The importance of ethnicity in Malaysia: A comparative study in Penang and Glasgow

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Abstract

Ethnicity has always been regarded as a central issue in Malaysia's socio-political and economic spheres. Whilst it is true that the country has been able to sustain a relatively stable political economy, at least since the Malay-Sino Riot of 1969, Malaysian inter-ethnic relationships remain fragile and delicate. This thesis explores the importance of ethnicity for Malaysians by focusing on the relationships between Malay and Chinese students in Penang and Glasgow. Drawing upon data acquired from fifty-five interviews, observations and secondary data analysis, the thesis locates the importance of ethnicity within a dialectical relationship between the State (Malaysia's societal structures of family, education, occupation and politics) and the everyday actors (understanding, experiences and challenges). In this way, the thesis presents an analysis of the complex ways in which ethnic identification and categorisation are practised at the macro-structural level, and explores their intersection with a wide range of individual and collective identities. The thesis also seeks to challenge the *identity* of the Malaysian ethnic and nation-state epistemology, arguing that the knowledge which it produces contributes to the formulation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries in the Malaysian everyday understanding. In contrast to the primordial understanding of ethnicity, this thesis argues from an instrumentalist standpoint for an understanding that the boundaries were socially constructed for instrumental ends led by the State elites. The findings suggest that the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia is beyond the everyday manifestation of identity. It involves several overlapping concerns of the boundaries – religious and cultural – which by *habitus* were built to become the essence of Malay-ness and Chinese-ness. Its practicality, however, is contextual and situational depending on locations, needs, regionality and interlocutors. The results were seen in the diversity of choices made by respondents in their spouse or partner preferences, social networks, education, occupation and political views.

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Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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Signature:

Abbreviations

ABIM	*Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement)
BA	*Barisan Alternatif*
BN	*Barisan Nasional* (National Front)
CPC	Communist Party of China
DAP	Democratic Action Party
ECM	Extended case method
FMS	Federated Malay States
GE	General election
GofU	University of Glasgow
GUMS	Glasgow University Malaysian Society
ICSS	Independent Chinese Secondary School
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
IOK	Islamisation of Knowledge
JAKIM	*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (Department of Islamic Development, Malaysia)
JAKOA	*Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli* (Department of Indigenous People)
JIM	*Jemaah Islam Malaysia*
JPA	*Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awan* (Public Service Department)
JPN	*Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara* (Department of National Registration)
KL	Kuala Lumpur
KMG	*Komuniti Malaysia Glasgow* (Malaysian Glasgow Community)
KMM	*Kesatuan Melayu Muda*
KMT	Kuomintang Party
LCE	Lower Certificate of Education
MARA	Council of Trust for the *Bumiputra*
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army

MRE	Malay Reservation Enactment
MRL	Malay Reserved Land
MRSM	*Maktab Rendah Sains MARA* (MARA science secondary schools)
MU	Malayan Union
NCP	National Cultural Policy
NEP	New Economic Policy
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
PAP	Peoples' Action Party
PAS	*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
PEKIDA	*Persatuan Kebajikan Islam dan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia* (Islamic Welfare and Dakwah Malaysia Association)
PERKASA	*Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa* (Mighty Native Organisation)
PGRM	*Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia* (Malaysian People's Movement Party)
PG	Post graduate students
PKPIM	*Persatuan Kebangsaan* Pelajar (Islam Malaysia)
PKR	*Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (People's Justice Party)
PLS	Plain language statement
PMR	*Peperiksaan Menengah Rendah* (Lower Secondary National Examination)
PR	People's Pact (*Pakatan Rakyat*/PR)
PRM	*Parti Rakyat Malaysia* (Malaysian People's Party)
PKR	*Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (People's Justice Party)
RM	*Ringgit Malaysia*
SAN	*Sekolah Agama Negeri* (State Religious School)
SAR	*Sekolah Agama Rakyat* (People's Religious School)
SBP	*Sekolah Berasrama Penuh* (fully residential schools)
SITC	Sultan Idris Teaching College
SMKA	*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama*/National Secondary Religious school
SMAR	*Sekolah Menengah Agama Rakyat (*People Religious Secondary School)
SMKJC	*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Jenis Cina* (National Secondary Type [Chinese] School)

SMK	*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (National Secondary School)
SMU	Singapore Malay Union
SOAS	School of African and Oriental Studies
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SPM	*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education)
SK	*Sekolah Kebangsaan* (National Primary School)
SKJC	*Sekolah Kebangsaan Jenis Cina* (National Primary Type Chinese School)
SKJT	*Sekolah Kebangsaan Jenis Tamil* (National Primary Type Tamil School)
STPM	*Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia* (Malaysian Higher School Certificate)
UCSCA	United Chinese School Committees' Association
UEC	Unified Examination Certificate
UG	Undergraduate students
UiTM	*Universiti Teknologi MARA* (MARA University of Technology)
UK	United Kingdom
UKM	*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia* (National University Malaysia)
UM	*Universiti Malaya* (University of Malaya)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UMS	Unfederated Malay States
USM	*University Sains Malaysia* (University of Sciences Malaysia)
UTM	*Universiti Teknologi Malaysia* (University of Technology Malaysia)
UPSR	*Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah* (Primary School Achievement Test)
YDPA	*Yang Dipertuan Agong*

Definitions

Bumiputra	Sons of the soil
Baba-Nyonya	Straits-born Chinese in Penang, Malacca and Singapore
Bomoh	Malay traditional doctor
Cina-Peranakan	Straits-born Chinese in Kelantan and Terangganu
Halal	Permissible (usually of food)
Haram	Prohibited (usually of food)
Iban, Bidayuh and Melanau	Natives groups in Sarawak
Jookidam	Japanese army
Kaum Muda	Modernist/New Generation
Kaum Tua	Traditionalist/Old Generation
Kadazan, Dusun, Bajau and Murut	Natives groups in Sabah
Kerah	Unpaid labour
Kerajaan	Malay traditional political system
Keris	Malay traditional sword
Madrasah	Formal Malay traditional religious school
Pawang	Malay shaman
Penghulu	Chief man
Pondok	Informal Malay traditional religious school
Rakyat	Usually refers to the subject class
Raja	Indian title for a king
Sultan	Arab title for a king
Surau	Small chapel

Syariah	Islamic laws and regulations
Taharah soap	A special soap for purifying utensils
Tawkay	Reference to Chinese businessmen (small-scale business)
Tycoon	Reference to Chinese businessmen (large-scale business)
Ulama	Muslim scholar

Chapter One: Introduction

1   Prologue

This study is carefully designed to produce an understanding of the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. At the beginning of this thesis, it will be useful for me to explain my own personal interest in the study of ethnicity in Malaysia. I am a Malay who was brought up in the northern *rural* area of Malaysia. My hometown population consisted of Malays as the majority and Chinese as the minority. In our everyday interactions, I have never seen the Chinese as a threat to me or my family, and I believe that they feel the same about us Malays. In regard to my primary, secondary and tertiary educational background, I never had non-Malay friends or knew any non-Malays who were the same age as me. The closest Chinese to me were the Chinese people living in my neighbourhood, with whom I was and still am friendly and comfortably interact using our shared northern Malay dialect during our commercial contacts. Admittedly, I rarely questioned my social life patterns and experiences. I had assumed that it was normal for Malaysians to be secluded in their own ethnic community because of the differences in our language, religion and customs, and that we undertook interactions with people of other ethnicities only as commercial or formal relationships. I only started to look at my ethnicity in a different way when I had to vote for the first time in 2008. I saw how all of the political parties during that year could be understood to be dominated by a specific ethnicity. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) mainly represent Malays, whilst the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP) mainly comprising Chinese. Indians, on the other hand, are represented by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). These political parties also frequently highlighted the urgency of achieving or protecting the needs of the people whom they represent. Since the majority of the population in my neighbourhood were Malays, the political candidates were also Malays – from both the ruling (UMNO) and the opposition (PAS) parties. The only choice that I had to make was between an Islamic-secular and an Islamic-orthodox political party. Throughout the year, I became aware that not every Malaysian came from the same background as me. They were probably born in a

multi-ethnic neighbourhood, went to a school that contained multi-ethnic students and possessed a diverse range of friends from different ethnic backgrounds. The choice of political candidates in their region was also probably not between just Malays, or just Chinese, it could be between Malays-Chinese-Indians. Does this create an issue for them in choosing a suitable political representative? My experiences and Malaysia's political situation led me to question why, when and where ethnicity can matter most, and how it can affect the formation of Malaysia as a nation. These questions have now become the main focus of my study and I hope to provide answers to them throughout this thesis.

2 General structures of Malaysia: population composition, religion, politics and jurisdiction

The aim in this sub-section is to provide the reader with a general picture of Malaysia's complexity in terms of its population composition, religion, politics and jurisdiction. Malaysia is one of the smaller countries within the Asia-Pacific region (*see* Map 1). It consists of two geographical parts: the West of Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia) and the East of Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). There are eleven states in Peninsular Malaysia: Kedah, Perlis, Terangganu, Kelantan, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Selangor, Johor, Penang and Malacca. The first nine states listed here maintain their monarchy institution to the present time. The monarchy institutions in these states act as the protector of Islam and Malay tradition and custom in their respective states.

Historically, Malaysia was part of British Empire. As a post-colonial state, Malaysia's population today consists of multiple ethnicities as a consequence of the British colonial economic rule and imperialism. Demographically, the Malaysian population was 28.33 million in 2010, of whom 26 million were Malaysian citizens. Malaysians are divided into two categories: *bumiputra* (which literally means 'sons of the soil') and non-*bumiputra*. *Bumiputra* comprise Malays, the aboriginal people of the peninsula, and natives of Sabah and Sarawak. They are politically and legally considered as the indigenous people in Malaysia.
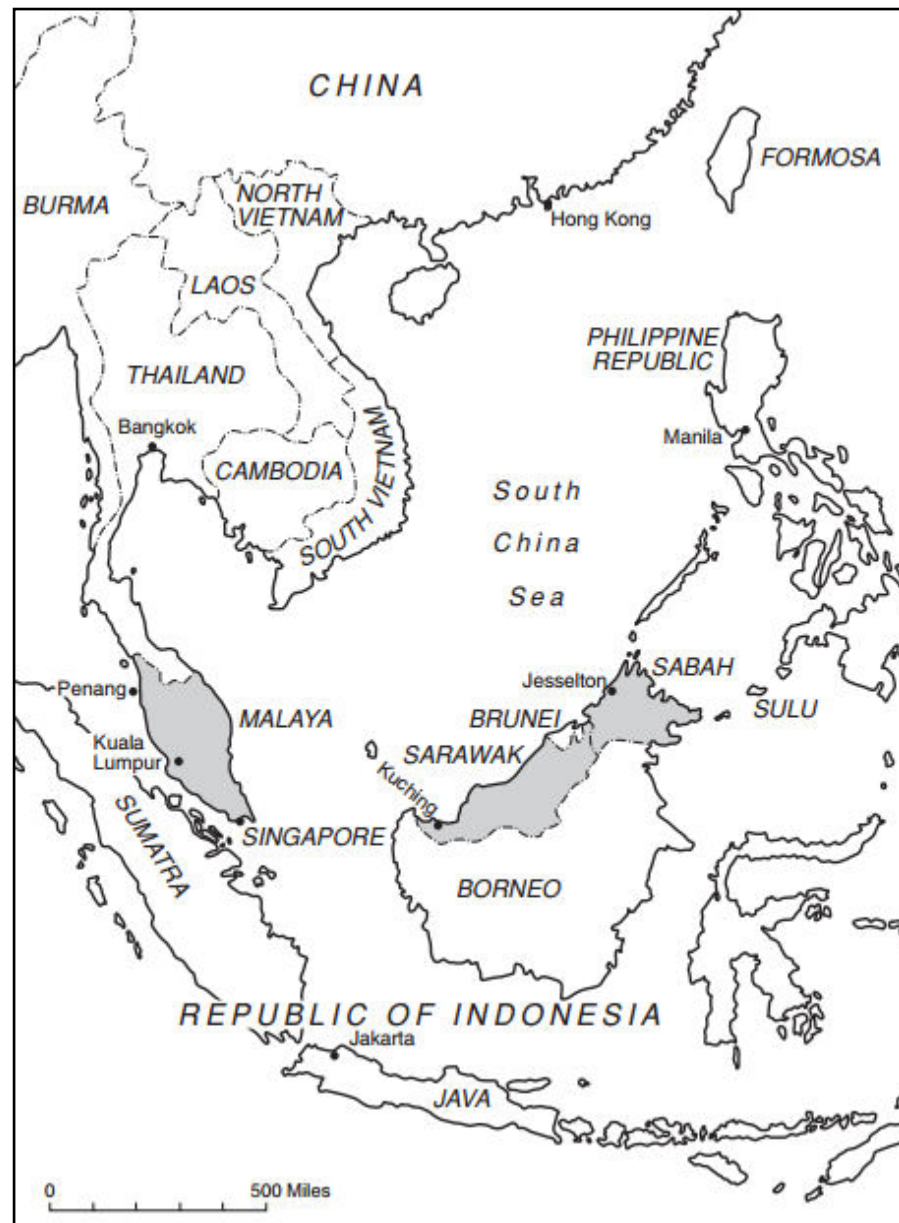
Map 1: Malaysia and its neighbours

In Peninsular Malaysia, Malays represent the largest number of *bumiputra*, followed by aboriginal people, with 14.2 million (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011) and 176,197 respectively (*Orang Asli* Affairs Department, 2012). In Sabah, the *bumiputra* are dominated mainly by the *Kadazan/Dusun*, *Bajau* and *Murut* people (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011). In Sarawak, the largest *bumiputra* groups are *Iban, Bidayuh* and *Melanau* people (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011) (*see* Figure 1). Despite the indigenous status, each sub-category in *bumiputra* is culturally diverse within itself (Smith, 2002).
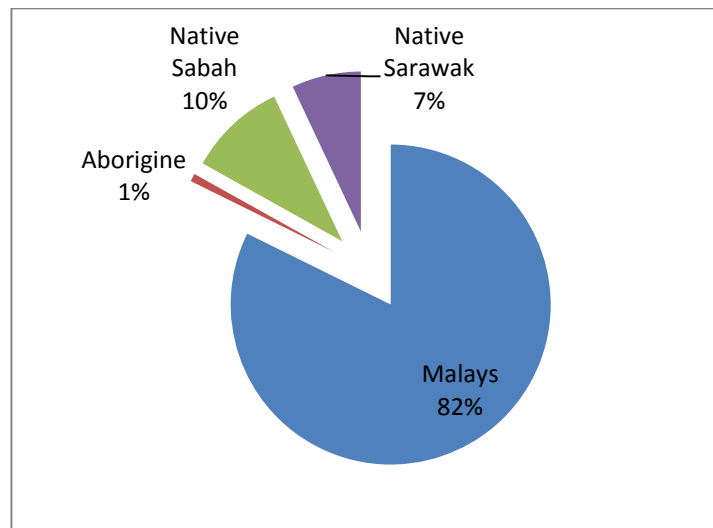
Figure 1: *Bumiputra* sub-categories
(Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011)

The non-*bumiputra* category is represented by Chinese, Indians and 'Others' (*see* Figure 2). The Chinese and Indians are politically understood to be the descendants of immigrants from China and the Indian sub-continent who mainly came to the peninsula in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the British administration. 'Others' is a general category for the small number of Eurasians, Thais, Europeans and other people who do not fit into the three major 'ethnic' categories (Hirschman, 1987). In 2010, the numbers of the Chinese, Indian and Other populations were 6.4 million, 1.9 million and 189,385 respectively (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011).
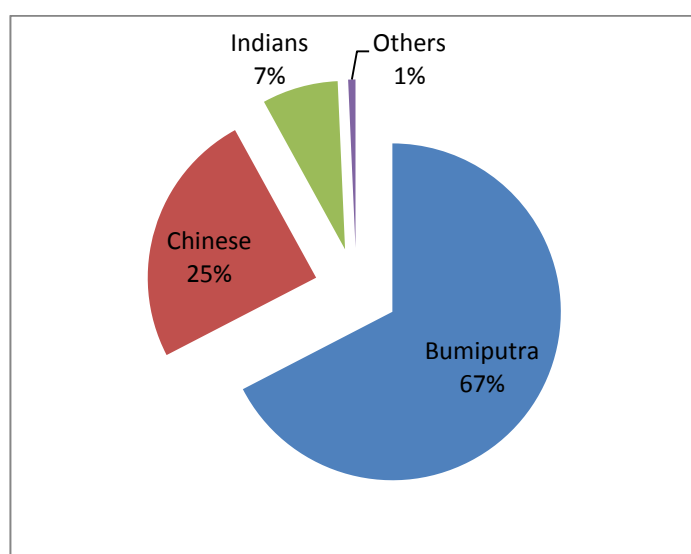
Figure 2: *Bumiputra* and non-*Bumiputra* categories
(Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011)

Under Article 3 of the Malaysian Constitution, Islam is the official religion in Malaysia. The majority of Malaysians are Muslim (61.3%), followed by Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%), Hinduism (6.3%), Confucianism, Taoism, tribal/folk/other traditional Chinese religions (1.3%), and other religions (0.4%). The rest have either no religion or it is unknown (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011) (*see* Figure 3).
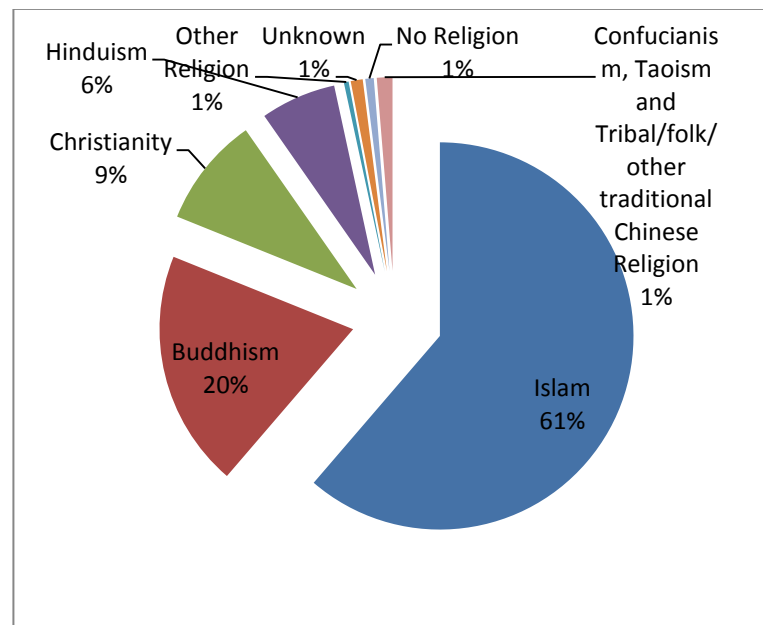
Figure 3: Religions in Malaysia
(Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2011)

In term of legal affairs, Malaysian jurisdiction is divided into two categories, the Federal Court and the *Syariah* Court (Islamic Court). The separation of the responsibilities of these systems is stipulated in Article 121(a) of the Federal Constitution (Mohamad *et al*., 2009). The *Syariah* Court covers Muslim family affairs such as marriage and divorce, property affairs and other Islamic criminal offences such as apostasy and alcohol consumption (Mohamad, 2010a; Azhar and Hussain, 2013). Other issues fall under the authority of the Federal Court. The main issue with the *Syariah* Court is that its distinction is based on regions and administered by different Islamic state departments.

Politically, Malaysia is a State which practises parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy and *Yang Dipertuan Agong* (*YDPA*) as the 'paramount' ruler (Harding, 2012). A General Election (GE) is held every five years. Since there are nine Malay Sultans for the nine states with monarchies, they are also required to vote for one of their number to perform in rotation the duties of

YDPA every five years (Milne and Mauzy, 1999). The YDPA acts as the Head of Islam in Malaysia and is responsible for preserving the allocated privileges and rights of Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak in education, business and specific positions within the public sector. Despite the fact that the Malaysian political system practises both a parliamentary and a monarchy system, the real governing power is held by the prime minister as Head of Government, and not by the YDPA (*see* Figure 4).
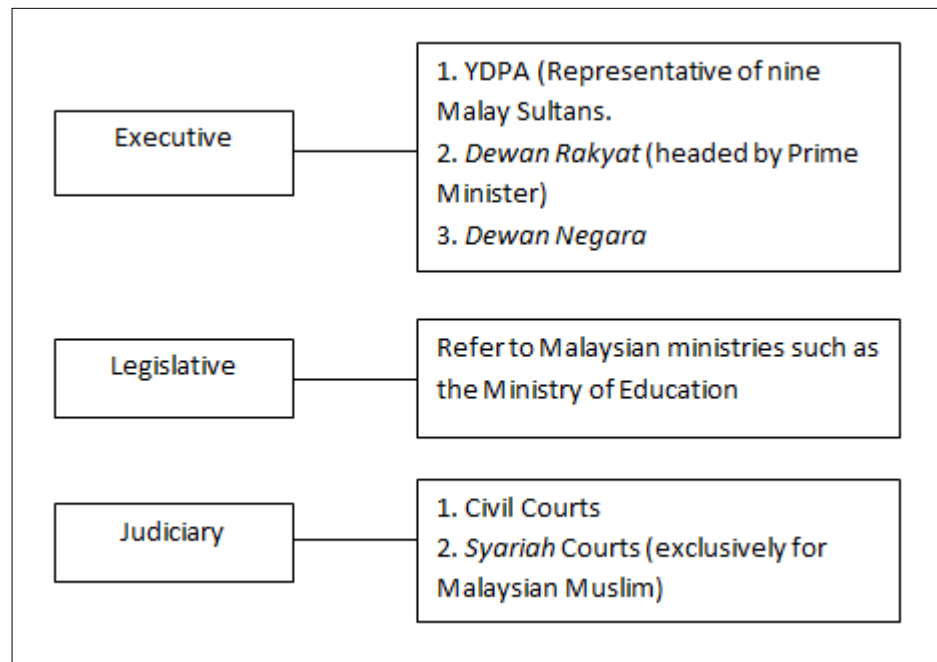
Figure 4: The Malaysian Political system

The current Malaysian government is led by *Barisan Nasional* (BN). BN is a political coalition which consists primarily of UMNO, MCA and MIC. UMNO is the most dominant of the political parties in BN (Brown, 2007; Weiss, 2009; Pepinsky, 2009). UMNO, MCA and MIC restrict their membership exclusively to Malays, Chinese and Indians respectively (Mohamad, 2008). On the other hand, the opposition parties – *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR), the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and *Parti Rakyat Malaysia* (PRM) – formed a coalition known as the *Barisan Alternatif* (BA) in 1998. PAS's advocacy of the Islamic laws led to clashes of interest between PAS and DAP. In 2004, BA was dissolved. In 2008, PKR, PAS and DAP once again collaborated under the name of the *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR). PKR, PAS and DAP opened their membership ostensibly to all Malaysians but ended up being quintessentially

ethnic: PAS (Malays), PKR (Malays), and DAP (Chinese) (Brown, 2007) (*see* Figure 5).
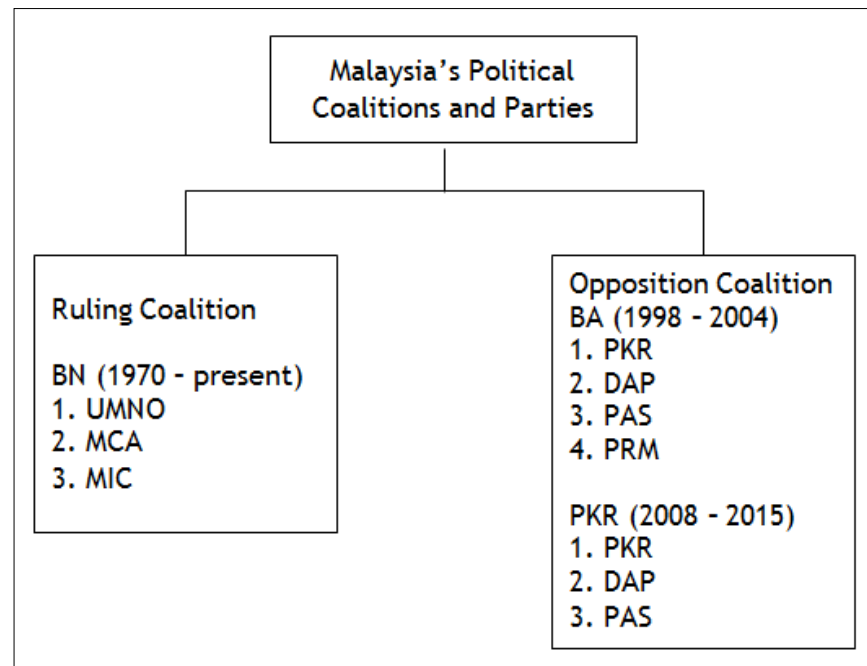
Figure 5: Malaysia's political parties and coalitions

In sum, the description of Malaysia's population composition, religion, politics and jurisdiction provided in this sub-section suggest that first, Malaysian society is made up of multiple ethnic groups, and second, the political formations seem to be based on these ethnic identifications which have made Malaysia a remarkably complex society.

3 Malays and Chinese inter-ethnic relationship

Despite the fact that there are a variety of ethnic communities in Malaysia, the main findings and discussions presented in this study focus exclusively on the middle-income class of Malay and Chinese students interviewed in Penang and Glasgow. Malays and Chinese were chosen as the main subjects for this research as throughout the years, many inter-ethnic issues, demands and contentions have occurred between them. Both Malay and Chinese communities hold strong positions in the Malaysian political and economic spheres respectively (Lim, 1985; Ali, 2008; Tay, 2015). Their relationship, especially from the colonial period to the early years of Malaysia's independence, should be understood as

that "the economically disadvantaged are politically powerful and *vice versa*" (Lim, 1985, p.251). Today the Malays as one of the indigenous populations in Malaysia are supported by the special privileges stated in the Federation. Their numerical strength is also able to influence the direction of Malaysian political affairs. As for the Chinese, their economic prosperity was gradually built commencing in the nineteenth century when they were given an opportunity by the British to be in the front line of economic activities. The history of Malay and Chinese early and separate domination was the result of the British colonial economy and the 'divide and rule' policy.

The British started to be officially involved in local economic activities in 1786 and local political affairs in 1874. During the period of British acquisition of and trade in raw materials, many labourers, especially from China and India, were imported as cheap labour. To avoid any local disruption to this colonial economy, the British offered two layers of 'protection' to the Malays. In the first layer, the sovereignty of the Malay Sultans was preserved as protectors of Malay customs and religion. Their economic power, however, was transferred to the British Resident and Advisory system which in turn would 'protect' them from being overrun the non-Malays (Lim, 1985). Although the Malays' life and culture were left free to continue more or less in self-made directions (Wilson, 1967), the swift transfer of administrative power from the Malay Sultans to the British made them economically dependent on the British. Moreover, the protection of the Malay traditional mode of existence had prevented their engagement in modern economic activities which left them behind in the colonial economy.

The Chinese immigrants mainly came to Malaysia in the eighteenth century but their economic activities really expanded in the first decades of the twentieth century. During this period, the Chinese were important in establishing rubber plantations in Malaysia. They provided labour, owned the rubber estates and were also engaged in the packing, grading, milling, transport, storage and sale of rubber (Hui, 1980; Phang, 2000). After the Japanese occupation of Malaya between 1941 and 1946, the British decided to restructure the local political system which led to the establishment of the Malayan Union (MU). Under the MU, the Malay Sultans' sovereignty was transferred to the (British) Crown. At the same time, equal citizenship was offered to Malays and immigrant communities

(Kheng, 2009; Harding, 2012). The MU was widely rejected by the Malays, because according to them it would change the nature of the Malay Land. At the same time, the Malays were concerned about their economic well-being during that time. In 1948, the Malaya Federation was established, replacing the MU after taking into consideration the Malays' economic and the Chinese political needs and demands. In the Federation of 1948, the Malay monarchy system was preserved and Malays' rights and special privileges (their economic concern) were officially declared and acknowledged under Article 153 of the Malaysian Constitution, whilst non-Malays were granted Malaysian citizenship (their political concern).

According to Singh (2001), the privileges became a basis for conflict. Guan (2000), stated that the Malays' special rights became a major source of dissatisfaction among Malays and non-Malays. The Malays merely considered it insufficient, while the non-Malays took it as a discriminatory measure. Beng (2000) suggested that the separation of Singapore in 1963 showed that tension already existed between Malays and Chinese. In 1969, the Malay-Sino riots took place in Kuala Lumpur and caused deaths and casualties. Consequently, in 1970 the government endorsed the New Economic Policy (NEP) to reduce the income gaps between the ethnic communities in Malaysia. A new term, *bumiputra*, was introduced for allocating NEP privileges in employment and education, and this attracted a great amount of criticism from the non-*bumiputra*. Although the NEP was officially ended in 1990, its *bumiputraism* still remains important in the Malay/Chinese inter-ethnic relationship.

4   Background of the study

Malaysia inherited a society which was shaped by imperialism and in which multiple distinctive ethnic identifications were embedded across all aspects of social life, materially as well as in the consciousness. The question for the new State was how to 'manage' these aspects. Malaysia in the post-independence period therefore faced three major challenges: economic planning and development, political administration following the power transition from British to local rule, and the formation of a nation with multiple ethnic identities.

Each of these challenges can be studied independently but at the same time they are closely related to one another. For example, Malaysian studies in economic planning and development (Eyre and Dwyer, 1996), Malaysian labour and employment (Guan, 2005; Lee, 2012), politics (for example by Shamsul, 1986; Mohamad, 2002, 2008), education (Gill, 2014; Ting, 2010) and jurisdiction (such as by Jones *et al.*, 2009, Mohamad, 2010a; 2010b; Shamsul, 2015) inevitably needed to highlight ethnicity within their discussions of these related societal structures. Similarly, Malaysian studies at the micro level highlight the salience of ethnicity, particularly in regard to social networks (Holst, 2012) and marriage (Holst, 2012; Jo-Pei *et al.*, 2008; Pue and Sulaiman 2013).

Studies at both macro and micro levels suggest that ethnicity is salient in every part of Malaysian affairs: family, education, the economy and politics. As stressed by Embong (2001) and Haque (2003), ethnicity affects most policies and rules within the various sectors in Malaysia. Additionally, Crouch (2001, p.230) also stated that ethnicity affects most Malaysian national policies in terms of "language, education, government, employment, business licenses, immigration, internal security, foreign policy, or virtually everything else". In other words, further institutionalisation of distinctive ethnic identifications within Malaysian societal forces has reinforced ethnic diversities in Malaysians' everyday life. At the level of the experiential, these identities come to matter for folk in their everyday life.

