of the society made up the key agendas of social cohesion which Razak initiated.

To that end, social unity in the context of this study focuses more on the model of political structure of a country. Ethnic composition of a country's population has its own challenges. Homogeneous ethnic or population is easier to manage and is less exposed to conflicts as opposed to heterogeneous one (Amri, 2014). Wealth distribution is the main challenge. Social cohesion is key to neutralizing sensitive elements and prejudice amongst members of the society made up of diverse backgrounds. According to Norton and Haans (2013), social cohesion has a number of elements; firstly, citizenship or social membership. The clarity of identity and basic backgrounds are vital to determine the basic rights of a particular ethnic. This, in then, will facilitate and ease the public administration affairs in establishing inter-ethnic interaction.

Secondly; fairness and equality, that is, tolerance and the different ways of acceptance should be ascertained in the society according to the ethnic especially in terms of opportunity and social movements. This is important in the sense that not only will it help prevent the misunderstanding of existing primordial elements within each ethnic, it will also help put in check sensitive acts and behaviours. Thirdly; protection of access to public amenities and life's basic needs. This apparently refers to social guarantee for each member of the society against the loss of job income and wealth. Public assistance and aids, from the aspect of basic needs such as education, should also be guaranteed as it serves as the instrument to creating national identity especially in a country composed of plural or multi-ethnicity. These instrumental elements are significant in resolving identity conflicts and the ethnic-based economic disparity. Fourthly; the role of national institutions or the government; implementation of the three aspects aforementioned based on the power of the government or politics such as policy making and programs meant for public services. Other than that, the institutions should also ensure the extension of fairness and equality to all ethnics i.e. access and opportunity in economy and social aspects.

Many sociological experts agree with Norton and Haan (2013), believing that the latter's arguments demonstrate their appreciation and comprehension of the limitation and the challenges of the society regardless of ethnic or social class that could reduce conflict. Building on that, Amri (2014) argues that the access to social mobility is the challenge that should be addressed in order to avoid conflict from breaking out. Obviously, being left out in economic

distribution will lead to the rise, and its reinforcement, of prejudice among the ethnics. In support of Shamsul's argument, the findings Horowitz (2000); Dan Mustafa (2014) further demonstrate class struggle mostly precedes full-scale ethnic conflict. Competition and rivalry to keep and maintain the status quo through strong primordial elements can precede perpetual hatred among the ethnics. Chua (2003); Muhammed (2014) also find that instrumental elements such as class struggle usually lead to ethnic conflict.

For Mansor (2000), for most of the time, sentiments or primordial elements lead to waning ethnic limitation which in turn gives rise to prejudice. This, as a matter of fact, vindicates that both primordial elements and instrumental have strong link with each other. In the context of Malaysia, these elements keep showing up in ethnic conflicts that have occurred before independence and up to the present day. Ethnic conflicts circa 2019 until 2017 can be seen to be serious especially after the government loosens up the control mechanism in ethnic management in the country. When the Internal Security Act 1960 was repealed, the legislative body passed the Security Offences Special Measures Act 2012 (SOSMA, 2012). Since then, there appears to be a rise in ethnic conflict with an increase of 50% in several states nationwide. Apparently, this indicates that social cohesion should come with thorough and rigorous controlling mechanisms especially in a society with distinct identity of political ethnic. As a result of that, Malaysia has a complicated challenge towards well-developed national integration with public policies such as DEB and DPN, founded on social cohesion elements, appear to fail to achieve their objectives. One of the reasons can be attributed to the country's democratization lacking the assimilation of values and community identities.