Additionally, throughout the years, debates over what really represents Malaysian identity – whether citizens should maintain their ethnic identity (pluralists) or identify themselves as Malaysian as a homogenous community (assimilationists) – have been never-ending. The ethnic identity issue has been reported by various scholars, such as Beng (1988; 2000), Shamsul (1996; 1998; 1999b; 2015), Holst (2012) and Barlocco (2014). Moreover, over the years, Malaysian political leaders have attempted to create and promote a national identity, but at the same time continued to maintain the ethnicisation system in managing Malaysian inter-ethnic relations (Ishak, 1999).

There are therefore two equally important issues affecting Malaysian affairs. On the one hand, ethnic preservation and maintenance are important in societal structures with continuous enhancement being made by the Malaysian

authorities through education, politics and economic policies. On the other hand, there is a concerted promotion of national identity and unity by the Malaysian authorities; however, at the same time most political leaders seem more enthusiastic about promoting the unity of a particular ethnic group. The confusion over the importance of ethnicity and the 'ideal nation' has put Malaysia in a difficult situation fraught with many complexities.

To address this complexity, I shall attempt in this study to provide a sociological explanation for the importance of ethnicity, its structuring capacity and the challenges within Malay and Chinese inter-ethnic relationships. In order to achieve this sociological objective, it is necessary for me to include an historical and comparative analysis of the different ethnic groups, locations and time-spaces. This historical and comparative analysis is entirely salient because of the possibility that changes might have taken place, and might still take place, across generations, groups, socio-economic background or places (Lim, 1985). The historical account in particular is important for understanding the real nature of the relationship between Malays and Chinese. The dialectical relationships between societal structures – political, economic, educational and family institutions – and everyday actors (the respondents) towards their life decisions in their working sectors, social circles and marriage choices also require deeper understanding and analysis.

5   The contributions of the research

The aim of this thesis is to make three major scholarly contributions: epistemologically, theoretically and methodologically. Theoretically, there are two main issues crucial to the study of Malaysian ethnicity. The first issue is related to the foundation of Malaysian ethnicity and nation-state epistemology. According to Shamsul (2001a), *most* ethnic relations studies and knowledge have been produced and elaborated within the colonial epistemology. Most of the key terms and concepts were therefore simply accepted without problematising them (Shamsul, 2001a). Due to this tendency, some Malaysian ethnicity studies have tended to understand the inter-ethnic relationship between Malays and Chinese on the basis of their primordial identity and 'fixed' boundaries such as

language and religion. The instrumentalists have challenged the primordial understanding of ethnicity, such as Said (1992), Nair (2009), Abraham (2004) and Hilley (2001). Nonetheless, most of instrumentalist studies have tended to focus on one part – either the macro (top-down) or the micro (bottom-up) perspective. This one-sided analysis tends to ignore the dialectical relationship between the State-led objectification of ethnicity and individuals' subjective understandings of their own identity, and how they negotiate that identity in their everyday interactions and discourse (Tong, 2010). Ethnicity is also not only relational but taken up by collective actors for particular kinds of political project which are mobilised to cohere populations for political aims.

The intention of the present study is therefore to produce an analysis by combining both the macro and the micro perspectives. In order to understand the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia, a qualitative approach was employed which extended the respondents' everyday experiences to Malaysia's ethnicised system. This study used data acquired from fifty-five interviews conducted with Malaysians inside (Penang) and outside (Glasgow) Malaysia's geographical boundaries. It is hoped that the empirical data, analysis and discussion will enrich the number of academic sources related to Malaysian identity, ethnicity and nationalism.

6   Aims of the thesis and research questions

The main aim of this thesis is to present a theoretical and empirical discussion of the importance of ethnicity by focusing on its formation, reproduction and challenges within Malay and Chinese inter-ethnic relationships in Penang and Glasgow. There are four specific objectives. The first is to gain an in-depth understanding of the State's urgency to intervene in the respondents' lives, education system and political-economic matters. Second, to explore the formation, maintenance and importance of ethnicity in the various realms as part of a dialectical interaction between everyday actors and the State. Third, to understand the reproduction and the challenges of ethnicity in various situations, locations and time-spaces. And fourth, to sharpen the focus on how ethnicity underlies the idea of 'nation'. The following research questions were

devised to pursue these objectives, and are each explored in the three empirical chapters of this thesis:

Ethnic Identification and categorisation, the Malaysian bureaucratic system and Marriage:

1. How do ethnic identification and categorisation work in Malaysia's bureaucratic system? What are the roles of the respondents' families in the State's identification and categorisation? Why do their parents want (or need) to comply with the ethnic identification imposed by the State's definition?

2. How do the Malay and Chinese respondents define one another? How is their *Malay-ness* and *Chinese-ness* reproduced or challenged during their interactions?

3. How does this affect the respondents' partner or spouse preferences?

Ethnicity, the Malaysian Educational System and Social Networks:

1. What role does ethnicity play in the Malaysian educational system? Does ethnicity influence parents' educational decisions regarding their children within primary and secondary schools? How and why did ethnicity influence the respondents' educational decisions at the tertiary education level?

2. Based on location, how are Malay-ness and Chinese-ness reproduced or challenged in the educational realm? How does their educational background affect the respondents' social lives and networking? What are the roles of student voluntary associations in the University of Glasgow and University Science of Malaysia?

Ethnicity, the Malaysian political economy and nation-of-intent:

1. How does ethnicity influence the respondents' employment decisions? How is ethnicity reproduced or challenged in the economic field?

2. How does ethnicity influence the respondents' political orientation? How is ethnicity reproduced or challenged within political affairs?

3. How does ethnic identification and categorisation influence the formation of national identity?

7   Methods

The general aim of this research is to understand the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. In order to achieve this aim, I chose to employ a comparative approach as it fits with my underlying theoretical position that ethnicity is socially constructed. By using this approach, I can get a handle on social construction of identity which help me to see how claims about and understanding of ethnicity change in different social and political contexts, and in response to different experiences.

Fifty-five interviews were conducted in Penang (Malaysia) and Glasgow (Scotland). These two places were chosen on the basis of their metropolitan status, demographic composition, and political and socio-economic conditions. Penang is the fourth highest urbanised area in Malaysia after Putrajaya, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). It is also the second most densely populated area after Kuala Lumpur (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2011). In comparison with other states in Malaysia, the population of Penang consists of relatively balanced numbers of Malays and Chinese, with 636,146 and 670,400 respectively (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2011). Politically, Penang is also the only region in Malaysia which is administrated by the non-*bumiputra* opposition party (DAP), which could give it a distinctive criterion in comparison with other states.

Glasgow is one of biggest cities in the United Kingdom. In 2001, it was the fifth largest urban area in the UK (Pointer, 2005). As with other metropolitan cities, the composition of Glasgow's population consists of variety of nationalities. For example, population data published in 2012 suggested that Glasgow City had been hosting a large number of migrants in Scotland (Vargas-Silva, 2013). In addition, I was also looking for university students who would have limited contact with other Malaysians which would provide them with frequent interaction with non-Malaysians and high exposure to different cultures, norms and values from those which they were used to in Malaysia. In comparison with universities located in other urban areas, such as Manchester University, the number of Malaysian students in the University of Glasgow is relatively small. For example, in the 2015/16 academic year, there were only 207 Malaysian students

registered in the University of Glasgow in comparison with 1,045 registered in the University of Manchester (University of Glasgow, 2017; University of Manchester, 2017). In 2016/17, the number of Malaysian students in Glasgow decreased to 189, which was lower than the number of Malaysian students in the University of Edinburgh (251 students) registered in the same academic year (University of Glasgow, 2017; University of Edinburgh, 2017). In other words, Glasgow provided a more 'foreign' setting to their Malaysian experience, thus providing them with a different understanding of ethnicity and its importance. The data from the interviews hence represent Malaysians' social experiences in two settings with different interlocutors, socio-economic environments and political issues.

In addition, I chose to focus on Malaysian students inside and outside Malaysia's geographical boundaries for two key reasons. First, I was looking for Malaysian ethnic experience based on exposure, challenges and changes stemming from living and studying in new and different locations. Universities are mostly located in urban areas and the majority of students need to migrate to a new place, which gives them the experience and challenges of migration. The variety in the selected students' socio-economic backgrounds and regionalities also provided me with a great deal of information about their ethnic challenges, barriers, advantages and disadvantages in this new setting. Additionally, exposure to different ethnic groups and different nationalities in USM and GofU would give them different experiences of and perspectives about Malaysian ethnicity. Experiences gained from living in Glasgow would especially expose them to a different socio-political setting which requires different expectations, identification and categorisation.

Second, in the Malaysian context, there is high potential for ethnic segregation in primary and secondary schools (Raman and Sua, 2010; Kenayathulla, 2015). The same segregation can also be also found in the Malaysian working sector, both the public and private sectors (Lee and Khalid, 2016). According to Mustapha (2009, p.35), "institutions of higher education are in a unique position to address the teaching and learning of diversity by creating an environment that will allow positive interaction among students from different ethnicities and backgrounds". In particular, the classroom in a university could provide exposure

to multi-ethnic and multi-national students. The university classroom also provides a suitable 'testing ground' for Malaysian inter-ethnic relationships because it is where students from different socio-economic backgrounds, educational backgrounds and regionalities need to make decisions during their social interactions and relationships, such as who will be their friends, who will be their flat-mates, what kind of association they will join and why. Although there is a possibility for Malaysians to meet and interact with different ethnic groups in Malaysia, such encounters can sometimes be brief, superficial and uncritical. It is the university classroom itself that can provide a 'meeting place' for different ethnicities because it requires long, continuous, repeated and critical interaction.

The fieldwork commenced on 1 June 2013 in Penang and the first interview was conducted on 26 June 2013. Recruitment of the respondents lasted approximately three weeks. The majority of the respondents were recruited through the snowballing technique, through friends' and respondents' social networking. The fieldwork in Penang officially ended in September 2013. Interviews in Glasgow took place in November 2013. For the Malay respondents, all of the interviews were successfully completed by January 2014. The interviews with the Chinese respondents in Glasgow officially ended at the end of May 2014.

During the process of recruiting and interviewing, all of the respondents were highly cooperative. The average time taken for each interview was around 45 minutes, but no time constraints were placed on the interviews. The interviews were tape-recorded and from time to time notes were taken by hand, as some of the respondents shared important information when the tape recorder was turned off. At the beginning of the interviews, all respondents were given an information sheet which detailed the research project in a plain language statement (PLS), the researcher's contact information, and a consent form in which all of them gave their signed consent for the interview, tape-recording and hand notes. To ensure the respondents' privacy, anonymised names will be used in the empirical discussion and analysis (*see* Appendix A). The respondents' socio-economic backgrounds were identified based on their birth year, gender, ethnic group and marital status (*see* Appendix B). The interview questions were

formulated on a variety of themes: marriage, friendship and education, political views and future plans for their employment (*see* Appendix C).

8   Plan of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters: this Introduction, the Theoretical framework, a social history of Malaysia, the Methodology and methods, three empirical chapters, and a Conclusion.

Chapter One, the present chapter, outlines the profile of the study by providing a general introduction to the thesis: the background of the research, its aims and questions, methods, the intended contribution of the study and a thesis plan. The following chapter – *Theoretical Framework* – presents a discussion of the conceptual and theoretical framework, and also highlights some of the contemporary discourse on ethnicity and nationalism. This chapter focuses on the major theories on identity, ethnicity and nationalism, and crucially attempts to establish the theoretical foundation for the study. The subsequent chapter – *a social history of Malaysia* – explores the socio-political identity, origins and history of ethnicity and nationalism within Malaysia. In this chapter, a sociological review of Malaysia's historical background as a post-colonial and multi-ethnic society is provided. The main purpose of the chapter is to provide a summary of the formation of ethnicity in Malaysia, and how it is important for the current study. The next chapter – *Methodology and Method* – provides an explanation and discussion of the research design employed in the study, which will be discussed in depth. Insights into the justification and rationalisation of the methodology, the methods, and the area of study, sampling and the mode of analysis are provided in the chapter.

The following three chapters (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) are the core of this thesis. These chapters are the empirical chapters which contain a discussion based on a comparative analysis of 55 interviews conducted in Penang (Malaysia) and Glasgow (Scotland) together with brief participant observations and secondary analysis of printed and online materials. Chapter Five – *Ethnic Identification and categorisation, the Malaysian bureaucratic system and*

Marriage – demonstrates the role and the process of State identification and categorisation of Malays and Chinese. It also highlights how ethnic identification and its boundaries are important in the respondents' everyday life and future spouse or partner preferences. Chapter Six – *Ethnicity, Malaysian educational schools and social circles* – highlights the role of schools and tertiary institutions (macro) in the respondents' social circles (micro). Chapter Seven – *Ethnicity, the Malaysian political economy and nation-of-intent* – then focuses on the respondents' ethnic identification and educational background (in the Malaysian educational system) as a capital/challenge for their past and future employment. In the same chapter, a brief discussion of the respondents' ideal nation and their future aims as Malaysians is offered. The final chapter of the thesis provides concluding remarks as well as suggestions regarding some prospective areas for future extensions of this study.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

1 Introduction

Ethnic categories in Malaysia, and generally in most social contexts, are largely treated as unproblematic and taken-for-granted (Hirschman, 1987; Shamsul, 1996, 2001a). Malaysians in this sense often remain unaware of the fact that ethnicity has "always been altered, redefined, re-constituted and the boundaries expanded according to specific social-historical circumstances" (Shamsul, 1996, p.12). Consequently, the unproblematic treatment of ethnic construction among *some* of the indigenous researchers in Malaysia has produced – regardless of knowledge and philosophical and theoretical grounding – an epistemological understanding which has been used as an instrument to defend and/or justify the interests of particular ethnic groups. Mindful of this tendency, I contend that ethnic identities and groupings should *not* be seen as simple concepts, but rather as multi-dimensional and analytically complex ones which must be unpacked and socio-historically critiqued.

This chapter is divided into three core sections. In the first section, *Identity*, I shall focus my analytical concern on identity as categories of *practice* and *analysis*, and the responses to this concept provided by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and by Jenkins (2008). In the subsequent section, *Ethnicity*, I shall begin by discussing two main Malaysian epistemological issues: the first of these pertains to the importance of reified colonialist 'racial' and nation-state paradigms and their relevance to social and political practices in Malaysia; the second pertains to the notion of ethnicity as an enmeshment of practice and analysis in some of the scholarly body of Malaysian social studies. I shall then engage in a discussion of Malaysian ethnicity from an instrumentalist perspective. In the same section, I shall highlight the need to study ethnicity using both a top-down and a bottom-up approach (Banton, 2011). This decision was made in order to provide a more holistic understanding of ethnicity in Malaysian authority-defined and everyday-defined social realities as proposed by Shamsul (1996). In the final section, *Nation,* I shall evaluate the theoretical frameworks of identity and ethnicity within the formulation of a nation. I shall

here stress the impact of Malaysia's *ethnicisation* system and ethnic group consciousness – in the form of political parties – which took place during the ideological competition for an 'ideal nation', and its consequences for Malaysian political support and views.

2 Identity: dimension, issues and alternatives

Identity is "a simple word for a complex concept" (Smith, 2016, p.81) which should not be taken for granted (Jenkins, 2008). The central locus of identity formation is the "heat of the hearth" (Carsten, 1995, p.223), which refers to immediate family, relatives and close friends. Through the process of socialisation, with family as the main agent surrounded by ethnic, national and regional affiliation (Hoffstaedter, 2011), people learn about the society into which they were born (Banton, 1998). Socialisation equips people with gender expectations and societal categorisations – be they ethnically, racially, nationally or otherwise defined – that they are expected to align themselves with, and how they and others should conduct their relationships based on that categorisation (Banton, 1998).

Socialisation is a process of learning and understanding one's roles, statuses and expectations as 'given' by the society. It is a continuous process throughout the life span. *Habitus* is a useful concept for understanding the outcomes of the process. According to Bourdieu (1976), habitus indicates:

> [...] the end of structures which practices tend to reproduce in such a
> way that the individuals involved are bound to reproduce them, either
> by consciously reinventing or by subconsciously imitating already
> proven strategies as the accepted, most respectable, or even simplest
> course to follow. (1976, p.118)

Socialisation agents include not exclusively the family but also external agents, particularly the state. These internal and external agents of socialisation – parents, elders, elites, authorities – are the ones which educate, foster, nurture, influence and define both a person's identity and the roles which are passed down to the next generation or to newcomers (Hoffstaedter, 2011).

So, what is identity? Identity is a category both of practice *and* of analysis (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brubaker 2013). Following Bourdieu (1987), the category of practice for Brubaker and Cooper (2000) indicates what others have called 'native' or 'folk' categories. For them, a category of practice is an "everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.4). The category of analysis, on the other hand, refers to the category of knowledge that social scientists use to understand the social world (Brubaker, 2012). For example, the category of analysis is used to understand individual and group roles and their foundation and social construction. Concerns arise when identity in the category of analysis is reified, giving a sense of concrete reality rather than socially constructed organisational types (Smith, 2016). This distinction is important in my research as I intend to avoid providing an analysis based on the reification of ethnic identities and groups.

Jenkins (2008, p.5) defined identity as "the human capacity to know who is who; it thus involves self- and other-acknowledgement with a multi-dimensional classification of our place in it [social reality] as individuals and as members of collectivities". It is a process and not a thing. It is an action and not an object. Therefore, instead of focusing on what a given identity 'is', I have shifted my focus in this study to 'how' identity is made in social life. To do this, I have adopted the framework put forward by Roger Brubaker and Fredrick Cooper (2000).

The main intention in this section is thus to propose a theoretical framework for the question of *how ethnic identity is constructed* (asserted or contested) by Malays and Chinese in Penang and in Glasgow. Since there is a tendency for identity to be treated as a reified concept in the category of analysis, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argued for identification and categorisation, self-understanding and social location, *and* commonality, connectedness and groupness to be used as alternative analytical concepts.

The Malaysian "ethnic-bureaucratic system" (Siddique, 1990, p.41) creates an assumptive, seemingly common-sense view of ethnic identity and categories which avoids analytical inquiry and which attempts to support 'us' and 'them' as something which exists in the natural order and is merely waiting for Malaysians

to experience. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) regarded the 'assumptive common sense' as the reification of identity, in that the distinctiveness and value of separation is regarded as "real, concrete and obviously apparent so that it does not require" analytical methods for "construction and deconstruction, but rather requires simple exploration and discovery" to unearth them (Smith, 2016, p.84). In order to avoid the reification of identity in the category of analysis, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) recommend that identity should be replaced by *identification* and *categorisation*. These terms "invite[s] us to specify the agents that do the identifying" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.14). In the case of Malaysia, ethnic identification and categorisation are used to allocate resources and this turns ethnicity into a political instrument.

However, this does not mean that Malaysians – and in particular, the respondents in this current study interviewed in Glasgow and Penang – have always had similar understandings and orientations towards *Malay-ness* and *Chinese-ness* in the way that the state seeks to posit. "How one identifies oneself – and how one is identified by others – may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.14). This specific value will allow me to explore the situational and circumstantial quality of the identification processes in Penang and Glasgow. The distinctiveness can also be produced on the basis of modes of identification (relational and categorical), and self-identification and identification by others. Relational identification refers to relational webs such as teacher/students and seller/buyer relationships, whereas categorical identification refers to categorical attributes such as ethnicity, nationality and gender.

The relation between self and others results in "self-identification that takes place in dialectical interplay with external identification" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.15). People identify and categorise others just as they identify and categorise themselves. However, there is another type of external identification and this refers to "the formalised, codified, objectified systems of categorisation developed by powerful, authoritative institutions" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.15) with limited room provided for negotiation. Following Weber (1948) and Bourdieu (1985), Brubaker and Cooper (2000) considered the

modern state to monopolise both legitimate physical force and the symbolic force which is used to identify and categorise *who is who*.

For example in Malaysia, ethnic identification and categorisation are shaped by the colonial 'racial' epistemological framework which has been maintained, applied, institutionalised and embedded in *official* use in post-independence Malaysia. Both identification and categorisation have been used to identify the legal occupiers of the reserved land and the receivers of allocated privileges in education, in business and in particular occupational positions in the public sector. This example suggests that those who control the *processes* of official identification and categorisation tend to be in positions of social dominance. The privileges are likely to be challenged, but this likelihood does not prevent most social relationships from being structured on the basis of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

Therefore, in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of *Malay-ness* and *Chinese-ness*, it is appropriate for me to focus on the *process* rather than the *condition*. In other words, contradicting the notions of Malay-ness and Chinese-ness as presented by the state and as understood by Malaysians as categories of practice (identity as a *finished product*), my aim here is to understand 'identity' as the process of interplay between self (and other) and the external identification by highlighting its complexity in Malay-Chinese social interaction.

Self-understanding and *social location* are "dispositional terms" which designate "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how [given the first two] one is prepared to act" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, p.17). Similar to identification, such a sense resists the reifying value of identity but at the same time it can be implied without being discursively expressed. Recognising this acknowledges the cognitive and emotional awareness of the individual in navigating the self, others and the social landscape in which social actors engage in meaning-making processes in their everyday lives.

"Self-understanding acknowledges the subjective nature of identification, allowing an opportunity to elaborate on the social, cultural, political and other circumstances that contribute to one's sense of self" (Smith, 2016, p.84). For example, Malays and Chinese are in different ethnic categories with different

residential statuses and privileges. These categories suggest the formation of ethnicity-based political parties (Segawa, 2013) with some contentions in their political aims and interests (Means, 1996). However, during relationships such as between seller/buyer and doctor/patient, Malays' and Chinese interactions frequently result in friendly reactions and behaviour. Different outcomes which depend on situation, context and modes of identification (categorical or relational) suggest that it is important to acknowledge people's ability to deploy self-understanding in order to navigate the processes of identification within the social context.

Commonality, *connectedness* and *groupness* are other alternatives which can be used in order to avoid the reification of identity. These concepts pertain to emotionally laden senses of "belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specific outsider" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, p.19). *Commonality* refers to shared attributes in a category, such as language and religion, whilst *connectedness* indicates the link that can relate one person to another within that category. *Groupness* would only occur when a combination of connectedness and commonality converges. People think that they belong to a specific group when they feel connected to the common attributes as shown by other people within the same category.

Additionally, it should be noted here that there is a distinction between category and group (Banton, 1998; Brubaker, 2002). Categories are defined by socio-political authorities. Examples of category are income-based ones and those based on regional background, religious affiliation and occupational sector. A group, on the other hand, establishes in its members' consciousness that they relate with one another, and that they identify themselves with it. In other words, the difference between category and group lies in the absence or presence of subjective traction. A category can be transformed into a group if the members can see that any differential treatment which they receive is also experienced by others within the same category (Banton, 1998). For example, a regional category can be transformed into a regional-based grouping within an urban setting.

Urbanisation brings people together into one focused place. In this situation, new immigrants might well encounter problems in adjusting themselves – emotionally, socially and psychologically – to the new environment. A regional group or association can offer social support and psychological comfort for these newcomers. Students' associations in universities located in urban areas usually have this kind of grouping. For instance GUMS (the Glasgow University Malaysian Society) was founded at the University of Glasgow, and associations based on regional origin such as GAPP (the *Gabungan Anak Pulau Pinang*/*Penangite* student Union) and HAAK (the *Himpunan Anak-Anak Kelantan*/*Kelantanese* student Union) were founded at the University of Sciences Malaysia, Penang. These groups were formed after students from the same geographical areas – be that in terms of region or nationality – found that they could relate to and identify with one another when facing social, cultural and psychological 'threats' within the new urban setting.

On the macro level, ethnicity is frequently portrayed as a salient division in Malaysian politics compared with class or gender (Zainal *et al.*, 2010). Sociologically, there are socio-economic classes in every society. Class in the Malaysian context is an '*unranked system*', meaning that no absolute ethnic group ranks exclusively in the higher or the lower class (Horowitz, 1985). It only turns into 'groups' on specific occasions such as the *Bersih* demonstration. That demonstration was initiated by oppositional political actors (Guan, 2008). Their main objective was to demand changes through clean and fair elections (Guan, 2008; Embong, 2016). The demonstration was joined and supported by the majority of the urban-Malaysian middle class (Malays, Chinese, Indians and others) (Embong, 2008). Looking from a different angle, *Bersih* was only possible when Malaysians – who wanted economic change through the democratic system – could relate with one another under the impression that they were unjustly treated by the state due to the economic pressure which they experienced in the urban area. The group, however, dissolved into a mere economic category once the urban-Malaysian middle class shifted its identification into one of ethnic interest.

At the same time, Brubaker (2002) insists that groups are not real. What remained real for him was a shared sense of 'groupness'. According to Jenkins

(2002, p.118), a group is not "imaginary in the sense that an illusion or a fantasy is imaginary. Far from it". He continued that "groups may be imagined, but this does not mean that they are imaginary" (Jenkins, 2008, p.11). It is real for people who experience it every day and it is observable in the real world. Group construction can be seen in people's everyday interactions, decisions and expectations. This is, therefore, a crucial warning for a researcher to be more careful and to exercise caution when differentiating between the category of practice and the category of analysis

 On the other hand, I am with Jenkins (2008) when he disagrees with Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) suggestion of abandoning identity and replacing it with 'identification'. Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) suggestion was made on the basis of the abundant usage of identity in everyday life which is now making it almost meaningless as an analytical term. One is concurrently not able to comprehend the variety of identification processes. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have not been the only commentators who have developed this suggestion. Sinisa Malesevic (2002) argued that identity as an analytical concept "is confused and confusing, means too many things and encompasses too many different processes to be of any social analytical value" (Jenkins, 2008, p.14) and this is especially so when it is reified and manipulated by political actors for their own benefit. Nevertheless, according to Jenkins (2008), 'identity' cannot really be abandoned. Hence it is us – social thinkers – who need to be careful and critical in our writing (Jenkins, 2008) by recognising the limitations and different uses inherent in the term. What Jenkins (2008, p.15) suggested is a "compromise between a complete rejection of identity" and "an uncritical acceptance of its ontological status and axiomatic significance".

In summary, I agree with Brubaker and Cooper's notion of understanding identity as a 'process' by focusing on identification and categorisation, self-understanding and social location, *and* commonality, connectedness and groupness. I believe that the notion of these analytical concepts would be helpful for understanding the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. The only disagreement that I have in regard to their framework is the suggestion of *completely* replacing 'identity' with these alternatives analytical concepts. For

this, the term identity would be interchangeable in use with the above concepts throughout the thesis.

3   Ethnicity

My aim in this section is to produce a theoretical framework for the 'why' questions: *why* does ethnicity remain significant in post-independence Malaysia; and *why* is formal ethnic identification and categorisation so important for the state? Generally, ethnicity studies are dominated by two distinct strands: primordialism and instrumentalism (Smaje, 1997). In reference to the above discussion, I understand identity and group to be related to external identification – in this case to the Malaysian (governmental) authority. I have also emphasised the significance of people's own subjective self-identification and feeling of 'groupness'. Taking into consideration the main objective of the current study – to understand the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia – and the Malaysian bureaucratisation of ethnicity within the self- and other-identification processes, I think that the instrumentalist perspective is appropriate, more applicable and more comprehensive in relation to this research.

The historical background to Malaysian ethnicity studies and concomitant epistemological issues

Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), a British officer-cum-social anthropologist, contributed a great deal to Malaysian 'race' and nation studies (Reid, 2001; Shamsul, 2011). He was the first to introduce the concept of a *Malay* nation, as well as a Malay 'race' and a Malay territorial geographical area (Shamsul, 2011). Similar to other English writers during the Enlightenment era such as William Marsden and John Crawfurd, he was influenced by the view that people can be scientifically classified (Reid, 2001). During Raffles' stay in Penang in the early nineteenth century, he was close to John Leyden, a Scottish surgeon, poet and orientalist (Reid, 2001; Bastin, 2002). They were both influenced by the idea of Johann Gottfried Herder and other thinkers in the European Romantic era which saw the world as a division of 'nations' (Reid, 2001).

His major contribution to the development of Malays as a 'race' and a nation was his 'Introduction' section in the translated work of one Malacca-Johor palace-centric text: the *Sulalatus-Salatin*. The *Sulalatus-Salatin* (Arabic term) or in English, the 'Genealogy of Rajas (Kings)' or 'The Rules of All the Rajas' was originally a description of Malacca-Johor Sultanate genealogy and palace ceremonial practices (Reid, 2001; Milner, 2011). It was translated by Leyden at Raffles' request. After translating *Sulalatus-Salatin*, Raffles and Leyden then retitled it as the *Malay Annals* in 1821. The Malay Annals hence is a title given by the British officer and translator (Milner, 2011; Shamsul, 2011; Hooker and Hooker, 2001; Reid, 2001, p.303).

In the Introduction to the Malay *Annals*, Raffles briefly explained, highlighted and categorised Malays as a nation and a 'race' formulated on the ideas of evolutionism that dominated European epistemology in the nineteenth century (for more detail, see the edition of The Malay Annals published in 1821). Prior to that, Raffles had already visualised Malay as a nation in his writing to the Asiatic Society in Bengal. He wrote that:

> I cannot but consider the *Malayu* nation as one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, and preserving their character and customs, in all the maritime states lying between the Sulu Seas and the Southern Oceans. (1818, p.103)

His interpretation lay on two reasons: the Malay-Malaccan diaspora, and the 'Great Tradition' of Malacca which qualified the Malay-Malaccan Sultanate institution as the archetype for other monarchy systems in the peninsula. The Malay Annals as translated by Leyden hence conveyed a general message as though it constituted the history of the Malays (as understood by Malaysians today) themselves.

Today, the Malay Annals is considered to be one of the important texts in the 'Malay' classical literature and history (Gunalan, 1999; Rahmat, 2002). Most of the Malay Annals' studies linger around the real identity of the author and the place and time of the writing. There is a lack of critical analysis on the identity of 'Malay' in the Annals. Even though there are some critical discussions on these historical 'facts' among local historians, what these discussions have done so far is to modify some parts of the historical facts without challenging the

whole paradigm grounded on the colonial epistemology of Malay 'race' and the nation-state (Shamsul, 2011). In fact, there was a large body of pre-war Malay nationalist literature written according to the colonial discourse of Malay nation and race (Shamsul, 2008), such as works by Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi in the 1920s, Za'aba and Kajai in the 1930s and Ishak Hj. Muhammad in the early 1940s (Shamsul, 1997, 2008). This is shown by "the fact that there are politico-academic attempts to 'indigenise' Asian history by privileging the native-indigenous viewpoint" (Shamsul, 2008, p.5).

According to Ernest Renan (1990), history is at the centre of a nationalist project that requires careful and selective interpretation. It is in this process that history gets its shape. History is not only purely about collective remembering but also collective forgetting. This forgetting "is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality" (Renan, 1990, p.11). Renan suggested that there is a need to look into the identity of historical knowledge and its construction, and that this has been absent from much Malaysian studies scholarship (Shamsul, 2001a). The dependence on colonial epistemology has created an ideological and intellectual issue for the on-going development of Malaysian studies (Kathirithamby-Wells, 1971; Khoo Kay Kim, 1979, 1992; Stockwell 1976) and the supposed knowledge which it produces (Shamsul, 2001b). Foucault (1998) posited that knowledge – in this case referring to history – cannot be separated from power. Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1978), linked knowledge to power in the colonial discourse and orientalist scholarship on the grounds that the local people (in East Asia) "are not free subjects of thought and action" (Said, 1978 p.3).

This point is worth noting because there are possibilities that the historical 'facts' of ethnic categorisation and nation-state in Malaysia would be taken-for-granted in some of the Malaysian social research conducted by local scholars. According to Shamsul (2001b), the colonial epistemology has been accepted by most local historians and some researchers in the humanities as unproblematic knowledge, and has been used as the base parameter for Malaysian historical and inter-ethnic studies. Meanwhile, in non-academic social research such as the work of the Merdeka Center, surveys have been conducted mainly on the basis of

ethnic categories without a proper explanation or definition, as though these categories are static and fixed with little consideration of region, culture, sub-values or class (Pue and Kaur, 2014). Most importantly, the knowledge thus produced continues to reify and promote ethnic identity and groups as natural and fixed in Malaysia.

Ethnicity and boundaries

The term 'ethnicity' was first recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1953. However, the early definition of ethnicity was opaque in that it either meant 'the essence' by which it was possible to differentiate one group from another, or a 'field of study' in general (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). Ethnicity is derived from the Greek term *ethnos*. *Ethnos* had a variety of meanings in ancient Greek. Homer, for example, used *ethnos* as a reference to groups of humans and animals, such as a group of friends or a flock of birds (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). Implicitly, *ethnos* was used as a reference to a 'they' or something that is not a part of 'us', who are different in terms of culture or biology. In the New Testament, for example, *ethnos* basically refers to the 'gentile' people (in other words, non-Jews, or 'they' who are not 'us') (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). However, during the mid-nineteenth century, the meaning of the word *ethnos* was amended and it began to denote groups of people with shared characteristics. Based on this usage, several terms have since been derived, such as ethnology, ethnocentrism, ethnography and ethnicity (Tonkin, McDonald and Chapman 2009). Still today, the main purpose of the word 'ethnic' is to distinguish between 'us' and 'them'. Max Weber gave the earliest comprehensive sociological definition of ethnic groups as:

> [...] those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. (Weber, 1968, p.389)

The most important element in this definition is the concept of 'subjective belief'. This belief facilitates group formation, particularly for political purposes. In simpler words, the ethnic concept describes the idea by which

people believe that they are actually a group of people with something in common because they focus on their similarity in terms of 'physical' appearance, customs or history. These similarities between individuals attach them as group members and help them to achieve their collective demands. The belief is likely to persist even when they have achieved their target(s). The belief subsequently becomes more strongly established, and is breakable only through "drastic differences in the custom, physical type or above all, language exist(ing) among its members" (Weber, 1996, p.36). This belief also creates social boundaries between the 'us' and the others, in that members of an ethnic group invariably uphold particular features of honour and pride which are absent among non-members (Weber, 1996). In addition, the feeling of being in a chosen group often makes members of an ethnic group try to avoid being associated with members of different ethnic groups (Swedberg and Agevall, 2005).

Weber's work on ethnic groups influenced many later scholars, one of whom was Fredrick Barth. Barth (1969) disagreed with the understanding of ethnicity as defined by the components which it contains. This understanding for him failed to comprehend the complexity of ethnicity. Barth justified his stand with three arguments. First, the understanding that ethnicity is equal to culture "is not so far removed in content from the proposition that a race = a culture = a language and that a society = a unit which rejects or discriminates against others" (Barth, 1969, p.11). Second, this type of understanding only prevents thinkers "from understanding the phenomenon of ethnic groups and their place in society and culture" (Barth, 1969, p.11) because "while purporting to give an ideal type model of a recurring empirical form, it implies a preconceived view of what are the significant factors in the genesis, structure, and function of such groups" (Barth, 1969, p.11). Third, the understanding also "allows us to assume that boundary maintenance is unproblematic and follows from the isolation which the itemized characteristics imply: racial difference, cultural difference, social separation and language barriers, spontaneous and organised enmity" (Barth, 1969, p.11).

Given these limitations, it is difficult to understand cultural diversity as each group is perceived as developing its own cultural and social form in isolation, with the main adaptation being to ecological factors through invention and

selective borrowing. For Barth (1969), culture should not be a definer of the ethnic group, but rather should be understood as a consequence of ethnic group organisation. Besides, sharing the same cultural elements such as religion, language or customs does not always make a number of people into a single ethnic group. There are no 'ethnic' groups where all members have exactly the same culture/religion/language and where *no one else* has that culture/religion/language. In other words, the boundaries of a given ethnicity *never* completely coincide with the characteristics which, it is claimed, define it. There is always unacknowledged diversity within and beyond the group. Hence, Barth argued, the key issue is not what the boundary contains, but how it gets drawn. Moreover, ethnic boundaries exist, persist and maintain through interaction (Barth, 1969). They therefore need to be defined in terms of their opposition to other relevant groups.

Ethnicity studies in the Malaysian context can be divided into three categories. The first category refers to studies which focus on what a given identity 'is'. These studies have a tendency to depart from a reification of ethnic identity. Instead of looking at how ethnic boundaries (religion, language, and customs) were built for/during Malays-Chinese interaction, they have focused on the boundaries as a fixed-definer of Malays and Chinese. They also frequently justified inter-ethnic contention as a result of these differences. For example, Milne (1970) interpreted the Malay-Sino Riot of 1969 as a primordial conflict between Malays and Chinese. The status of Malay privileges and Chinese education and language were the main issues behind the Riot of 1969 that led to the formation of a National Cultural Policy and the separation of Singapore from the Federation. Another example is Soong (1999), who justified the relevancy of Chinese education on the basis of everyday 'common sense' for children to learn by using their mother tongue. What Soong (1999) tried to ignore was the variety of Chinese dialects in Malaysia. If a child must be taught in his/her mother tongue, then pupils in each Chinese school should be taught in their group dialect. The maintenance of Chinese schools is arguably important for collecting and uniting the Chinese under one fixed-boundary – language – which is historically proven to have united the Chinese in the early twentieth century.

The second category refers to those scholars who challenge and reinterpret colonial epistemology especially on the concept of colonial capitalism, nation, feudalism and government, such as Syed Hussein Alatas (1977), Anuour Abdel Malek (1981) and Shamsul (1999a, 2001a, 2008, 2011). In *The Myths of Lazy Natives*, Alatas (1977) critiqued the colonial view for defining the local people through a racialisation which was based on environment, climate, culture and customs which consequently created group stereotypes such as laziness and lacking the initiative for development. For him, over-generalisation should not be applied to all indigenous people as many of them worked hard for their survival. The only 'mistake' the native people made was their reluctance to work in the colonial economy by preferring their own traditional economic activities. In other words, the stereotype was part of the ideology which justified colonial capitalism for tin and rubber in Malaya.

The final category refers to those studies which interpret Malays-Chinese from the instrumentalist perspective. For example, the reinforcement of cultural identities as a result of different economic positions (Said, 1992), colonial manipulation of ethnicity (Nair, 2009), Malaysian Chinese solidarity in the form of ethnic consciousness instead of class consciousness (Abraham, 2004) and Malaysian ethnicity as a class mask (Hilley, 2001). However, there is a tendency in this category of research to be one-sided. It is either a top-down or a bottom-up approach. The present study is therefore designed to expand the literature on the instrumentalist perspective of the Malaysian ethnicity (epistemology) by combining top-down and bottom-up approaches (theory) and extending their application beyond the Malaysian boundaries (methods).

The instrumentalist perspective of Malaysian ethnicity

The instrumentalist perspective proposes that ethnicity is an instrument used to achieve particular goals in political and social projects. My argument is that, in order to keep specific privileges and benefits, the Malaysian ethnicisation system is used to "produce a dialectical process that assigns individuals into a general category of persons that reproduces itself biologically, culturally and economically" (Miles and Brown 2003, p.99). The questions which arise here are therefore: by whom was it (and is it) utilised and for whom?

As I explained in the 'Identity' section, there is a dialectical relationship between the state and everyday actors in the process of identification and categorisation. The instrumentalist approach should therefore be used to look at both angles: the top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The top-down approach in this research refers to a study in which ethnicity is seen as an instrument which is institutionalised into political and social structures. My argument is that there is a consistency between the present (with a few alterations and additions) and previous colonial ethnic bureaucratisation systems. In the pre-independence system, ethnic identification and categorisation was important in the Malay Reserved Land Enactment (for Malays) and Article 153 (consisting of the Malays, natives of Sabah and Sarawak being allocated privileges in education, business licences and particular positions in the public sector). Each of these enactments and legislations is maintained in the present day. In the present day, a new concept of identification and categorisation has emerged: the *Bumiputra* category.

According to Banton (1997), ethnicity can be politicised by the state through group redefinition and 'name-changing'. *Bumiputra* is a name-change used by the Malaysian authorities to revise their ethnic bureaucratisation system. The *Bumiputra* category was introduced in the early 1970s for the purpose of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was introduced after the Malay-Sino Riots in 1969. Income disparity between ethnic groups was identified as the main reason for the riots (Sundaram, 2004; Shamsul, 2008). Under the NEP policy, special privileges were given to the identified underprivileged *Bumiputra*: Malays, aboriginal people in the peninsula and natives of Sabah and Sarawak.

The importance of ethnicity in Malaysian social relations can certainly be studied using this approach, but does this really represent Malaysians in everyday life? Are ethnic relations in Malaysia solely a product of the state? The weakness of the top-down approach is its tendency to overlook the individual cognitive and emotional ability to identify and categorise self and others. "People do not merely possess their ethnic identity; they also contribute to its development" (Fenton, 2010, p.3). The bottom-up approach in this research refers to a study in which ethnicity is seen as an instrument used by everyday actors - it could be in a form of collective movement – to achieve their socio-economic targets.

Banton (2011) recommended a combination of the top-down and bottom-up approaches because they can highlight the holistic relationship between societal structure and everyday social actors. This view supports that of Shamsul (1996, 2001b) who saw Malaysian social reality as a composition of two complementary approaches: 'authority-defined' and 'everyday-defined'. According to Shamsul (1996, 2001b), the authority-defined approach pertains to the reality which is defined by the authority, whereas the everyday-defined approach refers to the reality which is experienced and reacted to by people in their everyday lives. In the context of Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) work, the authority-defined also can be understood as an external identification which observes and guides the identification and categorisation processes. On the other hand, the everyday-defined could be understood as self- and other-identification which sometimes acts in conjunction with external identifications.

According to Rational Choice Theory (RCT), people's actions are based on the economic principle of minimising the costs and maximising the profits. This theory is important for this current study in enabling the understanding of the formation of ethnic-based associations or political parties. The profits in Malaysian inter-ethnic relationships are seen in the form of 'public resources'. Public resources in the Malaysian context refer to academic scholarships, business licences and particular occupational positions in the public sector. They are available for all but, because of scarce resources, not everyone will receive them. In gaining and maintaining these public goods, Malaysians realise the advantages of their ethnic groupings. Political parties are a manifestation of individual ethnic group consciousness. The formation of the political parties, UMNO, MCA, MIC and PAS, in present-day Malaysia was grounded on ethnic identification. Therefore, based on the RCT framework, in selecting a political party affiliation, an individual will act on the basis of his or her rational calculation of the costs and the benefits of that action (Yang, 2000, p.47).

At the same time, Banton (1996) emphasised that ethnicity is not important on all occasions. For example, Malays often feel obligated to refer to themselves as an ethnic group when dealing with the Chinese in a political situation. This preference is related to access to public resources. Ethnic identity, however, is an unnecessary intrusion into personal life in other contexts. Labour market and

socialising decisions are often shaped around the nature of the relationship, which could be one of cooperation or one of competition. When an individual focuses on cooperation, the ethnic boundaries are often diluted. But such ethnic boundaries will be strengthened by the individual when social relations are based on competition. "Ethnic definitions can lose ground to other social definitions, such as those of religion, class, nation or friendship. They can also weaken if self-interest is allowed greater legitimacy at the expense of social obligation" (Banton, 1996, p.101).

Based on the *actor's model of ethnic relations* (Banton, 1996), an individual acts as an observer by observing others and looking for signs before deciding on his or her appropriate response: "It is the observer who decides that a particular attitude is to be labelled ethnic, national or religious" (Banton, 1996, p.102). The aftermath of this observation always leads to exclusive or inclusive processes. An inclusive process refers to when the observer decides to preserve the group characteristics and loyalty to the group, whereas an exclusive process takes place when non-members are regarded as *different* from the group. For these outcomes, ethnic identification and categorisation may not be a result only of manipulation by elites. It is also an individual's cognitive ability to respond by identifying and categorising self- and others into ethnic or national identity accordingly to their situation and feedback. In other words, there is a social, economic, politics or psychological need to create, strengthen and maintain the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.

Indeed, individuals can decide to identify themselves or others based on their own cognitive ability, but the self- and other-identifications cannot be avoided in the face of external identifications created by the state. For me, both the top-down *and* the bottom-up approaches can be used independently but more effectively in tandem to better understand the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. To obtain a more holistic understanding it is preferable for this research to extend its scope by using both approaches, especially given that each of them is capable of reinforcing the other in maintaining the ethnic group and its boundaries in Malaysia, and both can cause the reoccurrence of the other.

4   Nation, nationalism and *Nation-of-Intent*

The main aim in this section is to provide a theoretical strategy in relation to the 'what' question posed in this study. As outlined in the previous discussion, the identification and categorisation of ethnic identity and the ethnic group is intimately related to the British colonial epistemology which has been maintained and instrumentalised by the state within the Malaysian ethnic bureaucratic system. The question therefore is: what are the consequences of ethnic identification and categorisation for nationalism and the formation of a nation? Similar to ethnicity, the term 'nation' has been widely used in many different ways by Malaysian politicians, journalists and members of the general public to express different meanings. It is used by the authorities to promote loyalty to the state; it is used by politicians to foster their image as heroes, and it is loosely used by the general public to describe the state itself. As I briefly argued above, there is an ideological concern among some Malaysian scholars over the development of Malaysian studies in regards to its attachment to the colonial 'racial' epistemology and the 'knowledge' which that epistemology has produced. At the same time, there is also an on-going political project to create and produce a Malaysian 'nation' (Shamsul, 2001a, 2001b) which implicitly depends on this colonial epistemological heritage.

Etymologically, the word 'nation' is derived from the Latin noun *natio*, which is related to the verb *nasci*, which means 'to be born'. *Natio* can mean simply 'birth' but has extended meanings of 'a breed', 'species', 'race' or even simply 'a sort' or 'a kind' (Connor, 1978, p.38; Fenton, 2010). The meaning of 'nation' in the late thirteenth century had a strong connotation with groups of people who were related by blood. However, the definition changed in the early seventeenth century when it began to be used in reference to a people within a country. In the late seventeenth century, the terms 'nation' and 'state' were commonly used interchangeably for two possible reasons. The first reason was based on writings pertaining to the doctrine of sovereignty wherein the meanings of 'people' and 'state' were portrayed as being the same, leading to the assumption that citizenry and nation were synonymous. The second reason relates to the development of the alternative form: the 'nation-state'. The term 'nation-state' is often used to describe "a situation in which a nation had its own

state" (Connor, 1978, p.40). Despite being related, state and nation are two separate entities, the former refers to a "major political subdivision of the globe", whilst the latter is less easily described (Connor, 1978, p.36).

Nationalism and the nation are inter-related. Nationalism has been defined by Gellner (1983) as "a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent". It can be best described in two inter-related concepts: as "a sentiment" and as "a movement". The former refers to a "feeling of anger" if the political principle is being violated or a "feeling of satisfaction" if the principle is being fulfilled (Gellner, 1983, p.1). The latter refers to a movement motivated by the sentiment (Gellner, 1983). Gellner's definition of a nation refers to the phenomenon which occurs when people are willing, either by consent or fear, to form a group with a shared culture as part of the "age of nationalism" when "general conditions make for standardised, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations and not just elite minorities", which can be achieved through central education (Gellner, 1983, pp.54-55). In other words, "it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way around" (Gellner, 1983, p.55).

Another modernist thinker, Benedict Anderson (1991, p.6), defined the nation as "an imagined political community. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". The nation is imagined as limited, sovereign and a community. It is imagined as limited because there are boundaries to differentiate one nation from another. It is imagined as sovereign because it was born in the age of Enlightenment and Revolution which displaced the divinely-ordained and hierarchical dynastic system, and it is imagined as a community because it is always regarded as characterised by "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1991, p.7). The imagined community at the same time makes it possible for post-colonial societies to create a self-image that can release them from colonial oppression (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2006). Fanon (1969), however, reminded us that there is a possibility for a national bourgeoisie to imitate the strategies used by former colonialists in maintaining their power.

According to Anderson (1991), there were three forms used by colonial powers to imagine their dominion, which also served as the backdrop for their post-colonial successor regimes. These were the census, the map and the museum. The earliest population *census* in what is now Malaysia was conducted by the British in 1871. Hirschman (1975) studied the Malaysian population censuses conducted from 1871 to 1970 and found that the population categories gradually became exclusively 'racial'. He also discovered that several categories actually disappeared. They were redefined and concentrated in larger groups such as Malays, Chinese, Indians and Others. These identity categories were agglomerated, disaggregated, recombined, intermixed and reordered on the basis of political, economic and numerical factors. Most importantly, the 'Malay population by Race' category in the 1911 census, which consisted of Malay (local), Javanese, Sakai, Banjarese, Boyanese, Mendeling (*sic*), Krinchi (*sic*), Jambi, Achinese, Bugis and Other, was reformulated into one category – Malay – in post-independence censuses. Except for Malays, other 'races' within the 1911 census of the Malay population categories were immigrants from the neighbouring colony of the Dutch East Indies. The new category indicated a new identification of a Malay category. There are two explanations for this outcome. First, the 1931 census showed that the numbers of indigenous Malays were exceeded by the Chinese population. Therefore, the combination of other categories in the 'Malay population by Race' helped to increase the numbers of the Malay population in Malaysia. Second, it was a result of the nation being regarded as limited by territorial boundaries, which had to include those who were living in Malaysia (after fulfilling specific criteria) as Malaysian by highlighting the sovereignty of the Malaysian government.

Maps enhanced the concept of 'nation'. Although there are academic concerns about the historical 'facts' and the formulation of the Malaysian nation-state, it is important for the Malaysia government to reinforce its political sovereignty by outlining the geographical boundaries between Malaysia and the other states surrounding it. Meanwhile, *museums* served as heritage platforms for historical proof of the formation of Malaysia with Malays, aboriginal people and natives of Sabah and Sarawak identified as the Malaysian indigenous people. Census, map and museum therefore reinforced ethnic and national identification, categorisation and grouping. They also coerced national commitment, loyalty

and indebtedness to the national 'heroes' on two different levels: between Malayan/Malaysian and colonialists, and between ethnic groups' fighters in preserving, maintaining and negotiating the socio-economic aspects for their respective groups in gaining independence from the British.

The maintenance of a population based on ethnic categorisation and the issue of historical 'fact' in the distribution of public goods in the national project created an ideological contestation between ethnic groups in Malaysia. Shamsul (2007) suggested that the contestation be called a 'nation-of-intent'. He saw the nation-of-intent as an idea for the formation of a nation, involving its territory, language, population, culture, symbols and institutions, shared by a number of Malaysians who think that it can unite them. It can include and exclude specific categories or groups and it can also create a new state. It is, however, not suggestive of self-rule. The Malaysian nation-of-intent has implied that the nation is never truly achieved, yet. It promoted citizens to be part of the national project. It provided a link between the "authority-defined and everyday-defined idea of a nation" (Shamsul, 2007, p.328). Most Malaysian prime ministers have had to offer their own nation-of-intent: Tunku (1957-1970) with his *laissez-faire* political economy, Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003) with his *Bangsa Malaysia*, Abdullah Badawi (2003-2009) with Islamic *Hadhari* and Najib Razak (2009-until the present) with his 1Malaysia project (this will be further explained in the following chapter). However, since ethnic categorisation and identification remain within the Malaysian system, the authority-defined nation-of-intent mostly came with a priority towards the *Bumiputra* category. The ideal nation promoted either assimilation into a Malay culture or Malay-ness as the core of national identity.

The authority-defined nation-of-intent has been challenged by everyday actors in the form of political groups: the non-*Bumiputra* group – which is mainly led by the Chinese – and Islamic *Bumiputra* (Shamsul, 2007). The non-*Bumiputra* group opposed Bumiputraism and promoted pluralism in the formation of the national identity. The Islamic *Bumiputra* group, mainly through PAS, on the other hand, requested unitary instead of dualist Islamic and secular jurisdiction to be implemented in Malaysia. These nation-of-intent competitions create different

political views among Malaysians. They also create a barrier to the formation of a single national identity and a homogenous culture.

5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the theoretical considerations resting behind the research questions and aims. The main concept in this research is 'identity'. My theoretical framework for identity is based on the works of Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and Jenkins (2008). In the discussion of identity, I have highlighted the analytical problem involving the categories of practice and analysis. I decided to use Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) premises of 'identification and categorisation', 'self-understanding and social location' and 'commonality, connectedness and groupness' (whilst at the same time not abandoning the term 'identity' in this study) to avoid succumbing to the *reification* of identity in Malaysia. The framework is helpful because it accounts for the inter-relationship between internal and external identifications and categorisations. Since both 'ethnic' and 'national' are an identity, they can therefore be studied within the identity framework provided by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and Jenkins (2008).

The second important concept in this research is ethnicity. I have emphasised this in the section on the issue of ethnic identity and construction from the perspective of historical sociology by questioning some of the local researchers' understanding of ethnic categories. Following this concern, I decided to explore the importance of ethnicity from the perspective of instrumentalism. Instrumentalism is useful for understanding and making sense of the uses of ethnic grouping and categorisation. I have opined that ethnicity – as an instrument – is not only used by the state but also by everyday actors. The state has *ethnicised* the Malaysian system whilst the everyday actors have the choice to respond by contributing to and maintaining this development through the presentation of ethnic groups' demands and priorities, such as *Bumiputraism* and the demand for *Mandarin* as one of the official languages. In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between the state and everyday actors which has led to the maintenance of ethnicity boundaries. It is therefore important for this study to adopt an integrated micro-macro level approach in order to achieve a

more holistic understanding of ethnicity and its sociological significance in Malaysia.

The third important concept is nationalism and the nation. The idea of an ideal nation in Malaysia is deeply related to ethnicity. The nation is an imagined community (Anderson, 1991). It is imagined on the basis of the idea of an ideal nation being 'limited, sovereign, and a community'. Based on these concepts, the state (macro) indirectly creates a nation which is constructed on the legacy of British colonial ethnic identification and categorisation. This legacy needs to be maintained by the state in justifying the public good distribution. The ideology is challenged by non-*Bumiputra* and Islamic *Bumiputra* groups (micro) which have arisen in the form of political parties. This does not necessarily mean that the opposing political groups are aware of the British legacy. They demand equal distribution of goods and identify themselves as Malaysian, but the basis of their political parties has remained instituted on the British ethnic identification and categorisation of language and religion. In other words, ethnicity has indirectly contributed to contests over the ideal nation, as the state's ideal nation is related to the ethnic identification and categorisation for public resources distribution which has created concern among some Malaysians.

In sum, these three concepts – identity, ethnicity and nationalism and nation – are important for understanding the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. By adopting and adapting Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) alternative analytical concepts to identity, rational choice theory (RCT), actors' model of ethnic relations (Banton, 1996) and imagined community (Anderson, 1991) within the Malaysian ethnic-bureaucratic system (Siddique, 1990) and everyday responses to it, I shall be able to understand how ethnicity is reproduced and challenged in two different locations (Penang and Glasgow) with two different socio-economic environments and interlocutors.

Chapter Three: A Social History of Malaysia

1 Introduction

The primary objective in this chapter is to present a sociological review of Malaysia's historical background in relation to developments regarding ethnicity and nationalism. There are four sections in this chapter: the pre-Malaccan (pre-1400) and Malaccan period (1400s–1780s), the pre-colonial and colonial period (1786-1900s), the pre-independence period (1900s-1957) and the post-independence period (1957 onwards). The *first* historical timeframe emphasises the initial understanding of 'Malays' and 'Others'. It also highlights the importance of the Malaccan civilisation within Malaysian imperial history. The *second* historical timeframe focuses on the colonial administration system and its contributions to the formation of Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society. The *third* historical timeframe highlights pre-colonial and pre-independence educational and political development among Malays and Chinese. The *final* historical timeframe concentrates on the challenges faced by the post-independence government in the process of nation-making.

Before proceeding to the review, a note on terminologies is necessary. Throughout this chapter, several terms will frequently be used interchangeably, depending on a particular time phase. The terms Malays, British Malaya, Malaya, Malayan, Malaysia and Malaysian may cause confusion for some readers. Article 160 of the Malaysian constitution defines 'Malay' as a person of Malay ethnicity who speaks the Malay language, is Muslim and practises Malay customs. 'British Malaya' was a former name for the present Peninsular Malaysia. 'Malaya' is a reference to the Federation of Malaya formed in 1948 and consisting of nine former Malay states and two Straits Settlements. A 'Malayan' is a citizen of Malaya, a term which was frequently used after the 1940s. After 1963, 'Malayans' became known as 'Malaysians' following the formation of the Federation of Malaysia with the addition of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore.
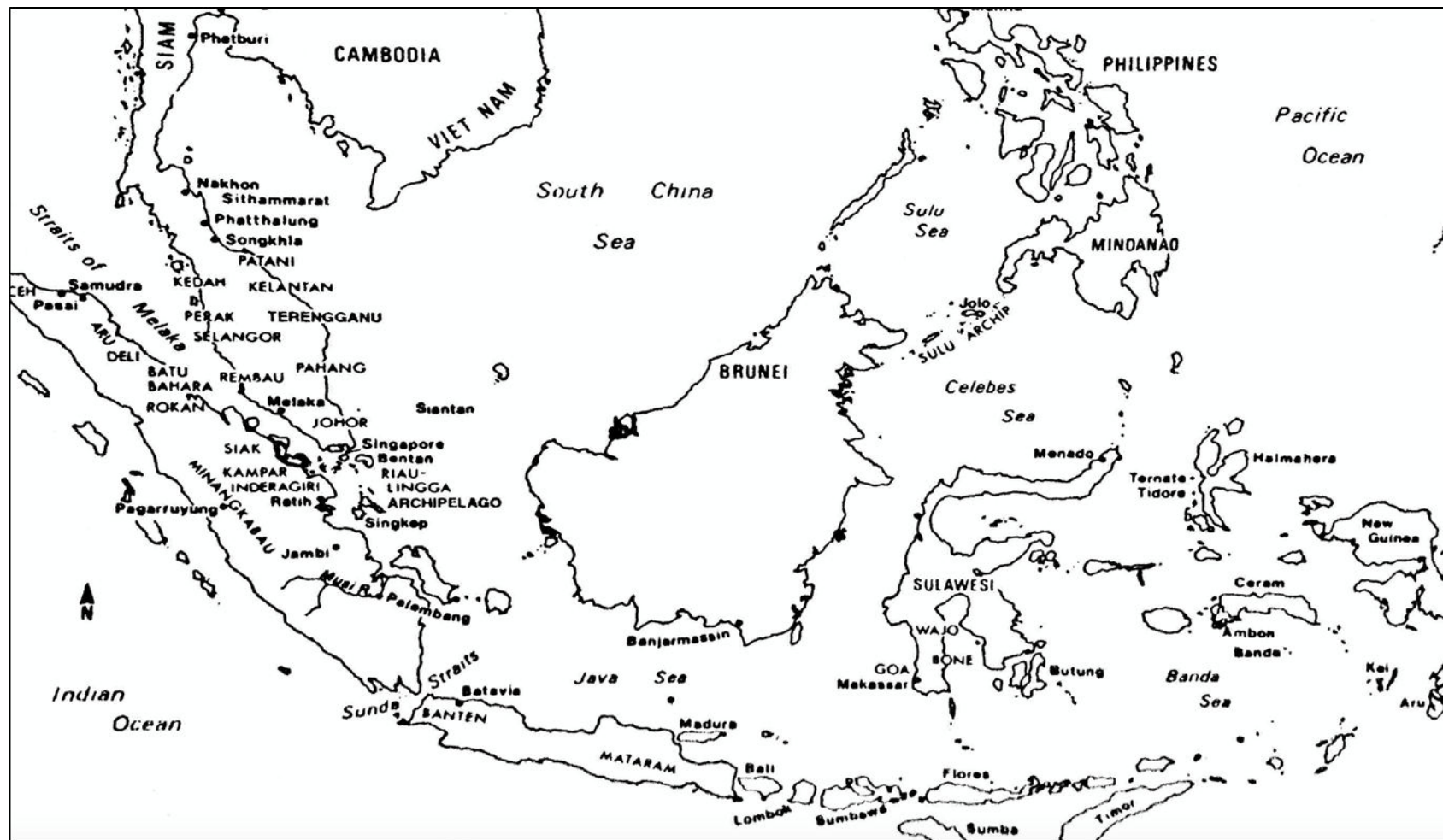
Map 2: The pre-colonial 'Malay' archipelago
(*Source*: Andaya and Andaya, 2001)

2 Pre-1400 to the 1780s: the historical background of 'Malays' and 'Others' identification and categorisation in the archipelago and Malacca

The Pre-Malaccan period

From the archaeological perspective, the earliest people in the peninsula can be traced back to at least 25,000 years ago. They are identified as *Orang Asli* (Aboriginal people) and divided into three main groups. The first and the oldest group are, rather unfortunately, identified as the *Negritos*. Archaeological studies relate *Negritos* to the early Hoabinhians who lived between 8000 and 1000 BC (Nicholas, 2000). They had a nomadic life and depended on forest products. Today, their descendants mainly reside permanently in the north (Kedah and Perak) and the south-east (Kelantan and Pahang) of Malaysia. The second group of *Orang Asli* are the *Senoi*. The *Senoi* are "Mongoloid people who are descendants of both the Hoabinhians and Neolithic cultivators" (Nicholas, 2000, p.4). The earliest date of their settlement in the peninsula is around 2000 BC. They mainly settled in the north (Perak), the south-east (Kelantan) and central (Pahang and Selangor) of Malaysia. In the past, they depended mainly on forest products but their descendants today are mainly involved in permanent agriculture and some work in the waged sector (Nicholas, 2000). Both the *Negritos* and the *Senoi* communities speak Mon-Khmer, one of the Austroasiatic languages. The third group of *Orang Asli* live mostly in the southern part of Malaysia. The southern group encountered seafaring peoples from Borneo and Indonesia (Austronesian speakers) between 2,000 and 3,000 years ago. They are frequently referred to as 'early-Malay' or 'proto-Malay' due to their physical resemblance, assimilation and archaic version of Malay language (Nicholas, 2000; Gin, 2009). The remaining local populations are hypothetically thought to have been present over a great period of time, moving back and forth to the surrounding islands, rivers and coastlines in the archipelago (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

At the beginning, there was no distinct category for the *Negritos*, *Senoi* and Proto-Malays. During the early period of British settlement in Malaya, they were

generally identified as 'aborigines' with negative connotations (Nicholas, 2000). It was the Communist insurgency in Malaya (in the 1940s) which caused the British to realise they needed the help of these aboriginal groups in restricting the movements of the communist guerrillas who mainly hid in the jungle. Following that, the British identified and categorised them as *Orang Asli*, which literally means 'the aboriginal people' but has more positive associations (Nicholas, 2000). The sub-identification of *Orang Asli* into the Proto-Malay category was also related to the colonial epistemology of Malay as a 'race' and a nation and this will be further discussed in the next section.