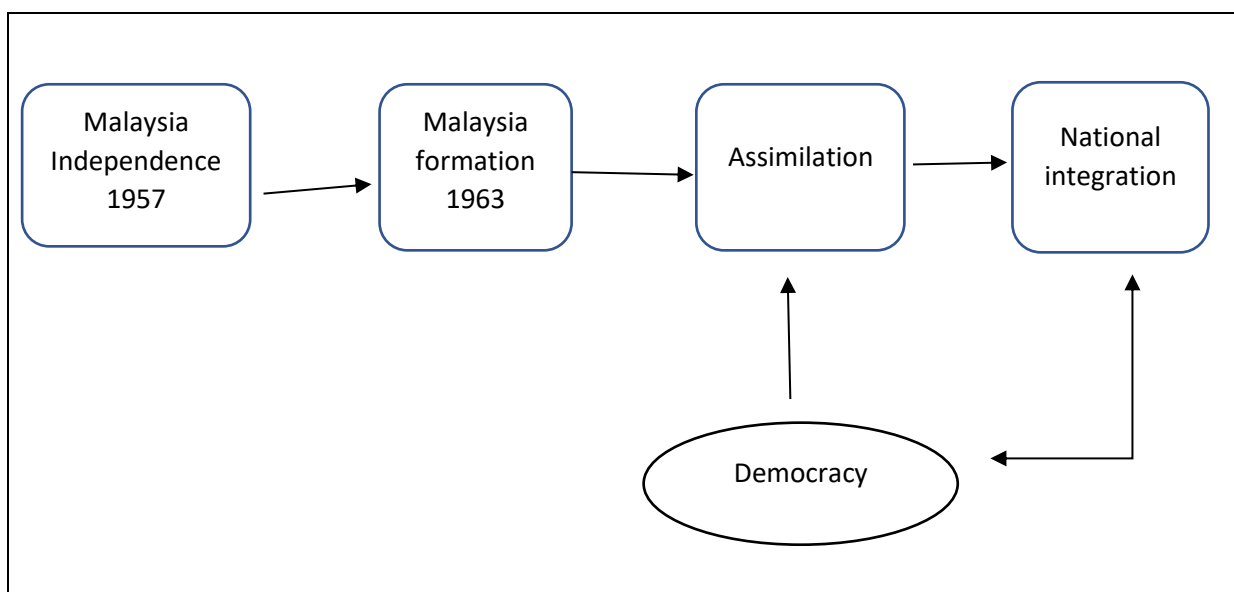


Figure 1: Democratic Transition to ethnic integration

Democratization is a long process. It needs to happen systematically to avoid backlash in the future. In other words, the hurdle towards national integration through social cohesion is democratization devoid of assimilation. The democratic transition should be accompanied by a consolidation process of the local elements or the country's historical backgrounds. Evidently, democracy without assimilation is risky and highly exposed to racial conflicts what more in a multi-ethnic country with diverse backgrounds. Assimilation and integration in many countries in the world have afforded them with a safe space for ethnic relations

especially for the minorities (Chua, 2003). According to Parekh (2005), integration correlates with belief and dignity. The lack of understanding of these two elements will make the creation of harmony to be difficult and hard to achieve. Certainly, assimilation requires genuine acceptance from the local community and only through it the identity of the immigrant ethnics can be preserved. This has obviously happened to the Malays, which make up the majority ethnic, and yet more than willing to accept and recognize the identity of non-Malay ethnic in the society.

Ramona (2006) asserts that integration without assimilation will certainly cause problems to democracy itself. The crux of the matter is that the history and background of the country must be the foundation for the native and the majority ethnic's nation-building. Thus, such element should be maintained so as to keep the condition for acceptance of integration without assimilation. Malaysia's colonial history has changed the social landscape of the native, Malay community before and after independence. However, the pre-independence social contract had given the opportunity for the integration of the other ethnics i.e. without the need to assimilate with the locals whilst maintaining their own identities. Parekh (2005) highlights a number of social integration conditions for the minority ethnics to keep a harmonious inter-ethnic relation; Firstly, absolute loyalty to the host country. Secondly, immigrants must never make their countries of origin, or same ethnics in other countries, as a point of reference. Priority and commitment must be demonstrated and shown to the host country. This is crucial to get rid of prejudiced feelings amongst the locals. Thirdly, acceptance of the cultural elements and values of the host country. These three are instrumental because they help facilitate and ease the process of integration to take place whilst creating the confidence of loyalty among the locals.