Historically, from as early as the first century of the Common Era, the aboriginal people (who lived in the hinterland) and other local people (who lived along rivers and coastlines) in the archipelago had close commercial relationships with India and China (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Forest products such as gharu woods, resins, animal horns and sometime gold were collected by the aboriginal people – the principal gatherers. The products were transferred by these gatherers by land or by river (the dendritic concept) to the subsidiary market in a central port (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Allen, 1997). The people who lived near rivers and the coast then distributed and sold the products to Indian and Chinese traders (Ariffin, 1993; Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The demand for and supply of these natural resources in the archipelago led to emergence of several maritime civilisations. In the period from the third to the thirteenth centuries, a maritime civilisation in the peninsula – the Old Kedah[1] – was one of the important trading ports and entrepôts between India, China and the Middle East (Allen, 1997). This Old Kedah maritime civilisation, however, ended in the fourteenth century (Lamb, 1982; Heng, 1990).

The early trading relationships influenced local politics, religion, language and culture (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Gin, 2010). For example, Hindu and Buddhist images and Chandi and Sanskrit transcriptions found in Kedah can be traced back to the fourth century, indicating an Indian influence there (Gin, 2010). Srivijaya[2], a civilisation which emerged in the seventh century, was a Buddhist

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[1] Kedah is one of the states in the Federation of Malaysia located in the northern part of Malaysia.

[2] Srivijaya was located in Palembang – modern Indonesia.

kingdom (Andaya and Andaya, 2001), whereas Majapahit[3], which attacked Srivijaya at the end of the fourteenth century, was a Hindu-Buddhist kingdom (Hefner, 1990). Additionally, an Arabic-Jawi inscription stone discovered in Terengganu[4] was dated back to the thirteenth century, suggesting the arrival of Islam in the peninsula (Kamaruzaman *et al.*, 2016: Andaya and Andaya, 2001). In sum, trade was an important factor which led to local exposure to outsiders as early as the first century. However, since there is lack of information about 'Malay' prior to the fifteenth century, many historians have interpreted the pre-Malaccan period as the pre-Malay history.

Srivijaya, Malacca, Malays and the European traders

The word *Melayu* first appeared in reference to a place in Sumatra and/or to the Straits of Malacca generally (Reid, 2001). The term 'Malay' originated from the name of a river in Jambi and Palembang (Milner, 2011). In a fifth-century Chinese record, the term *Mo-lo-yu* was used to refer to the Jambi region in East Sumatra (Coedes, 1968). In the seventh century, the Chinese recorded that *Melayu* was one of Srivijaya's polities (Milner, 2011; Coedes, 1968). At the end of the fourteenth century, Srivijaya was attacked by Majapahit. The attack caused Parameswara – the Palembang prince – and his Sumatran subjects to flee to the peninsula and eventually to Malacca (Milner, 2011; Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

Initially, Malacca (*see* Map 3) was a small and typical fishing village (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Hock, 2007). After its founding by Parameswara, Malacca started to become commercially dependent on trading activities with the Chinese junks which were passing through the Straits of Malacca (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Purcell, 1951). Parameswara successfully managed to raise Malacca into a great entrepôt centre, suppressing Majapahit and other maritime civilisations such as Kedah (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Malacca's establishment also successfully attracted more foreign traders from China, India, the Arabian peninsula and

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[3] Majapahit is the Indianised kingdom in Sumatra which existed between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.

[4] Terangganu is one of the states in the Federation of Malaysia located in the southeast of Malaysia.

Europe, and settlers from Palembang and the surrounding islands (Hock, 2007). Islam was brought to Malacca by the Muslim traders within these groups, which led to Parameswara's conversion to Islam in 1416 (Wilson 1967; Harding 2012).

Map 3: The location of Malacca

In the fifteenth century, Malacca in particular was known as a centre of Islam in the archipelago (Alatas, 1977). By the end of the fifteenth century, Islam had gradually replaced Hinduism and Buddhism (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). In the sixteenth century, the trading system – with Malacca as its centre – was expanded with the involvement of European traders. The European trading system, however, was different from the Asian trading system in that it was more competitive and capitalist in nature.

In the early formation of Malacca, its habitants were not identified primarily as Malays. Instead, they were known as Malaccans (Reid, 2001), a form of identification which distinguished them from other populations in the

archipelago. However, by the time the Portuguese arrived in Malacca (in the early sixteenth century), "a substantial shift of influence had already taken place from Sumatra to Malacca" (Milner, 2011, p.21). Malaccan people claimed and were understood to have a genealogical relationship with 'Malay' royalty from Palembang/Srivijaya and their 'Malay' subjects from Sumatra (Milner, 2011). Hence, the Malaccans were referred to as 'Malays' in the context of power relations, which indicated that they were related to a Malaccan king, a royal descendant from the *Seguntang* Hill near to the *Melayu* River in the Jambi/Palembang area (Reid, 2001; Leyden, 1821).

Following a siege by the Portuguese in 1511, Malaccans were then formally categorised by the Portuguese as 'Malayos', which meant a person or a group of people subject to the Sultan of Malacca and at the same time following the Mohammedan religion (Reid, 2001). The Malay-Malaccans, on the other hand, identified the Portuguese as white Bengalis during their first encounter (Leyden, 1821), not on the basis of their white skin but primarily because the Portuguese ships had come from the direction of "Goa on the other side of the Bay of Bengal" (Hale, 2013, p.48). The identification and categorisation of other foreign traders and visitors to Malacca prior to the Portuguese siege were similarly based on their ships' original direction and can be divided into four categories: the Gujeratis; the South Indians, Pegi and Pasai; the Javanese, Malukans, Banda, Palembang, Tanjungpura (West Borneo) and Luzon; and finally the Chinese, Ryukyu, Chancheo and Champa (Reid, 2001). In other words, the identification and categorisation during that time was based on continent: Asia and Europe. The absence of a 'Malayos' category in the list suggests that the Malays were "not a category outside Malacca itself" (Reid, 2001, p.299).

The establishment of Malacca as an entrepôt and Islamic centre also made Malay the main *lingua franca* in the archipelago (Alatas, 1977; Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The language however, "was called not 'Malay' but 'Jawi', in its elite form, and '*Kacukan*' (mixed language) or '*Pasara*' (market language) when describing the day-to-day communication among commoners" (Milner, 2011, p.4). Under the influence of Islam, the Malays' alphabet which had previously taken the form of *Pallava* and *Nagari* characters (Sanskrit) underwent character changes and was subsequently known as '*Jawi*' (in the form of Arabic letters),

and this was widely used in Malay letters, books and arts (Kratz, 2002). Islam at the same time influenced the Malaccan political administration system and local lifestyles. For instance, the *Hukum Kanun Melaka* (the Malacca Digest) and the *Undang-Undang Laut Melaka* (the Maritime Laws of Malacca) were formulated on the basis of Islamic laws (Liaw, 1976). Also, the 'Report of the Ocean' published in 1537 described pork as a forbidden food for native Mohammedans in Malacca (Purcell, 1951).

Initially, the trading relationship between Malaccan and other foreign traders, such as Indian, Chinese, Arab and Portuguese, merely involved economic commodities, particularly jungle products. However, there was a demand to establish a monopoly in the archipelago during the east-west trading system between European powers. Consequently, this led to the Portuguese invasion of Malacca. The siege of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511 had a significant impact on the formation of Malays' identity in other parts of the archipelago, particularly in the peninsula. Following the fall of Malacca, the Malaccan heritage was divided into two categories. The first category was the merchants who continued to have close trading relationships with Malacca. They then spread throughout Southeast Asia finding new trading ports. This group was mixed in its ethnic origins and included Gujerati, South Indian, Chinese and Ryukyuan communities who had been assimilated into the Malaccan culture by using the Malay language and practising Islam. When they moved out of Malacca and scattered around the archipelago, they were simply known as Malays. The further they travelled from Sumatra or the peninsula, the more this Muslim trading community was recognised as Malay (Reid, 2001).

The second group of Malaccan heritage, on the other hand, is an important pillar for the 'Malay' identity in modern Malaysia today (Reid, 2001). During the Portuguese invasion (1511), the Sultan at the time, Sultan Mahmud Shah, and his prince, Ahmad Shah, fled to Muar (an area located in modern Johor), and then to Pahang, finally settling on Bentan Island (located in the Riau Archipelago) (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). In 1526, the Portuguese destroyed Bentan, and Sultan Mahmud fled again to Kampar (an area located in modern Perak). After his death, his son, Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah, succeeded to the throne. He then married a royal from Pahang and settled in Pekan Tua (an area located in

modern Johor) (*see* Map 4).

Map 4: The location of Malacca, Johor, Perak and Pahang

Johor is considered as a rejuvenation of Malacca in terms of its political and cultural practices (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Hale, 2013). Pahang and Negeri Sembilan were part of Johor territories, whilst Perak was led by the heir of the Malaccan Sultan (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The Malay-Malacca legacy in terms of civilisation and traditions was therefore kept alive in Johor, Pahang and Perak (Bari, 2008). Negeri Sembilan, on the other hand, maintained its distinctive socio-economic and political system known as *Adat Perpatih* (see more in Gullick, 1988; Kassim, 1988). In 1641, the Dutch besieged Malacca but ceded it to the British in the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

After the sixteenth century, Malays - as a reference to a person or group of people - can be understood in two contexts: the non-European and the European. In the non-European context, 'Malay' is a self- and other-identification of people residing in the archipelago who were related to the

exiled kingship from Srivijaya/Palembang, and who practised "a commercial diaspora which retained some of the customs, language and trade practices in the emporium of Malacca" (Reid, 2001, p.300). The role of exiled kingship was prominent in the Straits of Malacca, whilst the commercial diaspora was "exceptionally open to new recruits from any ethnic background, it can be seen to have evolved towards the idea of *orang Melayu* [Malay] as a distinct *ethnie*" (Reid, 2001, p.301).

The second understanding of 'Malay' came from the European context and should be understood in regard to two different periods: prior to the nineteenth century, and during/after the nineteenth century. Prior to the nineteenth century, 'Malay' primarily referred to Malaccans. They were described by the Portuguese and Dutch (officers, travellers or historians) on the basis of their religion (Islam), lifestyles and customs (details in Tom Pires, 1944 and Duarte Barbossa, 1921). Other populations in the peninsula arguably would have self-identified themselves as Malay. Even in the eighteenth century, many of the letters sent by the local authority in the peninsula to the English authorities (in Indonesia) were "very rarely" self-identified as Malay (Milner, 2011). The peninsula during this period was also acknowledged by other Europeans as the Malaccan Peninsula (Reid, 2001), rather than the Malay Peninsula, as it is broadly referred to in Malaysian studies.

As I stated in the previous chapter, Stamford Raffles, who was influenced by the European concept of 'race' and by the European Romantic notion of 'nationhood', interpreted the Malays as a 'race' residing in and a 'nation' located in the peninsula. In a memoir compiled by his widow, Lady Sophia Raffles, he is said to have interpreted the Malay nation as a creation of Islam (Alatas, 1977). He also highlighted how the arrival of Islam in Malacca had separated the Malays' "original stock by the admixture of Arabian blood and the introduction of the Arabic language and Moslem religion" (Raffles, 1835, p.40). It was in the nineteenth century that the concept of Malay began to reflect the European concept of race, particularly after the publication of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin in 1856. Alfred Russel Wallace, a British naturalist, published a book entitled *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) in which he confirmed the idea of 'race' as understood by Europeans in a way that supported

Darwinism. Although most parts of the book discussed the archipelago's fauna, his use of the word 'race' for describing the people in the area reflected the Victorian understanding prominent during the time.[5] For example, he wrote:

> The intellect of the Malay race seems rather deficient. They are incapable of anything beyond the simplest combinations of ideas and have little taste or energy for the acquirement of knowledge.
> (Wallace, 1869, pp.448-449)

Even though there was a tendency for writers in the nineteenth century to highlight the 'racial' distinction, some of them nevertheless focused primarily on the cultural elements which were used to differentiate Malays from others. For example, Frank Swettenham[6] described Malays in his book as "Muslim, proud and fond of their country, and fearful of the Sultans, fatalist and superstitious, and physically as a short brown man, with flat and wide nostrils, a large mouth and dark pupils" (Alatas, 1997, p.44). Swettenham's descriptions of a Malay did not exclusively apply to Malays in Malacca *per se*, but to the Malays in the peninsula as a whole (Alatas, 1977). Although Islam had already arrived in the other parts of the peninsula as early as the thirteenth century, such as in Terengganu, it was Malacca that the others acknowledged as a relatively significant centre of Islam in the archipelago. The English generalisation of the indigenous Muslims in the peninsula as Malays was therefore a result of the Malay-Malaccan diaspora. The focus on physical appearance was a relatively new attribute added by the British during the nineteenth century.

In sum, there are three sociological points which can be retrieved from this historical account: first, the inter-ethnic contact and relationship in the archipelago (and later in Malacca) was initiated primarily by economic interests but changed into colonialism with the expansion of European capitalism in Southeast Asia. Second, the Malay-Malaccan kingship (the Sultans) and their diaspora (religion, language and custom) were two significant precursors to the formation of Malays in the peninsula as a 'race' category and nation in the nineteenth century. Third, in terms of the political perspective, the colonial identification of Malays as a 'race' and nation in the nineteenth century

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[5] Wallace later renounced any biological basis for racial differences (Hirschman, 1986).

[6] Frank Swettenham was the British Resident-General of the Federated Malay States from 1896 to 1901.

provided them with history and an 'indigenous' status in comparison with Chinese and Indian immigrants.

3   1786 – 1900s: the development and management of ethnicity in British Malaya

British colonial rule contributed to the formation of Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society more than the Portuguese and Dutch had done in at least in two ways: deep participation in local political and economic affairs, and the utilisation of a European 'racial' epistemological understanding as a tool for managing the relationships between ethnic groups in British Malaya.

British political economic involvement in the peninsula began in Penang, Singapore and Malacca. Chronologically, in 1785, the East India Company obtained a lease for Penang from Sultan Kedah and officially arrived in Penang in 1786. The arrival of the British stimulated Chinese immigration to Penang and other parts of the peninsula (Purcell, 1951; Andaya and Andaya, 2001). In 1819, the British expanded their control to Singapore. The British settlement in Singapore once again attracted Chinese immigration from China (Purcell, 1951). Under the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, the British gained control in Malacca. In 1826, Penang, Singapore and Malacca were placed under the management of the East India Company whose headquarters in the area were located in Calcutta, India. In 1867, the states' administration was directly managed by the Colonial Office in London and they were known as the Straits Settlements (Harding, 2012) (*see* Table 1).

Table 1: The history of the Straits Settlement

Year	Historical Events
1786	British officially gained control in Penang
1819	British officially gained control in Singapore
1824	British officially gained control in Malacca
1826	Penang, Singapore and Malacca were administered by one company: the East India Company.
1867	The formation of the Straits Settlements consisting of Penang, Singapore and Malacca

Parallel with the British administration in the Straits Settlements, other regions located in the peninsula were also officially recognised: Kedah, Kelantan, Terangganu, Perlis, Johor, Selangor, Perak, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan. Some of these regions were related to one another: Johor, Pahang, Perak and Negeri Sembilan were closely related to the Malaccan Sultanate; Kedah, Terangganu, Perlis and Kelantan were parts of Siamese territory (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Back in the fifteenth century, some of these regions had had political relationships with Malacca, but it was Malacca to which the others in the peninsula paid homage due to its advanced economic, political and religious development (Bari, 2008). Under the general British Government policy, a non-intervention policy in these regions was practised in order to avoid conflict with Siam (particularly for Kedah, Kelantan, Terangganu and Perlis) (Tarling, 1957). In 1873, however, the British Secretary of State instructed Sir Andrew Clarke to become aware of other regional political affairs and situations (Comber, 2001). Following this instruction, the British officially interfered in the other regions, especially after the *Pangkor Treaty* of 1874.

The pre-colonial British, Malays and Chinese political economic relationship

Tin was one of the main natural resources available in the peninsula, particularly in Perak (Larut) and Selangor (Kuala Lumpur). The pre-colonial Malay ruling class was involved in tin extraction but only on a small scale (Kratoska, 1997). Before the commercialisation of tin by the British, the local Malay *rakyat* worked on a part-time basis or worked as their chiefs required (Saleh 1989). In the mid-nineteenth century, the demand for tin increased in Britain due to the expansion of the tin-plate manufacturing sector (Hale, 2013). In order to fulfil this demand and maximise the profits, a new effective technique for tin mining was required. The Malay population was neither large enough nor willing enough to leave their rural neighbourhoods to provide the necessary human resource to satisfy the demands of the European and Chinese capital investors and entrepreneurs who had to turn, perforce, to sources outside the peninsula, which were Chinese from China and Malays from Sumatra, Java and other islands in the archipelago (Bedlington, 1978).

Realising that the Chinese had more capital, some local Malay leaders such as Long Ja'afar from Perak decided to collaborate with them. In 1848, Long Ja'afar invited Chinese miners to develop tin deposits in Larut. After his death, his son, Ngah Ibrahim, took his place. Ngah Ibrahim inherited the profits from the tin produced by the large Chinese population. Most of the Chinese miners at the Larut tin site were *Hakkas* but they were divided into two major clans, the *Chen Seng* and the *Few Chew* clans. The *Chen Seng* group was a member of the Hai San society and the *Few Chew* was a member of the Ghe Hin society. The conflict between these two associations manifested itself in a series of events between 1862 and 1873 (Purcell, 1948). Ghe Hin and Hai San at the same time had alliances with Malay sworn brotherhoods, the White Flag society and the Red Flag society respectively (Purcell, 1948). Additionally, the conflict between Hai San and Ghe Hin continued when Raja Abdullah asked for help from Ghe Hin in regaining his position as legal ruler in Perak by defeating Temenggung Ismail. Temenggung Ismail was supported by Ngah Ibrahim, who had a good relationship with the Hai San (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Holst, 2012). The conflict between them in Larut was finally settled after British interference in their conflict (details in Andaya and Andaya, 2001 and Purcell, 1951).

The feud between Malay chiefs and the war between the Chinese clans created an excuse for British intervention (Hui, 1980). In an attempt to solve the problem, the *Pangkor* Treaty was signed between the British and Raja Abdullah in 1874 (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). In the treaty, the British acknowledged Raja Abdullah as the legal ruler in Perak in exchange for acceptance of the British representative (the Resident) as administrator of Perak's economic affairs. The agreement, however, did not cover Malay customs and Islamic affairs (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Wilson, 1967). Furthermore, the same reason - internal conflicts within the Malay ruling class - was used as a justification for British imperial intervention in Selangor, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan (*see* details in Table 2). This situation not only applied in British Malaya but was also found in other British colonial territories. In 1895, these states were centralised into one system, the British Resident-General system, and were known as the Federated Malay States (FMS) (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

Table 2: Summary of the feuds in the FMS

States	Wars/Dispute	Consequences
Larut war (1862 – 1873)	Conflict between Chen Seng and Few Chew clans. Both were Hakkas. Chen Seng was a member of the Hai San Chinese society, whereas Few Chew was a member of the Ghe Hin society.	Hai San managed to gain authority in Larut.
Perak	Raja Abdullah (supported by the Ghe Hin) *versus* Temenggung Ismail (supported by the Hai San).	Under the Pangkor Treaty 1874, Raja Abdullah was recognised as legal ruler in exchange for recognition of the British Resident.
Selangor civil war	Took place between Raja Abdullah (supported by the Hai San) and Raja Mahadi (supported by the Ghe Hin).	In 1896, Frank Swettenham became the first Resident in Selangor.
Pahang civil war	The Wan Mutakhir and Wan Ahmad dispute.	Sir John Pickersgill became the first Resident in 1888.
Negeri Sembilan civil war	The Datuk Bandar and Datuk Kelana feud over tin-mining areas.	In 1897, Sir Patrick J. Murray became the first Resident of Negeri Sembilan.

Kelantan, Terangganu, Kedah and Perlis, on the other hand, had different histories compared with the Federated Malay States (FMS) or the Straits Settlement. Before being administered as the Unfederated Malay States (UMS), Kelantan, Terangganu, Kedah and Perlis were subject to Siamese control (Harding, 2012). In the 1909 Bangkok Treaty, Kelantan, Terangganu, Kedah and Perlis were ceded from Siam to British governance (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Harding, 2012). Johor, on the other hand, managed to maintain its independence and was recognised as an independent state under the 1885 Protection Treaty, but it was later brought into the residential system in 1914 (Harding, 2012).

The UMS differed from the FMS in several ways. First, the FMS was administrated by the Resident-General system, whereas the UMS was administrated by an Advisory system. The Resident's administrative scope in the FMS was wider than that of the Advisor in the UMS. However, neither the Resident nor the Advisor could interfere in the Malay religion and customs (Smith, 1995). Second, the size of the Chinese population in the FMS was higher than in the UMS. The number of

Chinese in the UMS was approximately only 2% of the whole population. The pace of development was also slower in the UMS compared with the FMS (Bedlington, 1978). Johor nonetheless was the only UMS state with a high number of Chinese immigrants and development due to the modernising approach adopted by its rulers: Ibrahim and Abu Bakar (Simon, 2008).
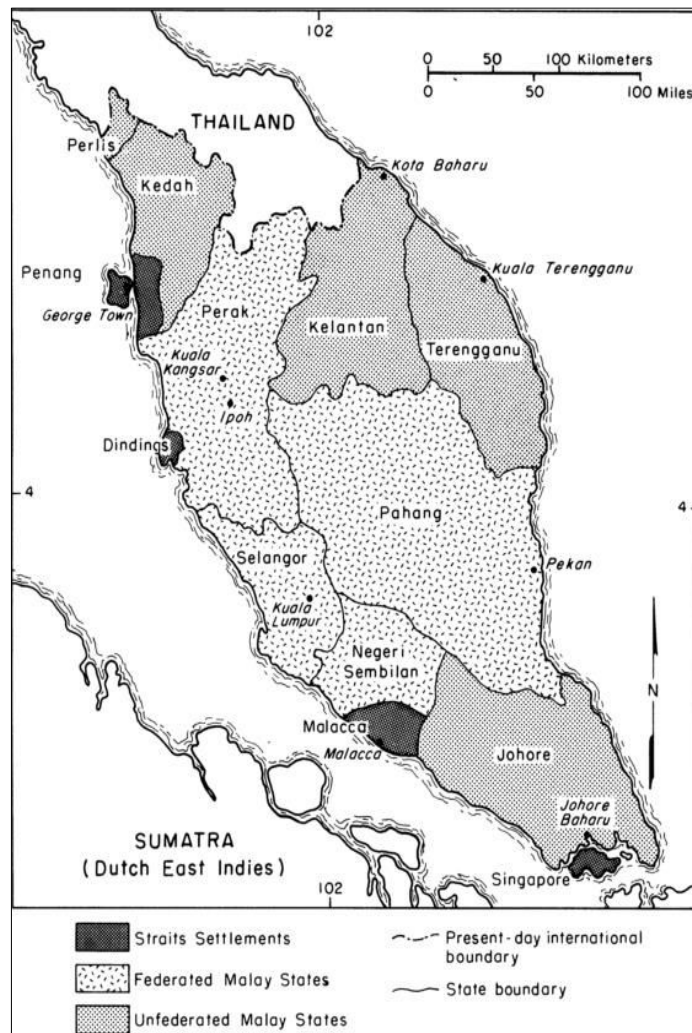
Map 5: British Malaya
Source: Hirschman (1987)

Third, Islam was well established in Terangganu and Kelantan. These places were already known for Islamic education and anti-colonial movements (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Unlike the FMS, the UMS were not required by the British to create a separation in their judicial systems between civil and Islamic courts (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Official letters in the FMS were also consistently written in English whilst the UMS maintained the Malay language as the medium in their official letters, whether in *Jawi* or Rumi   (Kratoska, 1997). In 1919, all the states in the peninsula were brought under British government. The Straits

Settlements, FMS and UMS were then known as British Malaya by the western world (Kratoska, 1997) (*see* Map 5).

The British administrators in the peninsula "generally tended to be pro-Malays rather than pro-Chinese" (Comber, 2001, p.10). According to Comber (2001), the British were impressed by the Malays' good manners, courtesy and friendly and harmless attitudes towards guests in comparison with Chinese characteristics: "tough, industrious, clever and independent" (Comber, 2001, p.11). The main British policy was to 'protect' Malays from other immigrants by acknowledging their status as indigenous settlers in the peninsula. This recognition can later be seen in the Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948, which acted as the legal basis for the New Economic Policy (this will be discussed in greater detail later). The 'protection' and 'recognition' should also be considered as a way of avoiding potential conflict and indigenous resistance within the British colonial economy.

The Malay traditional political system (the *Kerajaan*) and social class

The aim in this section is to provide a brief explanation of the Malay traditional social structure, political system, roles and status of the Malay Sultan to the Malay community and their economic activities. The Malay traditional political system - or *Kerajaan* - was an admixture of religion ('church') and state affairs (Shamsul, 2005). It was mainly oriented around *Raja* (Sultans) as "the endowment of religious and psychological significance" (Ariffin, 1993, p.1). The traditional *Kerajaan* was divided into two social classes: the ruling and the subject classes (Gullick, 1988; Roff, 1994). The general idea of the *Kerajaan* was based on a hierarchical system in which the Sultan occupied the first position, followed by his royal descendants, the district or local chiefs and *penghulu* (chiefmen). Other lower ranks of authority were referred to as *pawang*, *bomoh* and *ulama* (Roff, 1994). The system in each of the Malay regions was slightly different, but the chiefs were basically the centre of the Malay political institution (Roff, 1994).

In general, the British avoided making enemies with Malay Sultans and chiefs. During the implementation of the Resident system in Perak, the Resident – JWW

Birch – interpreted the Pangkor Treaty (1874) as an endorsement for him to gain full administrative rights from the local Sultan and chiefs. At the same time, there was a proposal that Perak would be directly governed by British Queen's Commissioners in 1875. This received a negative reaction from Perak chiefs and their followers which led to Birch's assassination (Chew, 1974). Since it was only a year after the Pangkor Treaty, the British decided to restore the Residential system in order to avoid causing an anti-colonial movement in other states. It was possibly through this incident that the British became aware of the importance of Malay Sultans' and chiefs' political position and status for Malays in British Malaya. In other words, the key to getting access to local economic and political affairs must only be through the Malay ruling class.

The subject class (*rakyat*), on the other hand, primarily had to offer their loyalty and obedience to their Sultan and chief (*see* Figure 6). Their main economic activities were based on agriculture, such as paddy plantations, fishing and herding buffalo and goats (Roff, 1994). In some locations, the Malay peasants collected forest products to be traded for imported goods such as textiles and iron tools with foreign traders at the nearest riverine cities (Roff, 1994).
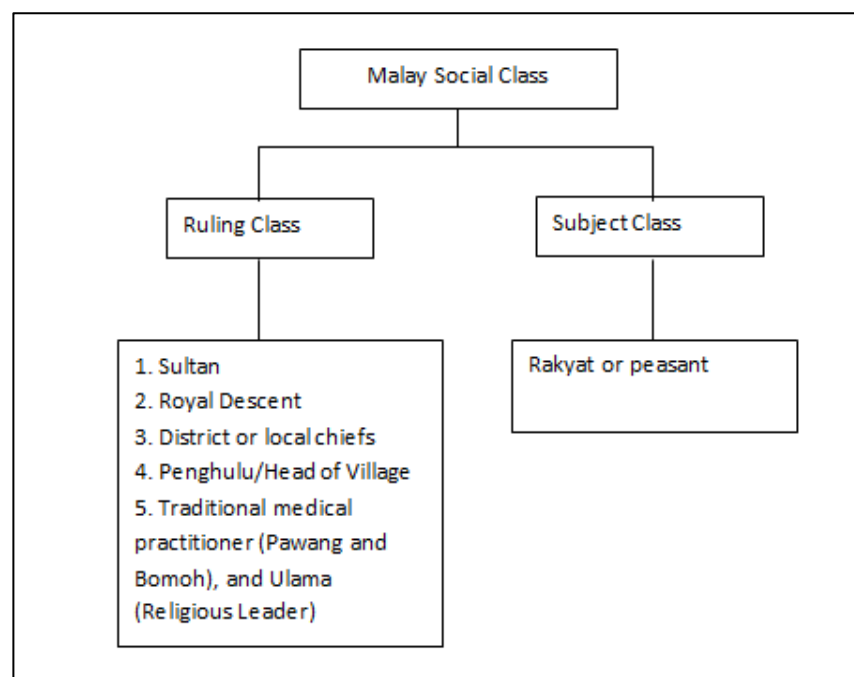
Figure 6: Malay's traditional political and social structures

In relation to the Malay traditional land tenure, the *rakyat* in fact were free people (Kheng, 1994). They had no rights to land titles, but they were free to

occupy any land (as long as it was not challenged) and had the right to inherit and sell it. Even so, at the same time they had to pay a certain amount of tax to the chief and the Sultan. Only in some regions, and especially in Pahang, was a *rakyat* who opened new land for occupation or personal use expected to be bound by the *kerah* system in return for his occupation of that particular piece of land (Hale, 2013). In this case, his right to the land could be easily revoked by the chief, which usually led to indebtedness and debt-bondage (Roff, 1994). *Kerah* covered multiple tasks and duties such as making roads, building bridges, palace duties, delivering letters and serving as a soldier or cultivating the chief's lands (Alatas, 1968).

Chinese identification and categorisation

Prior to the British administration, members of the only Chinese community in the archipelago were referred to as the 'Straits-born Chinese'. They were different from the 'China-born Chinese' who arrived during the British administration. They were distinguished in terms of their migration history, social status and culture. The Straits-born Chinese were usually labelled as *Baba-Nyonya* (Kratoska, 1997) or *Cina Peranakan*. The *Baba-Nyonya* had been exposed to the *Malay* world since the Malaccan period (Purcell, 1951). Some of them had decided to stay in Malacca, whereas others had scattered around the archipelago (Lee, 2008). They were considered as local aristocracy (Purcell, 1951) and possessed good relationships with the *Malay* ruling class (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). They were not considered to be pure Chinese by China-born Chinese because of their fathers' marriages with "Malay or Malay-Indian or half-caste mother[s]" (Purcell, 1951, p.298). The *Cina Peranakan*, on the other hand, mostly migrated from China to Kelantan and Terangganu from the thirteenth to the early nineteenth centuries (Teo, 2003).

In Kelantan's case, most of the *Cina-Peranakan's* forefathers had indirectly migrated from China to Kelantan. Their descendants migrated and resided first in Thailand and later moved to Kelantan because of the chaotic conditions in southern Thailand (Beng, 1982). In Terangganu, the early Chinese there were descendants of Chinese from Guangzhou (Hui Hui) who were colloquially identified by themselves and others as Yunnan-Chinese (Beng, 1991). They came

as Muslims with a Chinese culture heritage (for details, see Beng 1991). The main difference between the *Baba-Nyonya* and the *Cina Peranakan* was how their made their living (Pue and Kaur, 2014), their life style and their language. For the *Cina-Peranakan* in Terangganu, religion (as Muslim) was one of distinguishing characteristics that made them different from other Chinese. Most of the *Baba-Nyonya* and *Cina-Peranakan* in Terangganu were involved in trading activities whilst the *Cina Peranakan* in Kelantan were predominantly agricultural (Purcell, 1951; Beng, 1991). Both the *Baba-Nyonya*'s and the *Cina Peranakan*'s culture and practices were different from those of China-born Chinese. They used Malay as their main language despite some arguments claiming that it was different from the Malay language (Purcell, 1951).

The Chinese immigrants during the British administration were categorised on the basis of their original provinces in China and their dialects of conversation: Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka (Kheh), Teochiu, Hainan (Hailam), Kwongsai, Hokchiu, Hokchia and Henghwa (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Purcell, 1951). Instead of following in the footsteps of the Baba community by working in the trade and shop-keeping sectors, the new Chinese immigrants monopolised the tin mining and commercial plantation industries such as pepper, sugar plants and gambier (Hale, 2013). The Hokkien generally resided in Singapore, Penang and Malacca. In these locations, the Hokkien were usually involved in trade and small businesses. Some Hokkiens preferred to reside in Johor, Selangor and Perak. In these areas, they were usually involved in commercial plantations. The Cantonese lived scattered around the towns, but most of the time they were employed in the tin mining sector, commonly in Perak. Like the Cantonese, the Hakkas worked in tin mining areas too, but they could also be found in rural areas where they were involved in agricultural activities. There were quite a number of Teochius in Kedah; they often preferred to work in urban areas. On the other hand, a majority of Hainanese were involved in shop-keeping and other domestic services but chose to live in rural areas (Purcell, 1951) (*see* Figure 7).
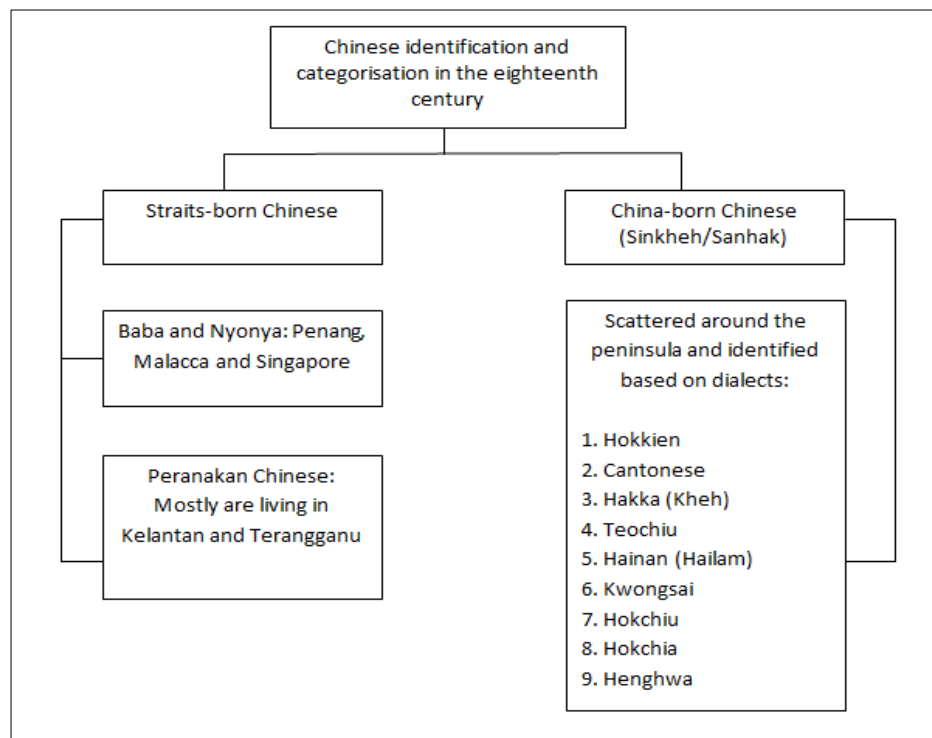
Figure 7: Chinese social identification and categorisation in the eighteenth century

Most of the China-born Chinese came to the peninsula only to earn some money and then return to their homelands (Hirschman, 1975; Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Their migration was heavily influenced by pull and push factors. The pull factor refers to the British policy of encouraging Chinese immigration under the expectation of using their labour power and investment for economic and social progress within the Malay peninsula. The British policy was also supported by Malay rulers, particularly in Johor, Selangor and Perak (Harding, 2012). In contrast, the push factors refer to the Chinese poverty in China (Andaya and Andaya, 2001) and several rebellions and revolutions against the oppressive government there, such as the 1851 Taiping Rebellion, the 1891 North-East China Riots and the 1900 Boxer Rebellion (Ee, 1961).

There were several ways for China-born Chinese to migrate to the peninsula: "Some workers paid their own passage, bribing local officials in order to bypass Manchu restrictions against emigration, but [the] majority came under the iniquitous credit ticket system" (Andaya and Andaya, 2001, p.140). Upon their arrival, the *sinkhehs* (the newcomers) would be sold to potential buyers (Purcell, 1951). According to Andaya and Andaya (2001), service was expected from a credit ticket system whereby the Chinese employers invested money for the *sinkhehs'* journey. The *sinkhehs* then had to work for their 'buyers' for about

twelve months before paying off this debt and gaining their total freedom. During that period, the *sinkhehs* received food, clothes and small wages for their services (Purcell, 1951). In some cases, the *sinkhehs* received no wages but only their maintenance (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The price of *sinkhehs* depended on their skills. For instance, a tailor, goldsmith or carpenter would cost 10-15 dollars, a healthy coolie (labour worker) was 6-10 dollars, and a sick coolie was worth about 3-4 dollars or sometimes less. In some situations, some *sinkhehs* were treated badly by their buyers. A *sinkheh* who complained to a magistrate would be released by signing an agreement that he promised to repay his passage money (Purcell, 1951). After paying off the credit ticket, the *sinkhehs* generally were free to work independently or find a new employer (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

Despite the difficulties and challenges faced by the Chinese immigrants during their voyage and the early years of their life in Malaya, they managed to dominate the commercial plantation and mining sectors in the late nineteenth century (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). There have been several interpretations of this outcome. One interpretation claimed that the "Malays seemed unwilling to work for wages on estates or in tin mines" (Andaya and Andaya, 2001, p.140). The Malay peasants were understandably reluctant to enter into the almost slave-like conditions of employment in the early mines and plantations (Hirschman, 1987). Moreover, in some mines, the wages for Malays were lower than for the Chinese (Alatas, 1977). However, the most reliable interpretation of the Chinese monopoly in commercial plantations and mining was their extensive social networks in the peninsula which comprised large labour forces, extensive capital finance, modern equipment, large-scale production and protective social organisations (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

At the same time, the reason why the Chinese migrants were mainly involved in tin mining and commercial plantations was related to the British aim of maximising production revenue and minimising labour cost. By denying the opportunity for the immigrants to build an economic base, particularly paddy planting, in Malaya, the immigrants could only work temporarily in Malaya by depending on the availability of tin. Their status as temporary immigrant workers was in high demand because they were cheaper than permanent settlers

(Stenson, 1980). Moreover, the successful Chinese immigrants in paddy plantations would only impinge on Malay traditional activities (Ghee, 1977). Moreover, as temporary workers, the Chinese might possibly want to become involved in the highly profitable plantations such as gambier (in Singapore and Johor) and sugarcane (in Penang).

The British 'divide-and-rule' policy and the development of 'Malay-ness' in British Malaya

The bureaucratic system operating in British Malaya was based on the 'divide and rule' policy. This policy refers to population segregation based on "racial categorisation" (Tong, 2010, p.95) and "ethnic compartmentalisation" (Stockwell, 1982, p.55). The divide-and-rule policy can also be described as a consequence of the British colonial economy. In the 1840s, the tin mining industry in British Malaya was monopolised by the Chinese (Tong, 2010). In the early twentieth century, the high demand for rubber production from the automobile industry in industrialised countries led to the establishment of large-scale rubber plantations (Kratoska, 1983) and Indian migration to provide workers for them (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). With the different natures of their work, Malays, Chinese and Indians were residentially and occupationally segregated: Malays (paddy planting), Chinese (tin mining) and Indians (rubber plantations).

The British, however, encountered difficulties when Malay peasants were reported to be disposing of their holdings (rice land), either directly or by transforming it first into a rubber small-holding before leasing or selling it to other parties (Kratoska, 1983, 1985). The practice would potentially jeopardise the British policy of creating specific occupations for the different types of ethnic category. The tendency for Malays to dispose of their land was actually not a new practice. Under pre-colonial Malay land tenure/legal codes, any peasants "enjoyed security of tenure as long as their lands remained under cultivation" (Kratoska, 1985, p.40). To prevent further lease and sale of the Malay lands to estates, the British Selangor authority was the first to grant limited ownership of specific lands to the 'Malayan race' in a scheme which was known as the 1911 Ancestral Land Scheme (Kratoska, 1983).

The Selangor legal Ancestral Land Scheme identified and categorised the Malayan race as "all inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula and archipelago" (Kratoska, 1983, p.153). The land therefore should not be transferred to anyone other than a member of the Malayan race. In 1912, further restrictions were implemented in the Ancestral Land: rubber should not be planted in the area (Kratoska, 1983). The scheme failed because many Malays would rather pay higher taxes to plant rubber in other lands; they then leased it or sold it to other interested parties. The decision to transform the land into rubber small-holdings before leasing or selling it to others was made because of the different prices between rubber small-holdings (a higher price) and rice-growing land (the lower price) (Krakoska, 1985).

The decision was also made on the basis of Malay traditional economic activities and family sustainability. Rice land would produce food for the family but a lower income, whereas the rubber price could be unstable (Kratoska, 1985). "The Malay peasants instead depended on their traditional system of leasing and borrowing, combining agriculture on hired land with supplementary labour of various sorts" (Kratoska, 1985, p.43). Moreover, the availability of other unopen lands – usually lands that were located far from transportations – meant that there were lands ready to be explored later (Kratoska, 1985). Additionally, the Malays never saw the Chinese and the Indians as a threat to them because of the temporary nature of their stay in the area (Seng, 1961; Hirschman, 1975; Alatas, 1977). This possibly created less urgency for them to seize opportunities offered by the British: intensive land use and a low tax rate on the new land in order to encourage new Malay settlement (Kratoska, 1985).

In 1913, the main features of the Ancestral Land Scheme were incorporated into the Malay Reservation Enactment (Krotaska, 1983); first, that neither state nor private land owned by Malays within the area of Malay Reservation lands could be transferred or sold to non-Malays, and second, that only a legal category of people (the Malays) were allowed to grow rice and rubber on the reserved lands (Kratoska, 1983). The definition of a Malay was also revised as "a person belonging to any Malayan 'race' that habitually speaks the Malay language or any Malayan language and professes the Moslem religion" (Perak Annual Report, 1915).

In the British census of 1911, the Malay 'race' in the FMS was identified as Malays (the local), Javanese, Sakai, Bajarese, Boyanese, Mendeling, Krinchi, Jambi, Achinese and Bugis (Hirschman, 1987). The 'local Malays' in this context referred to the native people who had resided in the FMS since at least the Malaccan civilisation, whilst the rest were Malay tribes originating from the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). The definition of Malays in the enactment and the categorisation of Malays in the British census made immigrants from the Dutch East Indies, such as Javanese and Bugis, eligible for the land rights in the peninsula (Kratoska, 1983). It was in this enactment that the term 'Malays' was defined and 'Malay-ness' was officially identified in the FMS. However, the definition of Malays in the UMS was different and varied depending on the state. For instance, a person of Arab descent was a Malay in Kedah but not in Johor (Shamsul, 2001; Sathian and Ngeow, 2014) (*see* Table 3). Religion and language nonetheless remained the core of Malay-ness.

Table 3 : Identification and categorisation of Malays in the UMS as legal applicants for MRL

Unfederated Malay States (UMS)	The definition of Malays
Kelantan (No. 18 of 1930)	A Malay is a person belonging to any Malayan race who speaks any Malayan language and professes the Muslim religion. Section 9 of the Enactment prohibited the alienation of MRL to those who were not "natives of Kelantan". This made non-native Malays disqualified for MRE in Kelantan, but made native Chinese-Kelantanese eligible for lands in Kelantan.
Terangganu (No.17 of 1360H)	A Malay is a person belonging to any Malayan race who habitually speaks the Malay language or any Malayan language and professes the Muslim religion.
Kedah (No.63 of 1931) *and* Perlis (No 7 of 1353H)	Each enactment defined a Malay as a person belonging to any Malayan race or a person of Arab descent who habitually speaks the Malay language or any Malayan language and professes the Muslim religion. (A Siamese agricultural worker permanently resident in the state may also own land in a Malay reservation).
Johor (No.1, 1936)	A Malay is a person belonging to the Malay or any Malaysian race who habitually speaks the Malay language or any Malaysian language and professes the Muslim religion.

Source: Suffian, 1972, p.248.

There were two objectives of this enactment: to preserve the Malays' village-based subsistence economy, and to create a protected area for Malay economic development (Ali and Mohamad, 2007). The residential and occupational segregation also led to infrequent meetings between these different ethnicities (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The colonial system consequently produced ethnic identification and categorisation that was bound up with the processes of capitalist accumulation and class formation which can be seen in the early years of independence.

4   1900s – 1957: the development of Malay and Chinese nationalism

The residential and occupational segregation of ethnic communities in British Malaya inevitably created different types of educational system, literature and political interests. The historical background of the Malayan educational system and political activities are particularly salient for the present study, as this later becomes the main concern in post-independence Malaysian nation-building. Since the present study is primarily focused on Malays and Chinese, more details will be provided specifically regarding these two ethnicities.

Pre-independence educational system

Primary schools in pre-independence Malaya were separated by language: English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil (Gill, 2014). They were located in different areas depending on the language of the population. The English schools, for example, were only built in urban areas (Gill, 2014). The majority of pupils were European and Chinese, with small numbers of Malays and Indians (Shamsul, 2005; Gill, 2014). Small fees were charged (Purcell, 1948). Those who could afford it could go on to secondary education and sit the Cambridge Examination. The qualification which this examination provided could be used for clerical employment in the government service or in private firms (Purcell, 1948). For those who were interested in furthering their study at tertiary level, they could continue it at the College of Medicine, Raffles College or a university abroad (Purcell, 1948). Initially, all English schools were primarily sponsored by

Christian missionary funds, but later were partially sponsored by the colonial government (Hashim, 2008). Other than the locational and financial factors, many Malay parents avoided registering their children at an English school because of the potential exposure to Christianity (Loh, 1970).

The Malay-vernacular schools, on the other hand, were located in rural areas and were limited to primary schools. They were sponsored fully by the colonial government (Lim, 1985). They were established in order to make Malays better farmers and fishermen than their fathers (Lim, 1985; Booth, 1999). English was excluded from the syllabus (Ozóg, 1993). The Malay-vernacular schools were widely criticised by some of the British officials (Booth, 1999). In the 1930s, the numbers of Malays enrolled in the schools dropped, as many parents realised that the education provided would not give their children any chance for social mobility (Rudner, 1994; Snodgrass, 1980).

Prior to the British educational policy, Islam was an important force in the Malay traditional educational system (Shamsul, 2005). The basic Malay traditional subjects were Quranic learning and reading, Quranic memorisation, Jawi reading and personal religious duties (*Fardhu Ain*). At the advanced level, Malay-Muslim students would further their studies in a *pondok* or a *madrasah*. In a *pondok* or *madrasah*, they would learn a different range of subjects. The main subjects were Islamic law, Quranic exegesis and the prophetic tradition (Shamsul, 2005). The *madrasah* and *pondok* were both important for preserving Islam in Malaya (Shamsul, 2005). The *madrasah* were more formal and organised than the *pondok*. *Madrasahs* offered combinations of theological, vocational and secular subjects, such as Madrasah al-Hamidiyyah (1906) in Kedah and Sekolah al-Diniah (1924) in Perak. The Sekolah al-Diniah, for example, offered mathematics, history, English and commercial subjects, which made it popular among Malays (Shamsul, 2005). The Malays who graduated from a religious school could further their tertiary education in the Middle East, particularly at Al-Azhar University in Egypt (Hashim, 2008).

The Chinese-vernacular schools were located in urban areas (Gill, 2014) and offered both primary and secondary level education. The students could further their tertiary studies in China (Ozóg, 1993). The British at the beginning were never directly involved in Chinese schools, but left them with more freedom in

shaping their own educational syllabus, curriculum and choice of language (Gullick, 1987; Pong, 1993). Since the British provided no sponsorship of Chinese schools, the Chinese had to finance their own schools (Tan, 1997), mostly through donations from wealthy merchants and trade guilds (Asmah, 2007). The teachers were recruited directly from China and the syllabus was based primarily on Chinese philosophy (Ozóg, 1993). In addition, the textbooks were all printed in China (Purcell, 1948). In the 1900s, the KMT (the Kuomintang Party) promoted the use of Mandarin in Chinese schools in order to strengthen the Chinese identity with China (Kratoska, 1997). Throughout the 1910s-1930s, Chinese education in Malaya reflected the political situation in China (Kheng, 1983). Through education, the KMT managed to bring Chinese dialect groups together and made the Japanese – because of their invasion of China in 1937 – into their common enemy (Kratoska, 1997). The main concern of the British about the Chinese schools was their potential to produce anti-colonial feelings (Kwa, 2008). In the 1930s, the British started to intervene in the Chinese schools by providing financial aid, but this was limited only to schools located in the Straits Settlements and the FMS (Purcell, 1948).

In summary, the Malayan educational opportunities in the pre-independence era were shaped by class and language. The Malays, for example, were divided into three categories: English-educated, Malay-educated and religious-educated. The English-educated Malays and religious-educated Malays mostly came from aristocratic or high-income families; the Malay-educated Malays mostly came from lower-income families (such as farmers). The same background applied to the Chinese: English-educated and Chinese-educated. The English-educated Chinese mostly came from the upper classes, whilst the Chinese-educated were mostly from the lower classes.

Malay and Chinese pre-independence political interests and literature (the press)

The pre-independence literature in Malaya was related to the Malayan educational background, which at the same time influenced their political interests and views. The early Malay political movement was initiated by the religious-educated Malays: *Kaum Muda* (modernists). They consisted of Malay

teachers and students who were inspired by the Middle East Islamic modernisation movement (Saleh, 1989, Shamsul, 2005). The aim of *Kaum Muda* was to bring Islamic modernisation into education, democratic rule and social progress (Soenarno, 1960). The *Kaum Muda*'s ideology was spread through the establishment of their religious schools: Madrasah Al-Iqbal (established in 1907) in Singapore, Al-Hadi (established in 1913) in Malacca and Al-Masyhur (established in 1916) in Penang. Their ideology was also channelled through a local periodical - *Al-Iman* (the Leader) – the first Malay newspaper to be concerned with Malaya's politics and social change (Soenarno, 1960). The abolition of the Caliphate system in 1924 nonetheless slowed down the *Kaum Muda* movement. At the same time, under the concept of *Jihad*, other religious-educated Malays resisted the British intrusion, such as the anti-British movement in Terangganu, which predominantly broke out in 1922, 1925 and 1928 (Shamsul, 2005).

From 1906 to 1926, the Malay political activities and newspaper presses primarily revolved around the issue of religion (Nik Hassan, 1963). Their concern nonetheless changed with the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s. During this period, Malays' political awareness concentrated on their economic conditions in relation to non-Malays' achievement (particularly European and Chinese) in Malaya. The Malay newspapers such as *Saudara*, *Warta Malaya*, *Majlis of Kuala Lumpur* and *Lembaga* began to promote Malay liberation from economic reliance on the British and on immigrants. At the same time, they encouraged Malays to take control of their state and to become economically independent (Emmanuel, 2010).

In the 1930s, the Malay political movement could be divided into two categories: right and left wing. The right-wing political movement was pioneered by the English-educated Malays, whereas the left-wing movement was dominated by the Malay-educated Malays. The left-wing movement demanded freedom from all 'oppressive people', referring to colonial officers, Malay Sultans and chiefs, and a change from the stagnant Malay society (Soenarno, 1960; Akashi, 1968). They also aimed for Malay unification in the peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago (Soenarno, 1960; Kheng, 1979) under the slogans of 'Melayu Raya/Greater Malaydom' and 'Indonesian Raya/Greater Indonesia' (Milner,

2011). The aim was to revive Srivijaya's heritage for Malays' common unity (Ariffin, 1993). In 1937, the left-wing Malay movement was formally recognised as *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM). Their leader was Ibrahim Yaakob, a Malay teacher who had graduated from SITC. The newspaper *Warta Malaya*, edited by Yaakob, carried a strong anti-British and anti-imperial agenda. In 1940, the KMM leaders were arrested and imprisoned by the British (Andaya and Andaya, 2001).

The main issue that Malays faced during the 1930s was not necessarily regarding the influx of immigrants, but the fact that the arriving immigrants began to see Malaya as their home and thus demanded recognition and a place in Malaya through a series of events: "the 'Sons of Malay' debate (1931-34); Chinese and Indian demands for the opening up of the Malayan Civil Service, which had previously been the purview of the local Malay elite; the 1932 Retrenchment Commission proposals; the 1933 Aliens Ordinance and the proposal to turn paddy production over to the Chinese" (Emmanuel, 2010, p.4).

The Malays may have begun to feel insecure with their position in the 1930s colonial economy, especially since they were economically weak compared with the European and Chinese immigrants, educationally disadvantaged, and politically null in the Malayan political administration. The success of immigrants, particularly Chinese, "sharpened the sense of common experience among local community – of an 'us' and 'them' attitude" (Milner, 2011, p.121). The importance of 'Malay' ethnicity might also have been accelerated under the pressure of Chinese identity transformation and unification from "dialect-group and clan identities to a cultural and political identity as Chinese" (Yen, 2000, p.12). At the same time, the 1931 census also shows that the numbers of Chinese were slightly higher than those of locally born Malays (Vlieland, 1932; 1934; Gullick, 1963; Ishak, 1999) probably give pressure to the Malays.

The political awareness of the Malayan Chinese generally began in the early twentieth century; in essence, their political concern was for China. In 1900, K'ang Yu-Wei and Sun Yat-Sen, the founders of the communist regime in China, came to Singapore in order to raise funds during the Hankow revolt and the Canton revolt (Kheng, 1983). K'ang continued to visit Malaya when the Malayan Chinese started to show an interest in Chinese politics (Purcell, 1948). The Malayan Chinese were indirectly involved in the Chinese Revolution of 1911 by

providing financial support for the plan to overthrow the Manchu government (Seng, 1961). Throughout the decade from 1901 to 1911, the revolutionary idea was implemented in private schools and night schools in the FMS, Chung Ho schools in the Straits Settlements, the *T'u Nan Daily* newspaper, and lecturing and reading societies (Seng, 1961). After the formation of the Republic of China in 1911, the Malayan Chinese once again became important by providing financial support (Seng, 1961).

In 1912, a branch of the KMT was opened in Malaya but was suppressed because of its anti-British agenda (Kheng, 1983; Ratnam, 1965). Only in 1924 did communism become noticeable in Malaya (Kheng, 1983). In 1924, the original KMT party in China formed an alliance with the CPC (Communist Party of China). In 1925, a KMT branch was re-established in Malaya (Kratoska, 1997). In 1927, the KMT-CPC alliance split, which led to the formation of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1930 (Kheng, 1983). The MCP originally attempted to have multi-ethnic membership (Kheng, 2009). However, by the end of the Second World War, the MCP ended up being a Chinese-dominated party (Allen, 1968; Kratoska, 1997; Kheng, 1983). In the MCP's 1934 constitution, "its aim was to overthrow British colonialism, abolish Malay feudalism and set up a Malayan People's Republic" (Hanrahan, 1971, p.170). Prior to the Japanese occupation, the MCP had already created terror and violence by assassinating "British officers, police informers, party dissidents and members of the rival party, the Malayan Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)" (Kheng, 2009, p.133). Additionally, due to the political separation between the KMT and the CPC, the Chinese immigrants started to feel concern about their position in British Malaya. This led the Chinese representatives in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council to request equal treatment and status with the Malays (Soenarno, 1960).

Generally, within the period 1900 to the 1920s, Malay and Chinese political interests were dominated by intra-ethnic relationships and class revolution in Malaysia and China respectively. Political contention between Malays and Chinese was arguably lacking. Only in the 1930s did the Chinese begin to demand recognition and a place in Malaya – either through right- or left-wing political factions – and the demands created political and economic concerns among the

educated Malays who were already exposed to foreign modernisation and nationalist literature. This may also have created a sense of *belonging* among Malays (in the form of an imagined community), and also a need to protect such belonging (on the concept of nationalism: sentiment and movement), which was expressed in Malay literature of the time, such as newspapers, magazines and novels.

British, Malays and Chinese Communists (MCP/MPAJA) during the Japanese Occupation of 1941 – 1945

The Japanese army had managed to occupy the whole Malay peninsula by December 1941. The Malays and the Chinese were both terrorised by the Japanese, but at different levels and stages depending on their social class and status. In comparison with the Chinese, the Malays in general received good treatment in the early months of the Japanese occupation. The Sultans and Islam were two elements which were taken into consideration within the Japanese military plan (Akashi, 1968). The Japanese perceived the Sultans as key to gaining support from the locals, together with showing respect for the Malays' freedom of religion, belief and customs (Akashi, 1968). Some Malays were given positions as lower-level administrative workers in the Japanese civil administration. The KMM leaders – the left-wing Malay movement – were also released from prison (Kratoska, 1997). In addition, some Malays under the KMM leaders were recruited as *Jookidam* (Japanese soldiers). They were sent into action on behalf of the Japanese in the war between the Japanese and the communist guerrilla factions (Kheng, 1981, 1983; Tong, 2010).

At the beginning of the Japanese occupation, there existed no Malay resistance towards the invaders. However, this situation changed for several reasons: Japanese misconduct towards Islam (Abu Talib, 1995); the maintenance of earlier European policy; bad treatment of Sultan[s] - in some states the rulers were no longer held to be sovereign (Stockwell, 1979); and the overwhelmingly negative consequences for Malays in their economic and social conditions (Allen, 1968; Kratoska, 1997). Japanese treatment of the Malayan Chinese depended on the latter's political views.

Moreover, according to Shamsul (2004), the WWII had divided the Chinese community in Malaya into Chinese nationalists, Chinese communists (MCP) and Chinese Malayans. Those who were identified as having supported the nationalist resistance during the Japanese invasion of China were killed (Allen, 1968). The MCP retreated to the jungle and formed the MPAJA (Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army). Meanwhile, rich Chinese were asked to assist the Japanese through financial 'donations'. The rest were expected to cooperate with the Japanese and any rebellion would result in capital punishment, often in the form of beheading (Kratoska, 1997).

In 1943, Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) formed the Force 136 reconnaissance party – consisting of 2000 Chinese seamen from India, Chinese from China, and other Malayans from outside Malaya during the invasion – to reach Malaya. They were later joined by the MPAJA, the Malay Regiment and the FMS Volunteer Force. In 1944, another Malay guerrilla force (*Askar Melayu Setia*/Loyal Malay Force) joined them, followed by a Malay guerrilla force from Kedah and Pahang (Wataniah Force) (details in Kratoska, 1997; Allen, 1968 and Kheng, 1983). The MPAJA were also acknowledged by the British during their war with the Japanese (Kheng, 2009). The occupation and the war to retrieve Malaya can also be identified as a consequence of inter-imperialist rivalry between the British and the Japanese.