Obstacle to Social Cohesion and National Integration

The major obstacle to creating social cohesion in the country points to the plurality character of the society itself as well as the liberal nature of the doctrine of democracy. More often than not, these have hampered the implementation of national integration by the government, which is further hindered by the emergence of civil society movements and extreme ethnic groups abusing liberal democratic concept as the right to be even more racist. Despite Malaysia effecting national integration founded on the spirit of social cohesion such as providing the right and access to education according to ethnicity i.e. vernacular schools and recognizing ethnic identities via political power-sharing - one in which all ethnics are allowed to keep their identities - these are still far from being satisfactory for some minority ethnic groups. The incessant demands for so-called equal rights and even going to the extent of challenging the constitution in issues involving religion (Article 3), language (Article 152) and the position of the Malay Kings (Article 174, 181) have often led to restrained inter-ethnic relations.

They even misuse the principle of freedom in the context of democracy in order to preserve the status quo of their own ethnic groups (Jazimin, 2022). This is different from what one can see in the United States of America (USA). According to Huntington (2005), the melting pot of the USA provides a transparent social cohesion package whereby no special privileges are accorded to any particular ethnic group, challenges notwithstanding. This is entirely different from Malaysia, which implements the policy of integration but at the same time preserves a strong identity of each ethnic in the country. Yet, Huntington observes that racial issues in the USA are still rampant. Across the country, there have been numerous cases of ethnic discriminations and racism that disrupt inter-ethnic relations. The introduction of ethnic

identity within the American community also occurs especially amongst the immigrants' generations like Latin Americas, Blacks and Asians (Fukuyama, 2019). Although Obama brought with him positive indicator, that is the end of white domination when he became the first black President of USA in 2008, the deaths of black American such as Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown Jr and Eric Garner who died while being in the police custody could well indicate that even the US's melting pot also fails to achieve its objective. Comparable situation can also be seen during Indonesia's Presidential Election (Pilpres) in 2019 when the supporters of presidential candidates of Widodo and Jokowi were involved in violent, bloody clashes over issues of religion.

Ethnic Hegemony or Ethnic Democracy

Shaping a plural society into one with strong multi-ethnic relation is an arduous task. Since the elements of hegemony within each ethnic are inherently primordial, they are naturally predisposed to repudiate or refuse any effort that could lead to more harmonious inter-ethnic integration. Systems of education, culture and language, for examples, are not readily inclined to neither adapting nor adopting changes. Among others, these indicate just how important hegemony is in keeping the status quo of an ethnic. Ethnic hegemony refers to an ethnic's strong bond or attachment in keeping its identity, manifested in institutional or political forms. In this context, ethnic hegemony points more towards the efforts undertaken by an ethnic to defend its identity for the purpose of making it visible to the society and social system. Often, hegemony looks at the domination by the majority ethnic over the minority one.

The discourse on ethnic hegemony such as the one occurring in Palestine can illustrate the way it can be systematically implemented, that is by turning the institution into a controlling mechanism and enforcement (Smootha, 1997). Likewise, ethnic hegemony in Singapore occurs in the form of the majority ethnic controlling public policy and the rights of each citizen by affording special privileges to Chinese ethnic as opposed to other ethnics (Barr & Skrbis, 2008). The assimilation of non-Chinese ethnic is also carried out to complete the identity of dominant-Chinese ethnic (Barr & Low, 2005). As far as national control is concerned, Malaysia itself is always labelled as practising dominant Malay-ethnic hegemony. Yet, looking at the state's socio-economy disparities and classes, the Malays are found to occupy the lowest rung as opposed to the non-Malays who are more dominant in economy, hence doing well and better than the Malays as a whole (Muhammad, 2014; wee & Jomo). Despite such paradox, Malaysia continues its social integration, which retains the identity of the non-Malay ethnic in the multi-ethnic composition of the country's population.