After the war, the MPAJA was forced to disband (Kheng, 2009). The MCP, however, continued to exist as a political party, particularly as its main aim was to establish a communist regime in Malaya and not to assist the British in restoring their colonial position (Allen, 1968) – as Means noted: "In the period just after the war, politics was dominated by the struggle of the MCP against colonial rule" (1996, p.104). At the same time, there were food shortages, MCP strikes and great ethnic tension in Johor, Malacca, Pahang, Kedah, Kelantan, Terangganu and Perak (Lau, 1989). There were many open conflicts between British troops and the MCP (Kheng, 2009). Since the majority of the British troops were Malays, this gave it the appearance of a war between Malays and Chinese. As was remembered by one former police sergeant, it was a "world gone mad": "There was a lot of anger and hatred about" between Malays and Chinese and eventually "our Malay kinsmen" came to help when they could not

"bear some of the things done to the Malay policemen, such as their bodies were mutilated and their eyes gouged out" by the communists (Kheng, 1983, p.133-134).

British, Malays, the Communist insurgency, the 1946 Malayan Union and the 1948 Federation of Malaya agreement

The Japanese surrendered in September 1945, giving the British a new opportunity to start afresh in Malaya (Tarling, 1993). They aimed for a strong and integrated Malaya that was able to defend itself. In order to achieve this aim, political restructuring was needed. In October 1945, the British proposed the formation of a Malayan Union in British Malaya (Lau, 1989; Andaya and Andaya, 2001). There were three main components of the proposed Malayan Union. First, the nine Malay states, Penang and Malacca would be combined into a unitary administration. Second, Malay Sultanate sovereignty would be transferred to the (British) Crown, except for religious matters. Third, equal citizenship would be offered to Malays and immigrant communities (Kheng, 2009; Harding, 2012). The Chinese were offered the opportunity to take Malayan citizenship because the British wanted to avoid having them exposed to the KMT (which was in collaboration with the US) regime in China (Tarling, 1993).

The announcement of this and the arrival of Sir Harold MacMichael to obtain the Sultans' signatures increased Malay fears of Chinese domination. As noted by Kheng, "All Malays now seemed united in their struggle to prevent Chinese domination of their country" (1983, p.236). Although the MU citizenship provision was intended to benefit the Chinese, it received little enthusiasm from pro-KMT and MCP members (Lau, 1989, Tarling, 1993). From their understanding, the acceptance of Malayan citizenship would automatically mean renouncing their Chinese nationality (Lau, 1989). Only the Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) positively accepted the proposal, but not without criticism (Lau, 1989). Malays in particular strongly rejected the proposal. The proposal for Malayan citizenship could radically break the previous preservation of Malay political rights in Malaya and create an opening for such rights for the non-Malay population (Lau, 1989). According to Beng (2000), there were fears that the proposal might change the political, economic and social character of the Malay landscape. This was

arguably the main concern for Malays at the time. Moreover, the equal distribution of special rights between Malays and non-Malays would give the Malays disadvantages, particularly within economic activities (Harding, 2012).

The rejection came from Malay elites and the *rakyat*. The anti-Malayan Union had stimulated Malay nationalism (sentiment and movement) and led to the formation of UMNO: a new Malay political party (Harding, 2012). Despite the strong rejection from many Malays, the MU was officially established on 1 April 1946 with the arrival of a new Governor, Malcolm MacDonald (Harding, 2012). In order to show their mourning at this turn of events, many Malay men wore a white band around their *songkok* (traditional Malay hat) and many Malay women wore a white band on their arm (Harding, 2012; Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The cry of *Hidup Melayu* (Long live the Malays) was constantly heard (Milner, 2011) - more than *Daulat Tuanku* (Long live the King) during the anti-Malayan Union protest (Reid, 2001).

For many Malays, the Sultans had failed to protect their people during the Japanese occupation and now had caused the formation of Malayan Union. As a consequence of these events, there came a call for the removal of the Sultanate (Milner, 2011). On the one hand, some Malay newspapers campaigned that the people's sovereignty was more important than that of the rulers, and on the other hand, there was a belief that the Sultans should be maintained as a symbol to unite Malays (Ariffin, 1993). It was in this period that the interests of the Sultans were "subordinated to the demands of Malayism" (Ariffin, 1993, p.53). This understanding was different from the previous *Kerajaan*, in which the Sultan was the centre for religion and customs. It showed a transition of religion and customs from being Raja-centred (monarchy-centred) to Bangsa-centred (ethnic-centred).

Due to the strong opposition from so many Malays, something that had never been shown before, together with support from a few retired British officers, the Malayan Union was revised and changed to the Federation of Malaya in January 1948 (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The 1948 Federation of Malaya consisted of Penang, Malacca and nine Malay states. A few alterations took place in the Federation of Malaya: first, the Malay monarchy system was preserved and the Sultans maintained their position as the leaders for Islam and for Malay

customs; second, Malays' rights as indigenous people were officially declared and acknowledged; third, citizenship should only be granted to those who were born in Malaya or had resided in Malaya for eight years; and finally, for the first nine years, Malay representatives in the Legislative Council should hold 55% of the seats, and therefore more than the non-Malay representatives (Harding, 2012).

From Siddique's (1981) perspective, the most important clauses in the 1948 Federation of Malaya agreement were the position of the Sultans (Malays) as having jurisdiction over Muslim religion and Malay customs, and the establishment of a Confederation of Rulers, which made the Sultans part of, and indeed the apex of, the Federation. The 1948 agreement, however, did not include any clause which established Islam as the official religion in Malaya (Siddique, 1981). Another possible reason for the British to comply with the Malays' demands during the anti-Malayan Union campaign was the former's dependence on Malay military numbers during the war with the communists (Hui, 1980), particularly when so many Chinese left for China in order to avoid being enlisted into the Malaya national service (Kheng, 2009).

In 1948, an 'Emergency' was declared as a result of the continuous fighting between the British and the communist guerrillas (Hirschman, 1975). Ships were prepared to repatriate Chinese nationals back to China. Only a few of them managed to enter China; the Chinese ports were closed by China's communists in fear of a potential attack by the British and as a result, the rest of the ships were sent back to Malaya (Kheng, 2009). To stop further communist influence among the Chinese, the British proposed a resettlement plan. The Chinese were relocated into controlled residential areas which were known as the 'new villages' (*Kampung Baru*) (Hirschman, 1975). The plan was criticised by the Malays for two reasons: first, the villages were built on Malay state lands; and second, the villages had better facilities than other Malay villages (Purcell, 1954). A total of 216 new villages were developed into urban areas, which in turn increased Chinese domination in urban areas (Kheng, 2009).

The cost of the war – in terms of finance, fatalities and socio-economic hardship – made the British realise that they needed support from the local people; in this case this meant a non-communist and multi-ethnic party (Kheng, 2009). Both

UMNO and the MCA were thus recognised by the British. They were encouraged by the British to discuss Malayan politics during the emergency (1948-60) and to help the British defeat communism (Stubbs, 1979). The UMNO was urged by the colonial Administrators to pursue a more non-communal policy, whereas the members of UMNO wanted to hold and safeguard Malays' rights (Stubbs, 1979). Onn Jaafar[7] wanted to change UMNO into a multi-ethnic party, but this was forcefully rejected by Malays, who wanted to maintain their original struggle. The MCA, on the other hand, had problems reaching other Chinese in the new villages because of their class differences and the lack of volunteers (Stubbs, 1979). The turning point for UMNO's and the MCA's political careers came in the 1952 municipal elections. It was in the 1952 Kuala Lumpur municipal election that UMNO and the MCA decided to work together to win the election. At the same time, the British emphasised that independence would not be granted unless cooperation between the ethnic groups in Malaya was established (Suffian, 1972). In 1955, a coalition between UMNO, the MCA and the MIC was formed as the *Perikatan Parti* (Alliance Party).

In February 1956, a constitutional conference was held in London in order to propose and to discuss Malaya's independence. The conference was well attended by British representatives, local rulers and representatives of the government of Malaya. Prior to the conference, the MCP's leader – Chin Peng – had a meeting with Tunku Abdul Rahman[8] in Baling[9] (the meeting known as the Baling Talks). During this meeting, Chin Peng made a promise that the MCP "would cease its hostilities and lay down its arms if the Alliance government could obtain the powers of internal security and defence from the British government" (Kheng, 2009, p.141). The cost of the war, the availability of a multi-ethnic coalition (the Alliance) and the MCP's promise caused the British to agree to concede their power and authority over internal security and defence to the local government on 31 August 1957 (Kheng, 2009). The Emergency, however, only ended in 1960 when the MCP finally agreed to a truce.

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[7] The first president of UMNO.

[8] Tunku was the second president of UMNO, and later became the first Malaysian Prime Minister.

[9] Baling is located in Kedah, Malaysia.

According to the terms of the London Conference, the Reid Commission was thus established. The Reid Commission had five members and was chaired by Lord Reid (a Scottish judge); the other members were Sir Ivor Jennings (a Cambridge academic), Sir William McKell (a former judge and Governor-General of Australia), Justice B. Malik (an Indian judge), and Justice Abdul Hamid (a Muslim Pakistani judge) (Harding, 2012). It was in the Commission that Islam was formally endorsed as the official religion of the Federation (Article 3), Malay as a national language (Article 152), and the ensurance of allocated privileges for Malays and for natives of Sabah and Sarawak (Article 153). A Malayan was also officially recognised as Malay if he/she – after fulfilling residential requirements – was Muslim, spoke the Malay language and practised Malay customs (Article 160) (details of the Articles are provided in Appendix A, B and C).

The aims of the Reid Commission were achieved after the Malay (UMNO), Chinese (MCA) and Indian (MIC) representatives agreed to compromise between non-Malay citizenship and Malay privileges (Harding, 2012). The Articles detailed above were balanced out by consideration for non-Malays' welfare (Suffian, 1972). For example, Article 3 stated that Islam was the official religion of the federation, but at the same time allowed religious freedom to be practised in harmony with Islam. Article 152 allowed for the learning, teaching and practice of other languages (except for official affairs). If ever Article 153 needed to be implemented, it had to be implemented in conjunction with the safeguarding of other communities. Article 153 allocated quota/privileges for Malays and natives of Borneo within public services, the economy and education. The quota within public services must be limited to four sections in the Division I only: the Malaysian Home and Foreign Services (four Malays to one non-Malay), the Judicial and Legal Services (three to one), the Customs Services (three to one), and the police force (four to one) (Suffian, 1972). Additionally, no quotas were set for the professional and technical service (Means, 1972; Lim, 1985). In the economic sector, the allocated quota referred only to licences for taxis, buses and lorries. In the educational sector, an allocated scholarship would be available for Malays and natives of Borneo because of their rural and economic disadvantages (Suffian, 1972).

In 1963, the Federation of Malaysia was formed with the addition of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. Sabah and Sarawak are located on the island of Borneo, on the eastern side of Malaysia. Historically, Sabah and Sarawak were administrated separately from British Malaya. Britain had shown its reluctance to become involved in the affairs of Sabah and Sarawak and had left them to the Chartered Company and the Brooke family (the White Rajahs) respectively (King and Jawan, 1996). According to Shamsul (2015), autonomous control in Sabah and Sarawak was higher than in all the states in Peninsular Malaysia. Their ethnic composition was also far more complicated and diverse (King and Jawan, 1996).

From 1964 to 1965, the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore challenged Article 153 under the slogan of 'Malaysian Malaysia' (Milne, 1970). This contention resulted in Singapore's separation from the Federation in 1965 (Milne, 1970). The current Malaysia therefore consisted of nine former Malay states (Kedah, Perlis, Terangganu, Kelantan, Johor, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang), two former Straits Settlements (Penang and Malacca) and the Borneo States (Sabah and Sarawak). Even with the allocated privileges, the socio-economic development of Malays and natives of Borneo remained slow in comparison with other ethnic groups. The economic disparity between the ethnic groups was identified as the main reason for the Malay-Sino Riot of 1969, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

5   1957 and onward: Malaysia as a 'nation'

Education, language, national and ethnic identity

After independence, the question of 'what are the symbols of national identity?' could no longer be avoided. Language, in particular, was the primary issue for Malaysian identity. As discussed earlier in this work, the educational system in Malaysia was separated by language as a consequence of the pre-independence occupational structures in British Malaya. A few years prior to independence (in 1957), the issue of a national language was already part of British concerns. The Barnes Report of 1951 proposed a single, national school system with bilingual (Malay language and English) education.

The Chinese community immediately rejected the proposal. As a reaction to the Barnes Report, the Fenn Wu report suggested that each primary school should teach in its own ethnic language whilst secondary schools should teach in English (Ozóg, 1993). According to Guan (2009), the Chinese leaders were concerned about the possible elimination and extinction of Chinese culture in Malaya. The language of Mandarin was a symbol of their unity (Koon, 1996) and identity (Beng, 1988): "Chinese Malaysians, especially the Chinese-educated ones, generally hold the view that their mother tongue (*muyu*) will not survive if they do not fight for it" (Beng, 1988, p.143). The language maintenance and preservation was possibly hoped to unite Chinese political support in opposition to the Malays' political power. In this case, language was no longer seen as a means of communication, but was symbolically utilised as a form of power to access and gain a political end (Bourdieu, 1993).

In order to accommodate the strong linguistic demands made by non-Malay communities, the Razak Report of 1956 decided to maintain the Chinese and Indian vernacular primary schools with two conditions: first, the Malay language must be taught compulsorily alongside the English language; and second, all primary schools must use the same curriculum and syllabus (Jadi, 1983). The Malay-medium primary schools were hence acknowledged as national schools and the Chinese, Indian and English schools were categorised as national-type schools (Gill, 2014). In the 1970s, the government began to transform English-medium primary schools into Malay-medium primary schools (Sua, 2013).

In 1960, the Rahman Talib Report stated that all Chinese and English secondary schools would be converted into Malay-medium secondary schools. Subsequently, Chinese secondary schools were divided into two categories. In the first category were the Chinese secondary schools which agreed to be converted into Malay-medium secondary schools; these schools are now known as national-type Chinese secondary schools (SMKJC) (Asmah, 1976). The second category comprised the Chinese secondary schools which refused to be converted into Malay-medium schools. They continue to be known as Independent Chinese secondary schools (ICSS). In 2015, there were only 60 ICSSs in Malaysia (Sua, 2013). In contrast with SMKJCs, ICSSs operate entirely through the support of the local community (Kwa, 2008). Their independent examination – the Unified

Examination – is not accredited by the state and cannot be used for admission into local public universities (Guan, 2009; Segawa, 2007).

In general, ICSSs prepare students for two examinations: the national examination such as SPM, which is conducted in Malay, and the Unified Examination set in Chinese (Segawa, 2007). Students can choose to sit either both examinations or only one. Since the Malaysian Educational Ministry does not certify the Unified Examination Certification (UEC), many private universities were established in order to fulfil the demand for tertiary education among UEC holders. Private tertiary institutions such as the New Era College (NEC), Southern College and Han Jiang College all use Mandarin as the main medium of instruction (Segawa, 2007). Additionally, through the efforts of the United Chinese School Committees' Association (UCSCA), "the UEC now is recognised for admission in several universities abroad such as in Singapore, Taiwan, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand" (Segawa, 2007, p.47). In some private companies, the UEC can be used as the basic application for those who have no educational certificate in the Malaysian national examination. The opportunities within higher education and employment offered through the UEC arguably help the ICSSs to remain attractive to the Malaysian Chinese community (Ee, 2000).

An Islamic resurgence which started in the 1970s also influenced Malay educational preferences. Malay parents – particularly in urban areas – started to seek an alternative education that was more 'Islamic' from their perspective. Alternative schools were initiated by Muslim social organisations, such as ABIM, *Jemaah Islam Malaysia* (JIM) and *Parti Islam se-Malaysia* (PAS). In order to compete with this development, the government decided to provide funds for secondary religious schools and take over their administration (Guan, 2009). Some of the religious private schools refused to let the government take over their administration, resulting in private religious schools. Additionally, it is compulsory for an Islamic subject and a Moral subject to be taught in every national and national-type school respectively. The present Malaysian educational system is summarised in Figure 8.
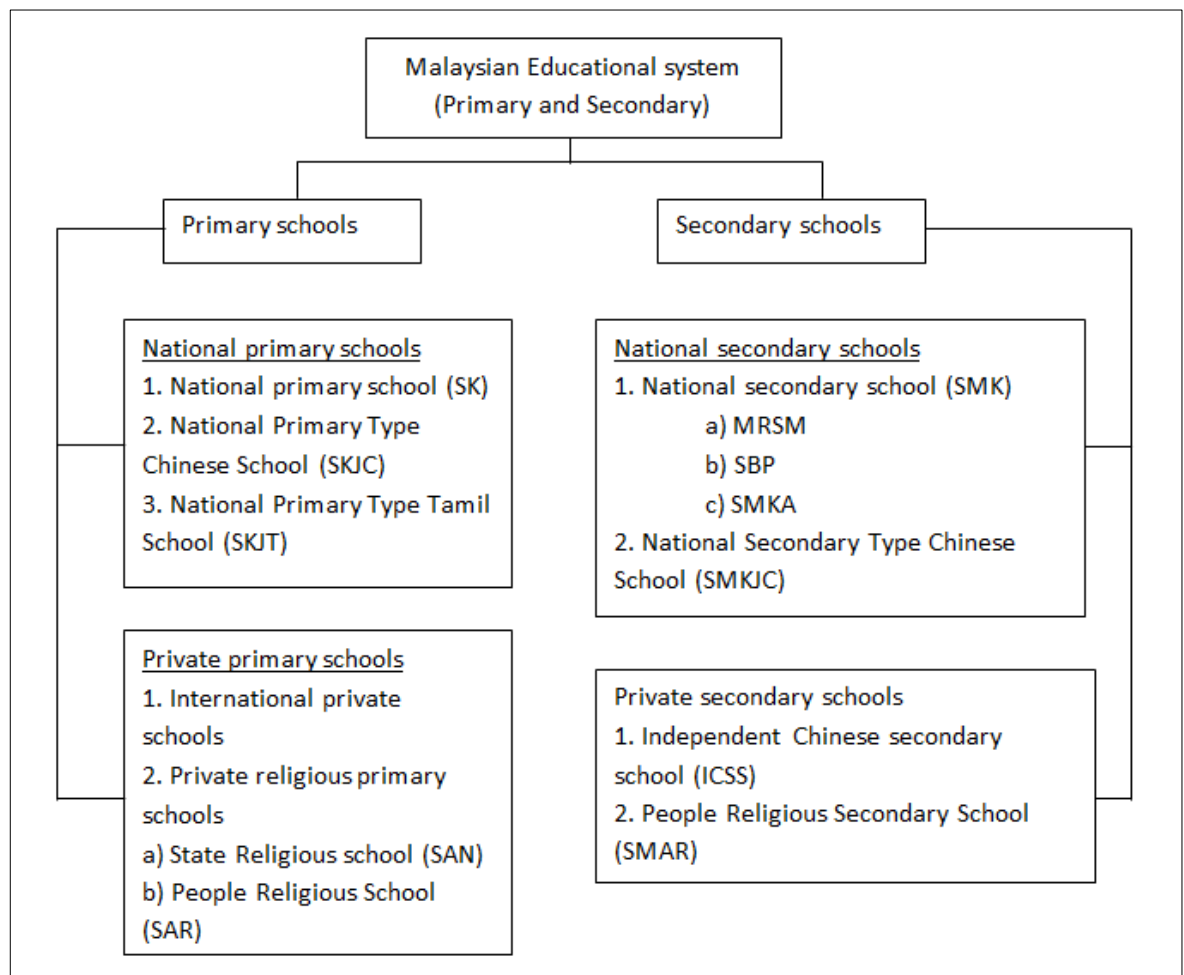
Figure 8: The Malaysian educational system

In other words, Malaysians have the choice to enrol their children into a school on the basis of language or religious concern. The educational background also provides them with different demands and targets within the Malaysian labour sector – government and private – which potentially creates a different vacuum which could further separate Malays and Chinese inside their ethnic milieu.

The 13 May 1969 Malays-Sino Riot, the New Economic Policy (NEP) and *Bumiputraism*

Malays and Chinese faced their first and biggest conflict on 13 May 1969 when riots took place following the announcement of the results of the 1969 General Election. The results showed that the Alliance had won, only by a nose, against the DAP (the Malaysian branch of the PAP) and PGRM.[10] Although this result did not change the government, it still showed a numerical decline in the number of

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[10] Both Gerakan and the DAP were monopolised by the Chinese.

votes cast for the Alliance – the ruling government. The DAP and PGRM gained support from non-Malays who questioned and refused to acknowledge Article 153. At the same time, the vote for the Alliance coalition declined due to Malays' dissatisfaction with their slow economic progress (Milne, 1970). Following the election result, a series of provocative events initiated by supporters of both factions triggered fights between Malay and Chinese youths. The fighting worsened on 13 May until it resulted in riots, casualties and deaths in Kuala Lumpur (Comber, 2001; Kua, 2007).

Several meetings were held to examine the reasons behind the conflict. Government failure to recognise income disparities between ethnic groups was regarded as the main reason for the tragic events (Sundaram, 2004; Shamsul, 2008). Based on the 1968 labour report, the professional services were dominated by non-Malays. For example, non-Malays represented 90% in medicine, 84% in public works (engineering), 67% in agriculture and 68% in education. The Chinese also dominated private sector industries such as construction, commerce, mining and quarrying, and manufacturing. At the white-collar subordinate level, particularly in clerical grades, the numbers of Chinese and Indian employees were higher than those of Malays. The Chinese and Indians were employed on the basis of their secondary English education, "a privilege which very few Malays enjoyed" (Cheah, 2002, p.85). By 1970, the income and sectoral disparities between Malays and Chinese were getting bigger. According to the Second Malaysian Plan (1971, p.5), the Malay monthly mean household income in 1970 was RM178.7 (RM34 per capita), whereas the Chinese monthly mean household income was RM387.4 (RM68 per capita). The Third Malaysian Plan (1976) reported that the Malay share of corporate equity was 2.4% compared with a Chinese share of 34.4% and a foreign – particularly British – share of 63.3%. The Malays were also the largest group affected by poverty (the Second Outline Perspective Plan, 1991). Malay poverty was considered to be a national issue as the Malay population was the largest population in Malaysia (Suffian, 1972).

In 1970, a few policies were proposed and added, mainly to reduce the inter-ethnic income gap and to maintain and encourage inter-ethnic harmony. The first was the Sedition Act (1970). In this Act, any issues related to the Malays'

special rights and the power of the Sultans were listed as sensitive subjects and could not be questioned (Andaya and Andaya, 2001; Harding, 2012). The second was a proclamation of the National Ideology, better known as *Rukun Negara* (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). *Rukun Negara* consisted of five pillars: belief in God, loyalty to king and country, upholding the constitution, the rule of law, and good behaviour and morality. In addition to the Sedition Act and the National Ideology, another consequence of May 1969 was the formation of the National Cultural Policy (NCP) in 1971. The pillars of the NCP were: first, that the basis of the national culture is the culture which is native to the region; second, that the traits from other cultures which are pertinent should be absorbed to enrich the national culture; and third, that Islam - as the official religion of Malaysia - should play its role in the formulation of the national culture. The NCP, however, was ambiguous, both for Malays and for Chinese (Beng, 1988). After receiving multiple criticisms of the NCP, the government decided to dissolve it, as any change was understood to be likely to anger either Malays or non-Malays (Ishak, 1997).

Nonetheless, the most influential policy introduced was the New Economic Policy (NEP). There were two main prongs of the NEP:

> The first prong is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, by raising income levels and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians, irrespective of race. The second prong aims at accelerating the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function. (The Second Malaysian Plan, 1970, p.1)

In 1973, the NEP was extended into a twenty-year plan from 1970 until 1990 (Eyre and Dwyer, 1996). Following the implementation of the NEP, a new identification and categorisation was introduced: the *bumiputra* (the 'sons of the soil'). The *bumiputra* consisted of Malays, natives of Borneo and aboriginal people in the peninsular, whilst the non-*bumiputra* consisted of Chinese, Indians and others. However, it would be wrong to think that the indigenous affirmative action started in the 1970s (Guan, 2005) because it had been stipulated during the Federation of 1948 and 1957 that the Malay Rulers must:

> ... safeguard the special position of the Malays and [to] ensure the reservation for Malays of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational or training privileges ... and, ... of [business] permits and licenses. (The Malaysian Constitution, 2014)

What changed in the 1970s was the systematic implementation of the affirmative actions (Guan, 2005). Within the NEP implementation (1970-90), several policies favouring the *bumiputra* were implemented. Nonetheless, this inevitably opened up several debates between Malay and non-Malay communities. From the non-Malay side, the issues of *equality* and injustice were frequently stressed in relation to the NEP. Meanwhile from the Malays' perspective, 'injustice' should not exist as the NEP was formulated on the concept of *equity*. In order to achieve its aims, the NEP focused on two important societal institutions: education and the economy.

In regard to education, prior to 1970, admission to local universities was primarily based on merit. Starting from 1970, the state implemented a policy whereby admission to the local universities was changed to a quota-based system. Consequently, the numbers of *bumiputra* in tertiary education institutions increased, resulting in a growing number of Malay professionals (The Seventh Malaysian Plan, 1990). In 1990, admission to a local university was no longer based on quota but merit, which was fully implemented in 2002. Quota-based admission, however, transferred to the pre-university levels: Matriculation Centre and Foundation Studies[11]. In Malaysia today, there are two types of qualification which can be used for making an application to the local university: results from the Matriculation or Foundation studies, and STPM. Those who cannot get a place in the matriculation or foundation studies can apply using STPM (open to all Malaysians with the SPM qualification) which is only offered in national secondary schools.

Economically, some Malay politicians interpreted the ethnic riots in 1969 as a "blessing in disguise" (Shamsul, 1997, p.251). Under the implementation of the NEP, the foreign share of corporate equity would be reduced to 30%, the Malay share would be increased to 30%, and the Chinese share would be allowed to

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[11] Matriculation Centre and Foundation Studies refers to a preparatory programme in science, accountancy and technical studies for a degree course in any local public and private universities.

grow to 40% (Third Malaysian Plan, 1976). A new type of Malay rich elites emerged following the implementation of the NEP, who can be divided into two categories. The first was mainly comprised of Malay politicians who managed to turn the rural development project into their economic resources by establishing companies and monopolising government contracts and tenders - predominantly based in urban areas. Their success would not have been possible without skills and capital from the local Chinese tycoons who enjoyed the same benefits from this cooperation (Gomez, 1990, 1991, 1994; Shamsul, 1997). The second category was the Malay rural rich, who originated from peasant families. Similar to the Malay rich in urban areas, they also needed to cooperate with local Chinese *tawkay*. Some of the Malay rural rich acted as sleeping partners to these Chinese *tawkay* by securing small government contracts (Shamsul, 1997). By the end of the NEP in 1990, the Malay and Chinese political and business leaders seem content with the outcome (Koon, 1997).

However, at the same time, unequal distribution of the privileges was arguably present within the *bumiputra*. In 1974, there was a controversial case in which the peasants in Baling (a rural part of northern Malaysia) suffered from starvation as a result of the falling price of rubber and high inflation, which led to numerous deaths. As a result, a series of mass demonstrations were held by university students and an Islamic NGO (ABIM) condemning the lack of government action, governmental waste and corruption (Nagata, 1980).

There were similarities in economic activities between the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence periods. During the pre-colonial and colonial periods, both Malay chiefs and Chinese entrepreneurs enjoyed their industrial relationship and cooperation in tin mining. In the NEP era, both Malay politicians and Chinese tycoons enjoyed their cooperation in a new form of economic resources. During the colonial period, the Malays peasants had a tendency to lease or sell their small-holding transformed land (from rice-land to rubber estates) to other interested parties. The same tendency occurred in the NEP era when some of the Malays became sleeping partners to Chinese *tawkay*. These outcomes were the result of the colonial legacy on ethnic identification and categorisation in post-independence Malaysia. What made pre- and post-independence Malaysia different was the administrators. In other words, there

existed a class issue within the ethnicisation of the Malaysian system, but it was blurred by the ethnic boundaries of language, religion and customs.

The Islamic resurgence of the 1970s

The 1970s were the starting point for an Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. This resurgence can be used "to describe the activities and ideologies of both the rural peasant and the urban middle-class groups" (Ong 1990, p.273). The latter, in particular, contributed to the Islamisation of the Malaysian sub-societal system such as in education (type of school and university) and economics (for instance, the financial establishment). Muzaffar (1987) explained the resurgence as a consequence of Malay alienation in urban areas as a consequence of the westernisation of social mores. At the same time, it was to avoid further erosion of Malay religious practices. Shamsul (1994) interpreted the resurgence as the result of a large number of Malay migrations from rural to urban areas which created an identity and cultural vacuum which Islam would fill. Lee (1990), however, explained the resurgence as a defensive ideology of Malay-*bumiputra* in the form of religious manifestation.

Muzaffar (1987) listed the signs of Islamic resurgence in city life as the use of several Arabic words and phrases in Malays' everyday conversation, and a growing concern about Malay dietary rules – not only about avoiding pork or slaughtering animals according to Islamic rules, but also in the details such as gelatine usage in cakes or chocolates and an increasing wariness about eating in the houses of non-Muslim friends. This concern caused the Malaysian government to make it compulsory for applicable restaurants to display a 'Halal' signboard. Due to the Islamic resurgence in the cities, the government also decided to introduce *Azan* (the call to prayer) in the radio and television service.

In terms of gender relations, Ong (1990) stated that the migration of Malay women to urban areas because of industrialisation and modernisation in the 1970s had created financial and lifestyle freedom for them. Drug-use, western dress (such as mini-skirts) and the breaking of village norms, such as dating non-Malay men, were the main causes of concern for some Malays (Ong, 1990). *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (ABIM), for example, was one of the main actors

within the Malaysian Islamic resurgence. One of its activities was the *dakwah* (proselytising) movement. Women in ABIM's *dakwah* movement portrayed an Islamic dress code by wearing the *telekung* (a long scarf covering the head, hair and chest) and *baju kurung* (Malay traditional dress). In some cases, the women would wear socks, gloves and *purdah* – which were historically unfamiliar to Malay culture (Ong, 1990). The new dress code was different from female Malays' previous traditional style of dress, under which they would freely show their hair in everyday activities and only on particular occasions would use a lace shawl draped loosely around the head and shoulders (Ong, 1990). As Sua *et al*. noted, "Prior to the 1970s, it was neither mandatory for female Malay students to wear the *baju burung* in schools nor for schools to operate different canteen stalls to accommodate the presence of a minority group of Malay students" (2013, p.332).

As briefly mentioned above, this Islamic resurgence created new educational needs among Malays. Islamisation not only took form in primary and secondary schools, it also applied to tertiary institutions. In 1983, an international Islamic university, the IIUM, was established in collaboration with the OIC and other foreign governments. The main aim of the IIUM was the Islamisation of knowledge by producing Muslim professionals for Malaysia's labour markets. Under the Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK) epistemology, IIUM acts as platform for addressing the secularism and westernism in the Malaysian knowledge and socio-economic system (Hussien, 2008).

The 1970s should therefore be considered as an important period for the development of ethnic boundaries between Malays and Chinese resulting from the British legacy of ethnic identification and categorisation in post-independence Malaysia. In educational institutions, the Malay and Mandarin languages formed one of the boundaries which distinguished Malay from Chinese communities. On the other hand, from the economic perspective, the NEP enhanced the need for a *bumiputra* and non-*bumiputra* identification and categorisation, which made individual ancestral trajectories significant and important. In addition, although the relationship between Islam and Malays had been recognised since the Malaccan period, it was not until the 1970s that the

details of Islamic elements such as dress, foods and choice of words began to be clearly manifested within everyday life for Malays.

The identification and categorisation in British Malaya, and its legacy in the Malaysian ethnic bureaucratisation system

The British took the first population census in 1871 and the final census in 1957. Its scope, however, depended on the expansion of the British administration (Hirschman, 1975). Over the years, the table headings of categorisations in the censuses changed from time to time. In 1881 and 1891, identified nationalities were used to categorise the population. In 1901 and 1911, the word 'race' was used in the population census. Although the definition was unclear, its usage remained for several subsequent censuses. In the 1931 census, many immigrants from the Dutch East Indies within British Malaya had begun to identify themselves as 'Malay' (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The 1947 census, however, adopted the term 'community', showing commonality in language, religion and custom for a particular group, but this was dropped in the 1957 census to be replaced again by 'race' (Hirschman, 1987).

The first census conducted by independent Malaya was in 1960. In the 1970 census, once again 'race' was replaced with 'communities', but the 1980 census was more sensitive and neutral (Hirschman, 1987), taking place in the aftermath of the 1969 Malay-Sino riot. In the 1990 census, the Malaysian population was divided into two categories: *bumiputra* (Malays, aboriginal people, natives of Sabah and Sarawak) and non-*bumiputra* (Chinese, Indian and others). As has already been explained, the term *bumiputra* was a new term coined by the Second Malaysian Prime Minister in the 1970s as part of the implementation of New Economic Policy in 1970.

Two questions emerge here: first, why did the colonial administrators need to conduct a population census? Second, why did post-independence Malaysia continue to categorise the Malaysian population on the basis of ethnic categories? Appadurai (1993) suggested that the colonial population census was important for colonial authorities because:

> [...] that number gradually became more importantly part of the illusion of bureaucratic control and a key to a colonial imaginary in which countable abstractions, of people and resources at every imaginable level and for every conceivable purpose, created the sense of a controllable indigenous reality. (1993, p.117)

The continuation of the British ethnic bureaucratic system in post-independence Malaysia can be best described by what Said (1978) claimed as the effect of colonial discourse analysis. He stated that, "rhetorically speaking, orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative, to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularising and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts" (Said, 1978, p.72).

For this, the Malay identity was particularly heavily guarded by the Malaysian authorities and was formally inscribed in the Malaysian constitution. According to Article 160 of the Constitution, a Malaysian is defined as Malay if he/she "was before the Independence Day born in the Federation or in Singapore, or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or was on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore", and "professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay custom" (Malaysian Constitution, 2014, p.287). This definition, however, provided an understanding that other Malaysians such as Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Pakistanis or Eurasians could be regarded as Malay if they fulfilled these residential, religious, language-based and custom-based requirements. It also might make them non-Malay if they are non-Muslim, speak their own language, practise different customs or do not meet the residential requirements. So by offering a definition of 'Malay', the Act concurrently functioned as a guideline for differentiating between Malays and non-Malays. In addition, the imposition of ethnic boundaries – by highlighting the religious and cultural elements – indirectly concealed the state's role in imposing and regulating these boundaries.

The evolution of population categorisation from 'nationality' to 'race', which was based on a pseudo-biological understanding, to 'community' which reflected cultural boundaries in language, religion and customs, showed the need to amend the population categorisation and identification based on the particular political situation and needs at the time. The changes are what Banton (1997)

identified as the process of *name-changing*, which can emerge depending on particular political or economic needs. At the same time, by maintaining the *need* to identify and categorise Malaysians into classified categories [new or old], Malaysians today arguably perceive their identity as natural and as having existed from time immemorial (Shamsul, 1999a).

The making of a nation: the top-down ideological approach and the challenges

Tunku Abdul Rahman – more commonly known as Tunku – was the first Malaysian prime minister (1957-1970). A graduate of Cambridge University, Tunku can be described as a combination of the traditionalist and the modernist. As a traditionalist, he was known for his policy of entrenching Malay political primacy by promoting *Agong* (the supreme king) as a king for Malaysians (Cheah, 2002). He was a modernist in his ideas regarding government, education and democracy. He was never afraid to endorse policies which could promote ethnic harmony (Cheah, 2002). He encouraged 'national activities' in sports such as football and badminton. He also declared religious celebrations such as EidFitri, Thaipusam and Christmas, and cultural festivals such as the Chinese New Year, as national holidays (Cheah, 2002). Tunku's style was considered to be patrician and humane by many. He continued and encouraged the British *laissez-faire* political economy. He also allowed Malaysians to participate and exercise their social, political and civil rights in the public spheres (Cheah, 2002). Although he realised the Malays' disadvantages in economic and political terms, he was confident in their potential and refused to introduce any policy that would enhance the already affirmative action in Act 153 (Kua, 2007). Tunku was also never in doubt about identifying the 'ultras' and taking action to deal with them. He (together with MCA) once called a group of Chinese 'Chinese chauvinists' when they demanded to have Chinese "as the official language and the retention of the Chinese school system" (Cheah, 2002, p.82). His style was met with many criticisms and setbacks. The Malay-Sino riot of 1969 was assumed to be a Malay capitalist *coup d'état* to remove him from his position as Prime Minister (Kua, 2007). In sum, his strategy of pluralism, balancing or give-and-take in the economy under the rights of citizenship raised resentment among

Malays, and at the same time was not enough to satisfy some non-Malays (Cheah, 2002).

Abdul Razak was the second Malaysian prime minister (1970-1976). The first action which he took after he became prime minister was to uphold and implement Malay political supremacy. He endorsed the NEP in order to assist *bumiputra* in economic terms, and he showed support for the NCP. He recognised the rights of non-Malays as Malaysian in economic matters, but at the same time set limitations to the pluralist or balancing strategy employed by Tunku (Cheah, 2002). It was in his years as prime minister that the terms *bumiputra* and non-*bumiputra* became important.

Another important top-down ideological approach came from Mahathir Mohamad. Unlike the previous prime ministers, Mahathir was non-aristocratic by birth. He was the fourth prime minister and served from 1981 to 2003. He was arguably the most influential prime minister in Malaysian politics. Throughout his years in power, many significant policies were implemented and had a strong impact on Malaysians. The NEP, for example, embodied many of his ideas (Britannica Academic, 2016). Today, he still remains politically significant in Malaysian politics. All of the respondents who participated in this current research study were brought up in a world heavily shaped by his vision. Unlike his early years in politics, Mahathir as prime minister tried to create an ideal state-nation through his *Wawasan 2020* (2020 Vision). He first mentioned the vision in 1991 and revived it in 1997. The vision was divided into two sections: the economic and the social aspects. Under the second section, all Malaysian affairs should be liberated from ethnic principles by the year 2020 and it was the government's responsibility to establish a united Malaysian nation. Tun Mahathir also proposed *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysia Race) under which all Malaysians should be entitled to enjoy peace through "integrated territory and ethnicity" with "political loyalty and dedication to the nation" (Mauzy and Milne, 2002, p.166). This nation-of-intent agenda relied on assimilation and the idea that national unity should no longer be threatened by ethnicity (Beng, 2006). His idea of *Bangsa Malaysia,* however, raised an important question: is *Bangsa Malaysia* a homogenous or a plural entity? (Shamsul, 1999b), which arguably remains unanswered today.

Abdullah Badawi, the fifth prime minister, who served from 2003 to 2009, launched the *Islam Hadhari* (Islamic civilisation) as a guiding philosophy for Malaysians. *Islam Hadhari,* according to Badawi, should be "the foundation and inspiration for our actions" and will bring benefits to "all Malaysians, Muslims as well as non-Muslims alike" (Milner, 2011, p.33). The key questions were: "whether it is to be understood as helping Islam to become a stronger element in the defining of 'Malay'; or to go one step further, could it be assisting a process by which Islamic identity and allegiance are being developed into an alternative to 'Malay-ness' as the foundation of the national culture?" (Milner, 2011, p.219). Since Malay-ness and Islam are intricately related to one another, *Islam Hadhari* can be considered as a reinforcement of the symbolic centrality of a particular ethnicity to the identity of the nation from the non-Malays' perspective.

The current Malaysian prime minister is Najib Razak (2009 until the present). Similar to his predecessors, particularly Tunku, Mahathir and Badawi, Najib produced a definition of his ideal-nation: 1Malaysia (read, *Satu Malaysia*). The idea of 1Malaysia is manifested on two levels: at the level of the individual and at the level of the government. At the individual level, Malaysians should think and act beyond their groups' boundaries. The government is obliged to cater for and fulfil all the needs and rights of the different ethnic groups within Malaysia. At the same time, the Malaysian government must preserve the *bumiputras'* rights because of their needs in Malaysia's economic and social achievements.

In other words, there are two equally important issues lingering around Malaysian affairs. On the one hand, the preservation and maintenance of ethnicity are important in societal structures, with continuous enhancements being made by the Malaysian authorities through education and political and economic policies. On the other hand, there is huge promotion of national identity and unity by the Malaysian authorities, but at the same time most political leaders are clearly keener to promote the unity of an ethnic group – Malays and Chinese. These contradicting interests have also contributed to the preservation of ethnic identification and ethno-political parties within Malaysia.

6   Conclusion

There are three main points which can be summarised from the discussion above. First, Malaysian historical trajectories suggest that ethnic boundaries between Malays and Chinese should not be taken as granted, as these were gradually recognised and strengthened throughout their inter-ethnic interactions and through government action. The boundaries were in motion and evolved over a period of time, straddling from pre-colonial to post-independence times. This became important in the twentieth century, particularly in the 1930s, and was accelerated during the Japanese occupation due to Malays-Chinese political and economic needs and interests, and then was strengthened during the communist resurgence (1946-1960). Details of ethnic boundaries (through clothing, food and language) only began to be structured and heightened in 1970s. The discussion also suggested that ethnicity does not exist in isolation: it is not about the boundaries exclusively but about the process of the 'boundary-making' (Barth, 1969). As Hirschman (1986, p.331) suggested, "When these processes are examined, it is often possible to discover how ethnic divisions are socially created, institutionalised and modified".

Second, the Malaysian competition for power and privileges seems to be embedded within the colonial discourse of 'ethnic identification and categorisation' and 'nation-state'. This became a reason for the maintenance of the ethnic bureaucratisation system in post-independence Malaysia. This also created contention among Malaysians - in the form of political parties – due to different perceptions of status, inequality and socio-economic and cultural interests. Third, ethnicity in this sense is deployed in an instrumental manner. From the top-down perspective, ethnicity is used to secure privileges and power. But from the bottom-up perspective, ethnicity in the form of group formation (manifested in the formation of political parties) is important for protecting or for gaining access to power and privileges. In other words, the formations of the Malaysian political parties were built under the primordial claims which were later used for political purposes. For example, although the PAP and DAP are both socialist parties, ethnic issues in regard to native status, privileges and language remain the prominent political points for them. These three points suggest that history is an important element within the study of ethnicity – or at

least in the Malaysian context – and needs to be explored in order to avoid any reification of ethnicity.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Method

1   Introduction

As previously outlined in Chapter One, my main aim in the thesis is to present a theoretical and empirical discussion of the importance of ethnicity by focusing on its construction, reproduction and negotiation during inter-ethnic relationships between Malays and Chinese in Penang (Malaysia) and Glasgow (United Kingdom). In Chapter Two, I argued that ethnicity is being used as an instrument by the state and by everyday actors, and thus maintains its relevance in Malaysia. I also proposed and stressed the importance of both the top-down (macro) and the bottom-up (micro) approaches for understanding the instrumentality of ethnicity in Malaysia. In Chapter Three, I critically explored the development of Malay and Chinese ethnicity in Malaysia: how ethnicity plays an important role in people's everyday lives; how the bureaucratisation of ethnicity has remained significant for the state; and how it has affected the formation of Malaysia as a nation.

In this current chapter, I shall explain how I engaged methodologically with the dialectical relationship between the Malaysian system (macro-forces) and everyday ethnicity (micro-processes) by adopting and adapting an approach advocated by Burawoy (1998), the extended case method. The present chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I shall begin by providing an overview of the methodological paradigm of ethnicity construction in Malaysia. Following this, I shall justify the methodological approach which I used in this study after taking into consideration epistemological concerns raised by the study and the aims and questions which it seeks to address. In the second section titled *Methods*, I shall begin by describing my strategy and experiences during the recruitment of respondents and the challenges that were faced during the fieldwork in Penang and Glasgow. In addition, I shall set out the research methods used in this study: semi-structured interviews, informal observation and analysis of printed and online materials. In the final section titled *Analysis*, I shall give details of the data management and analysis that was used in the present study. Rather than setting out a section specifically devoted to a

discussion of the ethical considerations relevant to this study, I decided to discuss ethical issues continually throughout this chapter.

2   The legacy of nineteenth-century colonial methodology in post-colonial Malaysian studies

As stated in the theoretical chapter of this work, colonial 'knowledge' has now become naturalised and embedded at two levels of Malaysian reality: within the Malaysian system (authority-defined) and in everyday relations (everyday-defined). The authority-defined and everyday-defined are both categories of practice; the former indicates an authoritative and political understanding of ethnicity which is shown within the Malaysian ethnic bureaucratisation system. The latter refers to everyday actors' understanding of ethnicity which is accumulated through their everyday experiences (Shamsul, 1996). This knowledge is grounded in the colonial legacy of *investigation modalities* which was produced by British 'administrator-scholars'. These British scholars were influenced by the idea that human beings should be classified in scientific ways, in a similar manner to Linnaean and Darwinist classifications (Shamsul, 1999a). According to Bernard Cohn, investigation modalities

> [...] Include the definition of a body of information that is needed, the procedures by which appropriate knowledge is gathered, its ordering and classification, and then how it is transformed into usable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazetteers, legal codes and encyclopedias. (1996, p.5)

Shamsul (1999a) stated that there were six investigative modalities utilised by the British colonial authorities in order to dominate local epistemology: historiographic, survey, enumerative, surveillance, museological and travel modalities. The *historiographic modality* consisted of three important components. The first component was the "settlement reports, which are produced on a district-by-district basis" (Shamsul, 1999a, p.6). These consisted of local revenue calculations, indigenous customs, histories and land tenure systems. The second component focused on local civilisation which eventually creates a space for colonial ideological construction and civilisational mission for

a particular colony, and the final component referred to a construction of the colonial histories within the colonies.

The second modality – *survey* – encompassed mapping, classification of flora and fauna and the recording of architectural and archeological sites of historic significance. It also created and highlighted nation-state boundaries. In consequence, a variety of maps, records, archives, encyclopedias and reports were available for colonial administrators to understand and to control the locality – geographically, politically, economically and socially. The third modality – *enumerative*, which I consider to be the most important modality in Malay-Chinese inter-ethnic relationships, assisted the British in identifying and constructing ethnic categories. It reified the population into segregated categories of locals and immigrants based on their religious, linguistic and regional characteristics. These categories were approached and employed as facts under the colonial administration, and have also been accepted as 'reality' in the everyday post-colonial system. Some part of the reification of ethnicity is mobilised by the local political actors within the colonial context, and even used against the colonial and other potential 'threats' in the form of a group.

The fourth modality – *surveillance* – was used to monitor those categories of people whose activities were considered to be a threat to the social order, by means of identification: fingerprinting and photography. The *museological* modality helped to create the 'history' and 'status' of the indigenous civilisation in the form of historical trajectories and a hierarchical universal civilisation. During this process, several images of the indigenous community were created in the forms of monuments, artefacts, architecture, symbols, logos and letter headings. The final modality – the *travel modality* – was used to complement the museological modality. The museological modality provided tangible presentations of the natives/colonised, whilst the travel modality offered an intangible presentation of them, including images and stereotypes according to European perceptions.

At least three consequences emerged from the methodological adaptation in post-colonial Malaysia. First, it led to the continuous construction of ethnic categories in Malaysia. The determining, codifying and categorising of groups under categories of ethnicity are still being maintained in the post-colonial

nation by repeating the colonial techniques of the construction of 'facts' and 'knowledge'. This can be seen in the present regulation of the population census, birth registration, land enactment, Malaysian identity cards (MyKad and MyKid) and other everyday bureaucratic forms and documents. Second, living in this context has made ethnic identification and categorisation meaningful and real for everyday actors.

Third, the continuity of the colonial epistemology is maintained in post-colonial universities and in anthropology, history and sociology departments. In fact, the establishment of the Department of Malay Studies, the Department of Chinese Studies and the Department of Indian Studies was modeled on the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London. In 2005, the Malaysian Cabinet endorsed an Ethnic Relations Course as an introductory compulsory course in twenty public Malaysian universities, which indirectly highlighted selected history and emphasised the differences between Malaysians in terms of ethnicity. Consequently, the epistemology has now spread into the everyday understanding of present and future intellectuals. In other words, the systematic epistemological acceptance of ethnicity and nation has become embedded and naturalised on at least three levels: the state, everyday actors and academia.

The academic understanding, in particular, requires attention if social researchers continue to treat ethnicity and its historical construction as unproblematic, natural and reified. This will potentially create 'wrong' research questions and inappropriate methodologies and methods, which will in turn result in false sociological facts regarding Malaysians. My argument is that indigenous researchers need to make a crucial theoretical and methodological choice before they start to conduct any ethnicity studies in Malaysia. Instead of assuming that ethnic categorisation and construction are unproblematic, fixed and simple, researchers must question the origin of that knowledge by extending their focus in order to explore its process and history. The choice is certainly problematic for those who are employed in state-sponsored universities, as any attempted change could be perceived as criticising the government or even threatening the national security and political stability of the country. It could also create contention between Malaysian social science fields and the state (Shamsul, 1998).

Howard Becker (1967) highlighted the axiological and epistemological concerns for social researchers by asking the question, *whose side are we are on?* As noted by Warren and Garthwaite, "This question was whether social research and the individuals engaged in it were part of the established order or could contribute to the emerging counterculture" (2015, p.226). Two points were articulated by Becker (1967) which I consider important to the present study. First, social scientists cannot remain fully objective or value-free. This point will be further explored in the next section of this work. Second, the issue of the *hierarchy of credibility*, which involves power relations between the superordinate and the subordinate. In this context, superordinate refers to the state or a public higher education institution as the financial funder for ethnic relations studies. Subordinate, on the other hand, refers to social researchers whose progress is properly monitored and depends on the funding provided by the superordinate. Knowledge has a tendency to be moulded on the consequences of this societal power relation (Warren and Garthwaite, 2015). Therefore, in order to avoid falling into the reification of ethnicity and bias, appropriate methodologies, methods and analyses of ethnic studies should be carefully justified and employed.

There are two major methodological challenges within the present research. The first methodological challenge is related to the power relation issue. As a sponsored post-graduate student, I may be expected to provide a new analysis which can be harmonised with the current Malaysian system. The second challenge is related to my everyday experience which was built within the Malaysian ethnic reification system. Living within this system provides me with (insider) challenges in avoiding the reification of ethnicity. The following section is my response to these issues, which I intended to address through reflexive science. By focusing on reflexive science, I hope to provide a scientific and rational explanation of ethnicity which can be appropriated for academic fields without neglecting my identity or status as an insider researcher.

Methodological considerations

In any study, the nature of the research question(s) defines the research methods used (Burawoy, 1991; Morse 1998; Yin, 2009; Bryman, 2012). The aim of

the present research is to understand the importance of ethnicity in the context of Malays' and Chinese interactions by focusing on their dialectic relationship within the Malaysian ethnicisation system. As was explored in Chapters Two and Three of this work, I believe that ethnicity studies in Malaysia should not be bracketed off from the colonial 'racial' epistemology and its historical context. The present study therefore focuses on complex, multi-directional relationships which are constantly changing and changeable over time and space.

Prior to making any methodological decision, I first considered the research aims and their shortcomings in positive science. I support Becker (1967) and Alatas (1972) in asserting that social scientists cannot remain fully objective or value-free. This is contrary to positive science, which aims for objectivity – reinforced by reliability, replicability and representativeness. Burawoy (1998) argued that these pillars are limited by the *context effects*: interview effects, respondent effects, field effects and situation effects.

The first problem identified with positive science in the context of the current study is reactivity, which is influenced by *interview effects*. In the case of my own research, my identity as a Malay could indirectly create this effect in the interviews. The Malay respondents would probably expect me to understand their experiences as a Malay, but for the Chinese respondents, my identity might create an impediment in terms of gathering information. At the same time, I do not want to take for granted the contextual significance of my everyday identity as a Malay. Many previous ethnicity studies conducted by indigenous researchers can be misleading when the researchers have failed to reflect on the potential implications of their own life histories in the studies – which can cause bias, and emotionally driven and defensive analyses (Stanfield, 1993). In addition, it can be problematic if an indigenous researcher interprets ethnicity based on his/her understanding in the popular or everyday life-world sense.

Reliability is also a problematic target as it is limited by the *respondent effect* (Burawoy, 1998). For Bryman (2012), reliability was in fact quite rare. Standardised questions can be prepared, but the outcome may differ depending on the respondents' backgrounds. The variety of respondents' backgrounds can be simply overlooked, particularly by indigenous researchers. The reason for this is their confidence in their 'prior' and local knowledge about their community.

For example, with confidence in their prior and local knowledge about the mixed Malaysian community, many Malaysian researchers can be blind to the complexity of Malaysian society, which is not only divided by ethnicity and class, but also by territorial-cum-values factors, such as language and dialects (Shamsul, 1982). In my own case, even though the respondents in Malaysia and Scotland were based in Penang and Glasgow respectively, their hometowns and social backgrounds were scattered and varied in nature. This created a further complexity in making a comparative analysis between the respondents in Glasgow and Penang.

Replicability is limited by the *field effect*. To create replicability, a stable context must be controlled. The field effect recognises the importance of the political, social and economic contexts within which the research takes place (Burawoy, 1998). Time phase and condition during the research can potentially affect the results. My identity as a Malay-Muslim-Malaysian female, in comparison with a non-indigenous researcher such as a non-Malaysian, non-Muslim male, likely resulted in different feedback from the respondents in Penang and in Glasgow. Differences in the political and economic conditions in contemporary Penang and Glasgow could also affect future research outcomes. This is the *situational effect*, which is something that could not be controlled for and which made representations and generalisations of the findings of this study arguably difficult to apply to other cases. There are many external and internal factors that need to be taken into consideration before making any generalisations. To address these concerns, I diverted my attention to an alternative method, namely reflexive science, focusing particularly on the extended case method.

Reflexive science as an alternative to positive science: Burawoy's four dimensions of the extended case method

As I have previously discussed in the theoretical chapter, there exists an analytical concern regarding the distinction between the categories of *practice* and of *analysis*. The category of practice refers to popular, folk or everyday understandings, whilst the category of analysis indicates a scientific understanding of social phenomena. Reflexive science departs from a dialogue

between researchers and the researched; it focuses on academic theory on the one hand and folk theory on the other. The interaction between these two categories takes place in real contexts (Burawoy, 1998). Reflexive science is regarded as one of the alternatives to positive science. Burawoy adopted its principles – intervention, progress, structuration and reconstruction – in his extended case method (ECM).

There are four dimensions to Burawoy's extended case method. The first dimension is the *extension of the observer to the world of the participant* (Burawoy, 2000). Intervention is emphasised in this dimension. This extension is in fact common to all ethnographic and participant observational studies (Borchgrevink, 2003; Iosifides, 2011; Denscombe, 2014). In the case of my own research, my identity and status as an indigenous researcher could possibly interfere with or affect the respondents' feedback. Since this is unavoidable, reflexive science suggests using it as an extension into the respondents' world. My identity as a Malay during the interviews with the Malay respondents helped me to explore more deeply their everyday understanding of ethnicity in regard to their inter-ethnic relationships with the Chinese. For the Chinese respondents, my status as Malaysian helped me to achieve access into their community, experiences and expectations. However, there is an issue with such an intervention, which is 'domination'. For example, a clear power relation existed between 'the researched' and myself as researcher. When undertaking the research, I had my own reasons for conducting the research and the respondents had their own reasons for taking part in my research. Sometimes, my position as a researcher dominated our relationship, whilst at other points it was the other way around, and I was the one who depended on their experiences, understandings and perspectives of everyday ethnicity in Malaysia.

The second dimension is the *extension of observation over time and space*. As I highlighted in the previous sub-section of this work, the multiple nature of the respondents' backgrounds may have undermined the reliability of the findings. In order to overcome this issue, reflexive science suggests the "aggregation of situational knowledge into social process" (Burawoy, 1998, p.15). The answer is to collect 'points' in multiple readings of a single case and combine them into social processes. The 'social process' in this research refer to the development

of ethnicity which changed, reformed, contested and negotiated through time, space and location. Therefore, the main reason for employing comparative analysis was theoretically based on revealing how ethnic identification is contextual and thus not necessarily fixed in Penang and Glasgow.

However, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), the accumulation of social situations and the integration of multiple observations into social processes inevitably cause researchers to make choices, and by doing so they risk silencing particular experiences and voices. Silencing is the effect of power and it is inevitable in all social science research (Burawoy, 1998). This effect is particularly challenging for an insider researcher. In order to avoid or reduce the silencing effects, a researcher should be "reporting back findings and being open to questions and the refutation of theoretical concepts and ideas" (Piacentini, 2012, p.91). In some cases, the reflection helped me to avoid providing wrong *formulations* by re-considering interview statements which I had to paraphrase through preserving, deleting, and transforming (Heritage and Watson, 1979). In order to do this effectively, I had to be careful with the formulation as it can have consequences for the data generated (Roulston and Lewis 2003).

The third dimension is the *extension from the micro-processes to macrostructures and forces*. This extension is particularly significant for the present study. Its aim is to incorporate wider geographical and historical contexts into the analysis of social processes and the role of broader social forces in shaping local phenomena (Iosifides, 2011). Van Maanen (2011) described this method of ethnographic study as structural tales in accounts which link ethnographic studies of the quotidian to wider issues within society at large. The nature of the extended case study avoids conflating the micro- and macro-levels: "It takes the social situation as the point of empirical examination and works with given general concepts and laws about states, economies, legal orders, and the like to understand how those micro situations are shaped by wider structures" (Burawoy, 1991, p.282), and *vice versa*. This was discussed in the theoretical chapter of this work, which demonstrated how both the state and everyday actors are capable of reinforcing each other in maintaining ethnicity, and how each can cause the recurrence of the other.

The final dimension is the *extension of theory*. One of the issues within social science research is generalisation. The extended case method is theory-driven and theory-oriented; it seeks to formulate theoretical generalisations "by constituting the social situations as anomalous with regard to some preexisting theory, which is then reconstructed" (Burawoy, 1991, p.280). The scope of the method is to develop existing theory through the identification of observed anomalies: "What makes the field interesting is its violation of some expectation, and an expectation is nothing other than some theory waiting to be explicated" (Burawoy, 2000, p.28). In the present study, I began with the idea that ethnicity is simple, unproblematic and natural. After extensive reading, I came up with two theoretical explanations of ethnicity. First, instead of focusing on what an ethnic group 'consists' of, I should focus on the process of boundary-making (such as religion, language, and customs) which constructs an ethnic group. Second, ethnicity was constructed as an instrument for achieving specific aims.

With this understanding, I entered the field. What I found later in my research was a set of complicated interplays between external structures (such as Malaysian laws, constitutional acts and jurisdictions) and everyday reactions, which varied according to respondents' backgrounds and which can be seen in the different choices which they made (or which were made for them) in terms of education, marriage, social circle, occupation and political views. The extended case method is explanatory. It advocates a notion of causality which departs from regularity and is implicitly realist: "Causality then becomes multiple, involving an individual connectedness of elements, tying the social situation to its context of determination" (Burawoy, 1991, p.280). It also accounts for social complexity and the role of power within social relations.

At the same time, reflexive science tends to involve repeated periods of ethnographic research. Due to limited time and financial constraints, I inevitably could not afford this 'repeated period of research', which can be seen later in my methods. Since I was never involved in any repeated fieldwork, theoretical guidelines were important for ensuring that the maximisation of my fieldwork could be achieved. The present research *only* intended to adapt and adopt the ECM's 'extended' principles in related phases. For example, the extension of the

observer to the world of the participant is useful during an interview. The extension of observation over time and space, the extension from the micro-processes to macro-structures and forces, and the extension of theory were used accordingly in the analysis and discussion of the data.

3   Methods

From Penang to Glasgow: extending beyond Malaysia's geographical boundaries

I started my fieldwork immediately after I had obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow, in May 2013. Since all of my target respondents were university students, it was important for me to obtain separate permissions from both of the universities involved: the University of Glasgow (GofU) and the University of Sciences, Malaysia (USM). By the end of May 2013, I had obtained official approval for conducting interviews in these two universities. Permission to enter USM and to interview students was easily gained because of my position as a future staff member in the university; my study was also conducted under sponsorship from USM. This may have created an easier clearance for me compared with other researchers who may need to go through several gatekeepers before conducting their research at the USM.