Socio-Economy Classes According to Ethnicity

It is only appropriate that the discourses on ethnic segregation in the society of Malaysia should also include ethnic-oriented community development. In hindsight, the history of ethnic development begins in the early years of Malaysia's independence. Mainly, it can be attributed to British's divide and rule policy as well as the massive influx of the immigrants the British brought in 1920. These had permanently altered the original social landscape of Malaya, for which the Malays almost exclusively made up the native and majority ethnic (Muhammad, 2014). Following the arrival of the immigrants, new and distinct ethnic groups began to be forming in economic classes. In terms of control, these proved to be helpful for the British in managing the different ethnics. Moreover, British gaining full control of the Straits Settlements also gave it the advantage in terms of domination on the sources of

economy and administration in Malaya. Indirectly, the exploitation of tin mining and the management of economy by the Chinese ethnic had further widened and expanded ethnic segregation (Khoo, 2000; Combers, 2011).

In addition to it, British continued to impose on the rulers of Malaya (Raja-raja Melayu) its own administrative policy as a pretext to help with the administration and development in the Federated Malay States and Non-Federated Malay States. For Non-Federated Malay States, although there were no British residents acting as advisors to the respective Malay rulers, British remained in control of their administration and economy right until the conclusion of British-Siamese Treaty 1909. The economy was thriving and became more active with the support of cheap labour from India. At the same time, the composition of the Malayan society was going through significant transformations when up to 70% immigrants resided in Malaya after the 1950s (Muhammad, 2014).

Breakdown of Population in the Major Cities of the Malaysian Peninsular 1970

Ethnic	Town Population	Percentage
Malay	699000	28
Chinese	1479000	58
Indian	324000	18
Others	28000	1
Total	2530000	100

Source: Comber (2011); Peristiwa 13 Mei Sejarah Perhubungan Melayu-Cina, Ooi Jin Bee, Semenanjung Malaysia, pp. 171

Based on the table above, the ethnic composition of the country had affected a massive shift particularly in major town areas. Obviously, the imbalances resulting from the uncontrolled, rash immigration policy and colonialism of British had brought about massive changes to social landscape of the society. Drawn by lucrative economic resources in town areas, the non-Malay ethnic had risen to be more than 77% of the native population. This condition had generated a discontent feeling especially when the elite groups of non-Malay ethnics began to openly dispute or challenge the sensitive elements of the constitution (Milne & Mauzy, 1999).

Social cohesion in the context of the society development appears to have had a long history. Thus, obstacles arising from the historical backgrounds or historical factors have certainly impeded social integration further. Despite the introduction of DEB and DPN to help eliminate or reduce the gaps between the ethnics, they continued to face a strong challenge from the strong ethnic hegemony, which aims to defend the ethnic own identities. This makes the integration process to become more complicated. Malaysia does not implement forced assimilation or any other way that can cause major conflicts. However, the room for integration, on the contrary, was made as a solid justification by certain parties to become even more ethnocentric and racist. Prior to independence, British had opened vast numbers of new villages and estate communities all over Malaya. Malay states in the West coast had begun to experience ethnic segregation transformation when sporadic, separate divisions within the population – established according to economic activities - sprung into existence in masses especially in Perak, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan in the 19th century. Following British's divide and conquer policy, these allowed for the consolidation British control over Malay states. They also allowed for British to keep political stability throughout.

The population distribution according to ethnicity, at the beginning, was based on economic activity. Nonetheless, the implementation of new economic policy and national development

policy had created a new landscape for ethnic composition (Jomo & Wee, 2000). With the Communist terrorism entering the fray, the society in Malaya continued to be infused with substantial changes, that is through Briggs plan which aimed to cut off the Communist relations with the Chinese community. Through this strategy (Briggs plan), British opened heavily guarded new settlements for the Chinese all over Malaya. According to Comber (2008), close to 500,000 Chinese were relocated to these new villages to isolate them from the Communist terrorists. Up till today, there are 612 Chinese new villages in the country. According to sources, in 2021, about RM84 million had been allocated for the development of these new villages in which RM69 millions were spent for infrastructural development, RM5 millions for house repair works and RM10 millions for special loan schemes.

Furthermore, disproportionate development policy also contributes to ethnic prejudice. Continuing ethnic conflict has hampered the community policy and development programs. Big economic disparities have made it even more difficult for the government to implement community development programs. The 2019 poverty incidence, according to ethnicity, indicates that there was only one percent poverty rate amongst the Chinese and Indian ethnics as opposed to all other ethnics in Malaysia. This figure was lower than the majority Malay ethnic who recorded a five percent poverty incidence. This dire situation suggests an obvious, apparent and huge economic disparity amongst the ethnics. This is unhealthy for a plural society. The government efforts in community development characterized by ethnic politics, coupled with demands for palpable ethnic hegemony the likes of vernacular schools, economic opportunity and wealth distribution are often singled out as the causes of ethnic conflicts (Jazimin, 2019). Access to education and social mobility should be the key elements in realizing social cohesion (Amri, 2014). Yet, support for ethnic and prejudice, born out of disproportionate development, has severely compromised ethnic relations.

Table 3

Mean of monthly household gross income by ethnic group, strata and state, Malaysia, 1970 - 2019

	2004	2007	2009	2012	2014	2016	2019
Malaysia	3,249	3,686	4,025	5,000	6,141	6,958	7,901
Ethnic Groups							
Bumiputer	2,711	3,156	3,624	4,457	5,548	6,267	7,093
a							
Chinese	4,437	4,853	5,011	6,366	7,666	8,750	9,895
Indian	3,456	3,799	3,999	5,233	6,246	7,150	8,216
Others	2,312	3,561	3,640	3,843	6,011	4,951	5,933

Source: Economic Planning Unit

Table 3 shows 20% household income disparity according to ethnicity between the Malays and the Chinese with another 10% between the latter and Indian. In total, among the three ethnics, the Malays were at the bottom rung in terms of economic classes. Evidently, the minority ethnics of the Chinese and Indian were at the top economic echelons as opposed to the Malays in the country notwithstanding the latter being the native, majority ethnic supported by affirmative policy. As such, it becomes clear that the domination of economic class is poorly balanced between all ethnics. Having said that, the affirmative policy that is assumed to be Malay-hegemony driven, does not discriminate other ethnics in terms of socio-

economy. Nonetheless, big economic disparity tends to lead to ethnic prejudice sentiments (Wee & Jomo, 2013; Chua, 2003; Hussain, 2014; Muhammad, 2014; Comber, 2015).

Dual-Education System

Education is an aspect of community development. A good education system helps influence the shape and direction of a policy and development plans, and their execution, in a harmonious and safe environment. Still, the matter of the fact is, the stability of the existing harmony depends very much on a single education system. Malaysia has a complicated history of education since pre-independence era. The Fenn Wu report (1951), which served to counter Barnes Report (1950), justified a strong attachment to ethnicity. It represented an outright objection or dissatisfaction of the Chinese ethnic to the application of national education system that made it compulsory for all schools to use Malay language as the medium of instruction. Although the Education Ordinance of 1956 did not recognize vernacular schools, "Penyata Razak" (Razak Report) (1956) eventually agreed to give in to the demands of the Indian and Chinese ethnics to keep and maintain vernacular schools, with a number of conditions notwithstanding.

According to Tan (2002), the existence of vernacular schools began to be seen in the early of 1954. In the initial phase, these vernacular schools were sponsored by the local community. At this time, there were 1,301 SJKC (Chinese vernacular schools) and 527 SJKT (Tamil vernacular schools) in Malaysia, making the total of all SJK (vernacular schools) to be 1,828. All these SJK used the mother tongue of respective ethnic as the medium of instruction with the syllabus was wholly brought and copied from China and India. Almost 100 percent of the syllabus was taught in Chinese and Tamil languages. On one hand, Tamil school is put under the national education system, hence the acronym i.e. "Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Tamil" (SJKT). The Chinese schools, on the other, has two types. Firstly: "Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina" (SJKC), which is put under the national education system and follows the national syllabus that is in accordance with national education philosophy. Secondly; Chinese private schools run by the private sector with the board of the school management is composed of the exclusively Chinese ethnic community itself. Its syllabus is prepared by the Examination Board from China and Taiwan. It also issues its own education certificate known as Unified Examination Certificate (UEC).

However, the current practice and operation of SJKC is different from recommendations contained in Fenn Wu and Razak Reports. In fact, there have also been lots of demands and requests coming from these SJKCs that are contradictory to the objective of national social cohesion. Ho (2015) even contends that Chinese education system must be protected from Malay ethnic hegemony in Malaysia due to the efforts by the public institutions to honour the Malay language as the national language. Essentially, Ho's view is flawed and inaccurate due the position of the Malay language as the national language in the federal constitution (FC). As such, it is only proper that the public institutions use the Malay language in the state's affairs. Since Malay is the official language as stated by Article 152 of the FC, it possesses the fundamental right to be used as the state's lingua franca. Still, the FC does not prohibit the use of languages of other ethnics in their daily life. The government even ensures the survival of Chinese education by setting up "Sekolah Wawasan" and provides combined education in national schools. Chinese educational non-governmental organizations, nevertheless, continue to resist and oppose such measures.

For Heyneman (2003), different education has the tendency to create rooms for exploitation by ethnic politics of certain quarters. Moreover, distinctive and dissimilar learning

environment has the ability to help construct a wholly different way of thinking. The process to understand each other as well as between the ethnics will most certainly not occur. Unfortunately, this will only generate prejudice. Often, differences in curriculums open the space for differences in opinion and the viewpoint of identity according to ethnicity.

In addition to that, Green et al (2010), argues that education-driven social cohesion is inadequate to bring about harmony in a multi-ethnic society due to the existence of social classes in education. Green et al. observes that to rely solely on the justice and equality system is far from being sufficient to produce a good social cohesion due to the inherent socio-economy classes in the society. Contradictory or divergent educational system such as boarding school or elite schools have resulted in different systems of thoughts. Consequently, the existence of vernacular schools has made things to be even worse more so since they only consolidate and reinforce strong attachment and hegemony of one's own ethnic.

In the meantime, the selective causes pursued by certain civil societies in the country, indirectly serves as another impediment to social cohesion. For some, social cohesion sees democracy as the best platform to achieve the objective of uniting the diverse backgrounds of the society (Norton & Hans, 2013). This, in general, offers more rooms and spaces for the society to be more tolerant and open in as much as it guarantees the basic and civil rights of every member of the of society. However, Malaysia's democracy construct is different from that of the Western's liberal democracy and that of most European countries. The predisposition to see and understand Western liberal democratization to have identical approaches and methods is a mistake. Democracy, as it should be, must move along and suit the unique features and backgrounds of a country. The causes taken up by the civil society, which obviously represents a certain ethnic and certain interests, only lead towards unhealthy rivalry. This, in turn, hampers social cohesion even further. The championing of selective educational issues by ethnic-based NGOs like Dong Zhong and Suqui in defending the status quo of Chinese education is a good example.

Not only does the cause of such NGO run against the philosophy of national education that honours the Malay language as the official language (Article 152 of FC), it also frustrates the effort taken by the government towards national integration i.e. creation of a single nation-state. Besides, the movement of human rights, almost always, is unconstitutional in nature and it, often times, constrains ethnic relation more than it does to reconcile it.

Conclusion

On a whole, social cohesion cannot be seen to have matured in Malaysia. Consequently, it fails to achieve the objective of full-fledged community development. This, in turn, results in unsatisfactory developmental policy the country aspires to achieve. The obstacle towards integration comes in the form of ethnic hegemony and ethnocentrism so strong that national integration becomes so difficult to be realized. Additionally, ethnopolitics driven by education and economic development, has brought about ethnic-based social classes and political identities in the society. This condition provides the room for the political elites, as the biggest beneficiaries, to claim themselves as the representatives for their own ethnics. This then allows them to be influential and remain in power. The abuse of democratization worsens things especially when such is allegedly used as a tool for the creation of social cohesion and equality of rights.

The selective struggle of individual groups or parties in the society who claim to have based their cause on fair and equality of basic human rights has frustrated the process of national integration. In achieving their objectives, these parties even disregard the foundation of the

nation and its history on purpose. The fact is, maximum or mature social cohesion can only be realized through adopting uniform system of education and removing ethnic identity by way of adaptable assimilation in the future. Hegemony, which currently lies on ethnic identity in this country should be eliminated not only to prevent conflict but also to stop prejudice from growing and continuing to impede full national integration.

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