Penang and Glasgow are both big cities in their respective geographical areas. Penang is located in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia (*see* Map 6). The state covers an area of 1,031 km² (Department of Town and Country Planning, 2009) and is rich with diverse cultures originating from both eastern and western civilisations. Malays, Chinese and Indians are the majority ethnicities in Penang. The main languages used in Penang are English, Penang Hokkien, Tamil and Malay. The use of these languages depends on people's respective class and circle (NAHERI, 2010).
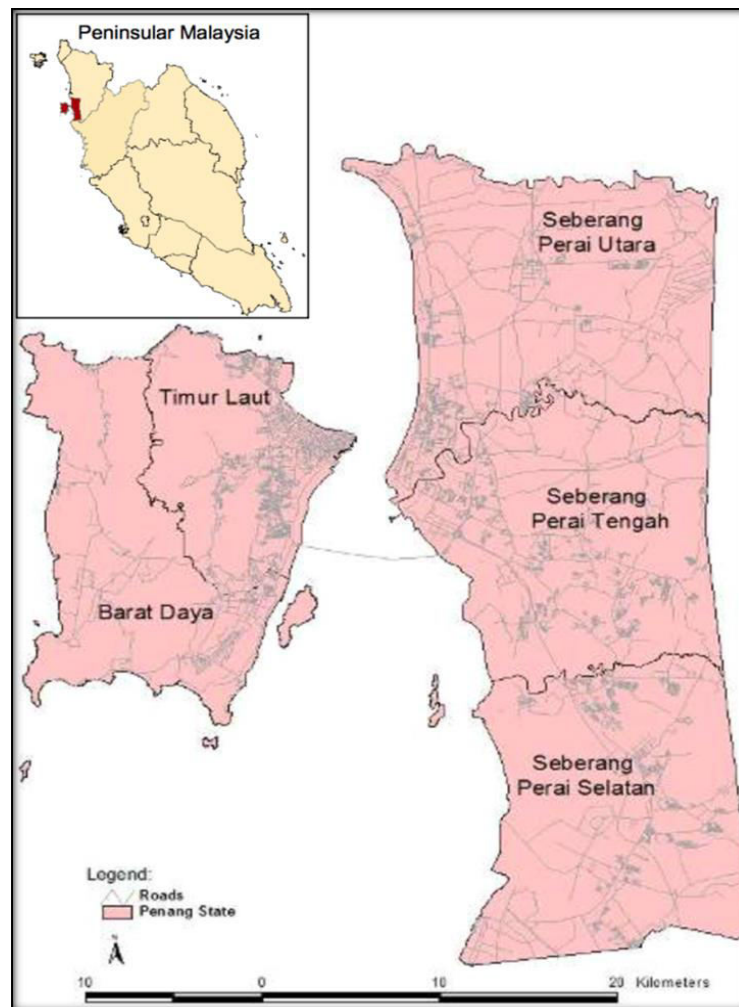
Map 6: Geographical area of Penang
Source: Department of Town and Country Planning (2009).

In the most recent Malaysian population statistics (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2011), Penang was recorded as having the fourth highest urbanisation levels after Putrajaya, Kuala Lumpur (the national capital) and Selangor. Of these four areas, Penang is the second most densely populated area with 1,490 people per square kilometre after Kuala Lumpur (6,891 people). Penang's density is higher than that of Putrajaya (1,478 people) and that of Selangor – the most populous state in Malaysia – with only 674 people per square kilometre. Its urban pattern is *desa-kota* (village-city), which means that there is no clear boundary between the rural and the urban areas (McGee, 1989). Penang has experienced rapid population growth since the 1970s, particularly from internal migration from other states in Malaysia due to its urbanisation and industrial developments (Munir *et al.,* 2010). Politically, the current state government in Penang is Democratic Action Party (DAP), an opposition party which has won and maintained its position in the state over the last two general elections (2008 and 2013).

The main difference between Penang and Glasgow can be seen to lie in the structure of their populations. Between 2001 and 2011, Glasgow was reported to have experienced the largest increase in non-UK-born residents compared with other cities in Scotland (Vargas-Silva, 2013). Based on UK Higher Educational Statistics, the number of Malaysian students in the UK is the seventh highest non-local population of students after those from China, India, Nigeria, the US, Germany and the Republic of Ireland (Vargas-Silva, 2013).

Glasgow was chosen as one of the two locations for this current study because I intended to explore and to understand the *process* of ethnic identification and categorisation and its importance for Malaysian young people both inside and outside Malaysia's boundary. Penang represents a common context with familiar faces, culture and norms among Malaysians, whereas Glasgow represents a different context and situation with different cultures, values and norms. Malaysian students in a local setting (internal to Malaysia) and a foreign setting (external to Malaysia) were regarded as appropriate participants for providing information on how they construct and maintain, or negotiate and suppress their Malay-ness and their Chinese-ness during their interaction with different people from different contexts, ethnicities and nationalities.

Recruitment and access to respondents

The respondents in this research were recruited on the basis of pre-defined research objectives and questions. As I briefly stated at the end of the methodological section of this chapter, the present research did not involve any repeated fieldwork. In order to achieve the maximisation of the fieldwork, the research question and targeted sampling were theoretically constructed and guided.

The method used to recruit respondents for this study was a combination of purposive, quota and snowball sampling. The notion of sampling in the exact statistical sense did not apply in this case. Purposive sampling was used because the respondents should not only be responsive but must also be informative (Bernard, 2011). According to Ritchie *et al*. (2003), the intention of purposive sampling is to choose respondents based on particular criteria, such as their

specific experiences and roles, and who would subsequently provide a researcher with a comprehensive exploration and understanding of his/her study. Purposive sampling has two main principles. The first principle is to ensure that the sampling covers all related issues and concerns, and the second is to ensure that all the differences are taken into consideration during the selection process – thus making the exploration of specific characteristics possible (Ritchie *et al.,* 2003).

Since this is a study of ethnicity, representation from at least two different ethnic groups was required. As I explained in Chapter One of this work, Malays and Chinese were chosen as respondents due to their long and crucial relationship and status in Malaysian politics and economics. At the same time, I also required Malaysians with a high level of 'cosmopolitan' experiences and 'cultural capital' so that they might potentially act most reflexively regarding questions surrounding identity. Additionally, there were two aspects which I needed to take into consideration at the outset of fieldwork. The first aspect was the current research's timeframe and its limitations. As a sponsored student, I needed to finish the research within the time given. This made the sampling decision crucial for me. I also needed to take into consideration the respondents' time limitations. In other words, I needed to recruit Malaysians who were willing to allocate their time for my research without burdening them. The second aspect was the accessibility of the respondents. Apart from classes and other academic activities, students seem to fulfil these two main requirements. Although there were some challenges to recruiting them – especially the Chinese students – they were still reachable for the recruitment (I shall discuss this in more detail later).

In addition, I also decided to focus on students only because the variety of their socio-cultural backgrounds and shared status as newcomers in urban areas would provide enough information on the contextual identity, ethnicity and nationalism in their life experiences. The majority of the respondents in Penang were not locals (Penangites), but came from various states within Malaysia: Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Sabah, Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur, Pahang and Johor. The majority of the respondents in Glasgow came from Selangor, Johor, Kelantan and Kedah (*see* Table 4).

Table 4: Respondents' regionalities based on the location of interviews

	Penang	Glasgow
Kedah	5	3
Kelantan	5	3
Terengganu	0	2
Johor	3	5
Pahang	1	1
Perak	5	2
Negeri Sembilan	1	2
Selangor	1	6
Penang	5	0
Sabah	1	0
Sarawak	3	0
Kuala Lumpur	0	1
Total	**30**	**25**

In order to avoid missing crucial information and perceptions, I gave particular attention to the gender variable. As a result, the respondents recruited for this research had to fulfil these specific criteria: they had to be Malaysian males or females, Malay or Chinese, and studying and living in Penang or Glasgow. These specific criteria were devised in order to ensure that all relevant ethnic groups and gender perspectives were included, so that any differences in terms of ethnicity, gender and location could be fully explored.

Despite these carefully selected criteria, however, there were three consequences of having students as the respondents in this research. First, since the respondents were relatively highly educated, they were likely to have a set of exclusive experiences and views which were quite unrepresentative of the wider Malaysian population. Taking this as a precaution, the importance of ethnicity in this research only reflected the views of the middle class and educated Malaysians in Penang and Glasgow. Second, some of the respondents were PhD students with a great deal of working experience. The lowest

educational level attained were those who were currently undertaking their degree and had less or limited work-related experience. This offered me much interesting information which unfortunately was beyond the scope of this research and therefore could not be included. The information did, however, suggest a field for further potential research with different research questions. Because of this, I had to make decisions about 'what' and 'what not' to include in this research.

Third, I was frequently asked about the research theory and for detailed information, particularly regarding the methods employed during the study. For respondents undertaking science courses, the use of qualitative methods – particularly interviews – seemed to be considered insufficient for understanding the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. I was also frequently asked about my conclusions and findings during my interactions with my respondents which usually took place at Malaysian gatherings and social occasions.

Quota sampling was used in order to help me to recruit an appropriate proportion of representatives from each ethnicity in the study (Denscombe, 2014, p.40). At the beginning of my fieldwork, my intention was to recruit sixty respondents, of whom thirty would be interviewed in each location (Penang and Glasgow). Within these sixty respondents, there would be fifteen Malay males, fifteen Malay females, fifteen Chinese males and fifteen Chinese females (*see* Table 5). These specific numbers were a precautionary measure to ensure that I would be able to obtain enough information for my research.

Table 5: Intended quotas based on ethnicity, gender and location before the fieldwork began

Location / Ethnicity	Penang		Glasgow		Total
	Malay	*Chinese*	*Malay*	*Chinese*	
Male	8	7	7	8	30
Female	7	8	8	7	30
Total	15	15	15	15	60

However, after the process of data collection, which took place concurrently with the transcription and analysis of the material gathered from the interviews, I decided to end my fieldwork after the fifty-fifth interview (*see* Table 6).

Table 6: Final quotas based on ethnicity, gender and location after the fieldwork

Location / Ethnicity	Penang		Glasgow		Total
	Malay	*Chinese*	*Malay*	*Chinese*	
Male	8	7	7	4	26
Female	7	8	8	6	29
Total	15	15	15	10	55

The decision to reduce the numbers of participants was made after the preliminary analysis, when I found that the information retrieved was sufficient for me to answer the research questions. Any further recruitment or interviews would probably have only led to repetition or superfluous material. According to Denscombe (2014), a researcher may stop expanding his/her number of respondents when sufficient data has been gathered and nothing could be achieved by further recruitment. Additionally, each identified phenomenon only needs to appear once in the data, thus making any increase in the number of respondents unnecessary if it cannot contribute any new discoveries. Naturally, qualitative data is rich in details, so it was time and cost efficient for me to work with a smaller number of respondents than planned once I had realised that I could fulfil the intention in terms of the information required (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). Additionally, since this was designed as an explanatory study, it was more efficient to keep the number of respondents low so that I could study each of the interviews in detail without the risk of neglecting some of the information provided by the respondents (Denscombe, 2014).

Snowball sampling, on the other hand, helped me during the recruitment of respondents. Many challenges were encountered during the recruitment process, particularly in Glasgow. First, some of the potential respondents had limited time to spare to participate in my research. On two separate occasions, I had to cancel interviews which had previously been scheduled, due to participants' time constraints. Second, I lacked Chinese friends or acquaintances in Glasgow and Penang, which may have slowed down the 'networking' nature of the recruitment process. Third, the number of Malaysian students at the University of Glasgow was small and the number of Chinese students was relatively smaller than that of Malay students. Snowball sampling was therefore useful to address this situation in which suitable respondents were hard to reach (Chambliss and Schutt, 2015), particularly in Glasgow. Snowball sampling helped me to build a

good reputation and create a foundation of trust with my next respondents through recommendation from previous respondents. By using this sampling method, I could also ask my respondents to nominate other potential respondents who could fulfil my recruitment criteria, particularly in their ethnic and gender identities (Denscombe, 2014). Through snowball sampling, I managed to interview four Chinese males and six Chinese females in Glasgow, a number smaller than my original intention of eight Chinese males and seven Chinese females. In recruiting Malay respondents in Glasgow, I did not face any issues during the recruitment and I was able successfully to meet the quota of seven Malay males and eight Malay females. The challenge was less of a problem in Penang. Once again, I did not face any issues during the recruitment, although the full quota of Chinese respondents was the last to be completed. Based on my fieldwork experience, Chinese respondents were harder to recruit both in Penang and in Glasgow.

By combining purposive, quota and snowball sampling, I was able to achieve my target for recruitment in the light of my aim of reaching data saturation. The purposive sampling helped me to identify my target for respondents based on ethnicity, gender and location of study. The quota sampling helped me to identify the appropriate numbers of respondents that I intended to recruit for the research, and the snowball sampling method helped me in recruiting respondents, particularly Chinese in Glasgow.

Semi-structured interview

Fieldwork research was conducted in Glasgow and Penang over a period of eighteen months, from June 2013 to December 2014. The central research methods were semi-structured interviews supported by informal participant observation and analysis of printed and online materials. I chose to adopt a triangulation method in order to help me to cross-check the information gained from the interviews with material gathered through observation and printed and online materials, and this enabled me to be confident in the findings of this work (Bryman, 2012).

I chose to employ semi-structured interviews because this is the research method which least restrains the respondents but still retains a good capacity for later analysis. The interview guidelines were continuously developed during the fieldwork, depending on the information collected and the number of irrelevant or unclear answers given in the previous interviews. All of the interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings. The decision to do this was made in consideration of the need to probe deeply and to observe respondents' body language – only possible through face-to-face contact (Neuman, 2004; Bernard, 2011). There were many questions which required deeper probing and immediate construction from me, particularly the open-ended questions. For instance, I needed to probe considerably during the interviews on issues involving ethnicity and identity based on the respondents' experience of making friends, choosing jobs, selecting a partner or spouse and political views.

During the face-to-face interviews, I realised that most of the interviewees became more relaxed in the middle of the interviews compared with the beginning of the interviews. I took their body language as a cue for me to move the discussion to the next phase, which involved more complex issues such as political and economic issues. These cues would have been more difficult to identify in a telephone interview. At the beginning of each interview, participants gave me their permission for me to tape-record and write down their responses, but I noticed that some of the respondents felt more comfortable after I turned off the voice-recording tape or after we had officially ended the interview. A few of them started to describe their experiences in detail, which meant that I had to write their comments down in my field diary.

During the fieldwork, my identity as a Malay gave me some advantages in the interviews with the Malay respondents. Trust was easily built and the Malay respondents were genuinely willing to share with me their perceptions regarding their Chinese peers, both positively and negatively, on the perceived grounds that I, as a fellow Malay, would empathise with their views. This expectation of empathy was not based on my status as a researcher, but on my identity as Malay.

The Malay language was highly preferred among the Malay respondents, particularly in Penang. The interviews were carried out in a casual and informal way so that I was able to manage to gradually develop the process of information gathering from relatively small and uncontroversial issues, such as friendship and marriage into bigger and more sensitive issues, such as quotas for *bumiputras* and their political views in regard to their relationships with Chinese Malaysians. Furthermore, as a Malay, it was an advantage for me to easily predict the questions which would be regarded as sensitive or insensitive, and I was able to apologise politely in advance or to construct the question more appropriately before asking it.

On the other hand, interviews with the Chinese respondents were quite challenging. Trust was not as easily built with Chinese respondents because to them I was an outsider (not Chinese) and a stranger (not an acquaintance or a friend). In other words, there was no immediate link between us. I worked hard and took time to build a rapport with them. However, my identity as Malaysian was particularly helpful during our discussion of Malaysian political issues. The Chinese respondents in Glasgow could particularly relate to my identity as Malaysian. Upon reflection, my identity as Malaysian was in fact proven to be an asset, as it took me less time to build a rapport with the Chinese respondents in Glasgow compared with the Chinese respondents in Penang.

I usually began discussions with the Chinese respondents by raising general and public issues in order to build a good rapport with them, and then progressively moved to more sensitive issues regarding ethnicity and identity. In some interviews, my status as a researcher did help me considerably in gaining the trust of respondents. Additionally, I felt that Chinese respondents were very interested in sharing their perceptions regarding the issues discussed, but they were also concerned about my identity as Malay. They frequently apologised before making any statements, particularly any regarding the Malay community or Islam.

I, on the other hand, lacked insight into issues which the Chinese might regard as sensitive. I therefore always apologised before asking them a question which I thought they might consider sensitive or insulting. For example, at one point I wanted to know respondents' Chinese sub-group (Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka

(Kheh), Teochiu, Hainan (Hailam), Kwongsai, Hokchiu, Hokchia or Henghwa). In order to avoid making the same mistake more than once and causing further emotional damage, I asked my first Chinese respondent whether the question was sensitive for the Chinese in Malaysia. The feedback he gave was helpful and I was able to then know which questions – generally, not exclusively – were considered to be sensitive by the Chinese community.

Language was another important aspect which emerged during my interviews with the Chinese respondents. I do not have any proficiency in Mandarin or in any other Chinese dialects, except for a few sentences that I am familiar with as a Malaysian. Nonetheless, I did not have any problem conducting interviews with the Chinese respondents in Glasgow because they preferred to speak in English. In some cases, a few of the Chinese respondents in Glasgow admitted that they actually had poor proficiency in Mandarin or in a Chinese dialect. However, I still cannot deny that the proficiency of an interviewee's use of language can be used as an extension into a respondent's world. For example, during an interview with a Chinese respondent in Glasgow, we were politely interrupted by the respondent's friend, who interrupted our conversation to ask her something. Although I cannot speak Mandarin, I do at least know a few sentences in the Chinese language, such as *wo fu sher tau*; which means 'I don't know' in English. To reduce my awkwardness in that situation, I said '*wo fu sher tau*', and both girls were quite surprised and happy; it created a friendly atmosphere and they seem to appreciate my apparent 'proficiency'. As a result, I managed to recruit the friend as my next respondent for the present study. The Chinese respondents in Penang, on the other hand, preferred to use Malay, English and Manglish (a combination of English and Malay) interchangeably during the interviews.

As Malaysian, and thus an insider, I also needed to consider my post-fieldwork relationships. This was a concern for me because, as a Malaysian in Glasgow who had been actively present at most of the Malaysian gatherings or events there, I felt obliged to help the respondents to feel comfortable in my presence. My aim was to avoid any feeling that I was manipulating our relationship solely for the purposes of my study. In other words, I wanted to give them the impression that they were helping my research purposes, but at the same time I did not want to make them feel that they were being exploited.

It is important to state here that most of the interviews were carried out efficiently and without any problems. Only in a few interviews did the environment and setting, such as a noisy and crowded café, disturb our conversation. In order to help these respondents to feel relaxed during the interviews, I asked them to choose another place where we could comfortably continue the conversation. Most of the time, the respondents felt no need to change the interview location. This did, however, create a lot of loud noises in the interview recordings, which caused slight issues when it came to transcribing the interview. This problem meant that it took more time and effort to transcribe them compared with other quieter interviews. In one interview, the respondent was in a hurry to get to her squash training, and this haste sadly affected the interview duration and my ability to get to the "heart of the matter" (Geertz, cited by Wolcott 1999, p.87); it was in fact the shortest interview that I conducted throughout the fieldwork. To avoid missing any important points, I had to recheck with the previous interviews so that any points which might have been overlooked could be covered in the next interview conducted.

The topic of the study itself intrigued one of the respondents enough for him to record our conversation during the interview. I was not aware that he was recording us and I only noticed the recording after his phone had loudly alerted him to its low battery. He explained that he had thought that the purpose of my research was to create hatred between Malays and Chinese. For ethical purposes, before starting any interview, I had to explain to every respondent the nature of the research, simultaneously providing them with a Plain Language Statement (PLS) and agreement form. Only in this specific case did I need to re-explain the purposes of my research. I briefly clarified that the study was academic research into understanding the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia; it was not seeking to blame or criticise a particular ethnic group. I also explained to him that the topic had already been approved by and was being monitored closely by the USM (particularly by the School of Distance Study) and Malaysian Higher Education (MOHE), to whom I needed to submit a work and progress report every six months. This unexpected attitude showed me that ethnicity studies could be a sensitive issue for everyday actors if they are not scrupulously

academically prepared and the participants are given full and detailed explanations.

Informal participant observation

The time allocated for participant observation depended on the location of my fieldwork. In Penang, I allocated only four months for the informal participant observation. All of the interviews with respondents in Penang were conducted within a university setting, such as in the university café or outside the library. My main concern regarding the observations was the ethnic composition of groups of students in the USM and their use of language. Participant observation in Glasgow, however, was conducted only during special occasions, such as the Commonwealth Games 2014 and other Malaysian gatherings such as EidFitri, Malaysian Nights, a Malaysian Food Festival, Malaysian Family Days and Malaysian Sports Days. The main issues of the focus of the observations there were also the choice of language, the majority of members in the gatherings and the ethnic composition of smaller groups.

This informal participant observation was important for this study for the following reasons. First, since this research was concerned with everyday ethnicity, it made sense for me to observe ethnicity being 'made' (or not) in Penang and Glasgow. In other words, it was important for me to be within the context in order to understand ethnicity in the respondents' everyday lives (Jorgensen, 1989). Second, I also wanted to cross-check the findings gathered from the respondents with my own observations; and finally, I was looking for differences and similarities between Penang and Glasgow which might have been absent from the respondents' statements. Since the interview was the main research method employed in this study, the findings from the observations were intended to be used only in order to support the empirical data obtained from the interviews.

Printed and online materials

The analysis of printed and online materials was an important part of this research, necessary for me to understand how the bureaucratisation of ethnicity

works for the Malaysian authorities. In this study, the relevant Malaysian authorities were *Jabatan Kebajikan Orang Asli* (JAKOA) (the Department of Indigenous People), *Jabatan Statistik Malaysia* (the Department of Statistics, Malaysia), *Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara* (JPN) (the Department of National Registration), *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (JAKIM) (the Department of Islamic Development, Malaysia), the Syariah Online Act and the Regulation Malaysian Constitution, and the USM official website.

I contacted JPN and JAKIM in order to obtain information on the procedure of Malaysian ethnic identification and categorisation, and statistics on newly converted Muslims in Malaysia respectively. In addition, I contacted JAKOA to obtain statistics on the aboriginal population. In order to obtain unpublished official information directly from these government departments, I was required to send a copy of the thesis, after my study is completed, for their records. Most of the information about the regulations and the Act, however, was taken from online sites which can be easily accessed directly without any need to seek access through a relevant gatekeeper. Other important information and ideas in this study came from many hours and days of informal observation of Malays and Chinese, and from informal discussions with Malaysians (mostly with Malays) who were willing to share their everyday experiences of ethnic issues indirectly with me.

4   Analysis, data management and discussion

Not surprisingly, the eighteen months of fieldwork conducted for this present study produced an abundance of data. By the end of May 2014, I had completed 55 interviews conducted in Penang and Glasgow. The interviews were in Malay, English, or a combination of both. It was challenging for me to transcribe 55 sets of interviews, of which the shortest duration was 23 minutes and 8 seconds, and the longest was 1 hour, 42 minutes and 21 seconds. The transcription process was incredibly time-consuming, particularly as I carried out the transcriptions myself without paying an external party to do it. Additionally, in order to achieve full translations and transcriptions from Malay to English, I had to deal with the possibility that the original meaning might be "lost in translation", a

term quoted by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.286) from Eva Hoffman, referring to a situation in which the translation does not properly describe the real meaning of the original statements. To avoid this, I retained those original words which could not be replaced by an English equivalent, such as *bumiputra* and Malay *Kerajaan*. Additionally, I also decided to maintain the colloquial structures in the respondents' statements in order to retain the realism of their opinions. Consequently, traces of grammatical error and choice of words which deviated from standard UK English inevitably occurred in the selected quotations reproduced throughout the empirical chapters discussed later.

I initially used Nvivo software to assist me with sorting and managing the data. However, I immediately found that it was quite difficult to handle. There were a few cases where the software suddenly stopped running, and it cost me time to recover the data. So I decided to proceed with manual coding of the interview transcriptions and fieldnotes. Although the coding was time-consuming, it at least kept me closer to the data than would have been possible when using the software.

There were two main concerns in my analytical course: my experiences as an insider researcher, and the dialectical relationship between everyday actors and the State. In order to avoid allowing my experiences as an insider to shape my analysis, I adopted Larkin and Thompson's (2012) suggestion of starting the analysis by writing down everything, including my emotional reactions and initial ideas regarding the potential themes. The purpose of this was to identify my potential preconceptions as an insider researcher. This step was important, as I was constantly worried about the possibilities of researcher bias and sentimental judgment (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Due to this concern, I could at least be aware of and differentiate my understandings as an everyday actor (Malay/*Bumiputra*/Muslim/Malaysian) and as a sociological researcher.

The second concern – the dialectical relationship between everyday actors and the State – was the most crucial part of my analytical course, as it is the main focus of this research. In regard to the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia, the dialectical relationship between everyday actors and the State refers to the top-down imposition of ethnicity in the Malaysian bureaucratic system and the bottom-up demeanour of ethnicity in everyday activities. What I wanted to

discover from their intersection was why, when and where alignment or contradiction can occur between them, and how important it is in the process of ethnic identification and categorisation.

I chose to employ 'thematic analysis' for understanding the dialectical relationship between these two premises. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.78), "thematic analysis should be considered a method in its own right". It is a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). Themes can be identified in both the inductive and the deductive approaches. The themes in the inductive approach are strongly linked to data and are mostly associated with the grounded theory. Its analytical course hence is *data-driven*. In contrast to the inductive approach, the deductive approach is dependent on the theoretical framework; its analytical course is *theory-driven* (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It was the latter that I employed as my analytical method.

As I briefly explained earlier, the interviews conducted in this research were semi-structured and designed on the basis of my academic exposure to ethnicity literature and theories, with specific research questions and targeted respondents. Therefore, the data corpus no longer exists in an epistemological vacuum. The thematic analysis in this research was hence mapped on the basis of the research questions and the theoretical framework devised earlier in this research. This analytical course is coherent with one of the pillars in Burawoy's ECM: an extension to theory. As Burawoy noted, "We begin with our *favourite* theory but seek not confirmations but refutations that inspire us to deepen that theory. Instead of discovering grounded theory, we elaborate existing theory" (1991, p.42).

In Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodological approach, there are at least five steps in thematic analysis which I closely followed in this research. The first step was familiarising myself with my data: primary and secondary. Since I am concerned with the dialectical relationship between the State and everyday actors in regard to the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia, I thus had to familiarise myself first with the Malaysian ethnic bureaucratisation system, including its history, development, jurisdictions and concerns. For this, I had to look into secondary data in published census, laws, statistics and related news

for this research studies. This familiarisation with the secondary data offered me an understanding of how the Malaysian ethnic bureaucratisation system works in the Malaysian macro-structures. The next data familarisation refers to my primary data. It was at this stage that I realised that the long, mundane and time-consuming interview transcriptions indeed gave me more time to familiarise myself with each individual interview and respondent. In order to encourage greater understanding, I repeatedly read the transcribed interviews and the related Malaysian ethnic bureaucratisation materials.

The second step was generating initial codes from the data. Codes (overt and latent) refer to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). Since I opted for manual coding, I personally think that I had more chance to get closer to my interview materials. The coding in this study was guided by the theoretical framework and the research questions constructed at the beginning of the fieldwork. My coding strategy was focused on giving attention to the interesting aspects and repeated themes. The coding at this stage is often general and broad. At the beginning of my coding, I had more than hundred coding and repeated patterns which were gradually reduced in the subsequent steps. The third step only began after I had finished coding all potential aspects and sets of patterns. This stage involved sorting, organising and collating all the codes into identified themes. The main task in this stage was finding "the relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.91). The fourth step refers to thematic refinement. It was at this stage that I decided whether the identified themes were coherent with one another or not. The aim of this stage was to get an idea of how these different themes work together in answering my research questions.

In the fifth stage, I began to write a detailed analysis and discussion of each major theme, guided by the theoretical framework and the research questions. I sought to avoid creating an overlapping 'story' of my data. The final discussion of the importance of ethnicity is presented based on the chronology of the respondents' social lives: family and marriage, education and social networks, political economy and occupation. They were discussed in the context of the

State's ethnic bureaucratisation system. Each of these themes has sub-themes closely related to one another. In addition to coding the interview data, I also analysed the entries in the field diary which I had kept during my informal observations in Penang and Glasgow. This analysis was fairly simple as I did not have a large field diary because its sole purpose was to record additional information from the interviews. All of the observations made in Penang and Glasgow were described under the same two codes: 'group composition' and 'language'. Some photographs which I had taken to capture the settings and the moments lived and experienced by the respondents were also included in the discussion.

5   Conclusion

In this current chapter I have described, analysed and justified the methodologies and methods that were used to underpin the present research. The choices of methodology, method and analysis were also made after taking into consideration my personal concern as an insider researcher and sponsored student, and ethical, intellectual and practical issues. In the first section, I identified the colonial 'racial' methodological understanding which still has a significant conceptual effect in present-day Malaysia. As an academic researcher, I did not want to take the construction of ethnicity lightly, so I devised a methodological approach to reflect this concern for both micro processes and macro forces. For this, ECM's main principles were used as guidance for my fieldwork and analysis. The principles were adopted and adapted accordingly to my research. However, the ECM's usage was limited only to its 'extended' principles, as I was not involved in any repeated periods of ethnographic research or inductive approach similar to grounded theory. The decision affected my methods accordingly. The semi-structured interviews and sampling were structured on the basis of theoretical and research-based question guidelines. Comparative analysis in two locations possessing different populations and socio-politics was theoretically salient for comprehending the ethnic identification and categorisation within this research. My respondents were chosen on the basis of theoretical outlines which looked for those with high cultural capital and metropolitan experiences. Since I want to understand the

importance of ethnicity within the dialectical relationship between the state (top-down) and everyday actors (bottom-up), I decided to thematically analyse both primary and secondary data which is relevant to the present research. The analysis is presented in three separate empirical chapters which have been formulated on the respondents' life chronologies - home, school and work – which will be discussed in depth over the next three chapters of this work.

Chapter Five: Ethnic Identification and categorisation, Malaysian bureaucratic system and Marriage

1   Introduction

This chapter is the first of three empirical chapters which explore the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. They each discuss the impact of the Malaysian bureaucratic system in relation to Malay and Chinese inter-ethnic relationships. Theoretically, the discussion provided in these three empirical chapters builds upon the premise that ethnicity is a *social* organisation which focuses on boundaries which help an individual or a group of people to define 'them' against 'other'. Ethnic boundaries are relational and cultural (religious, custom and language). They can be used to create the notion of an 'us' and a 'them' which are often set in opposition to one another. In this study, they are used to identify and differentiate Malays from Chinese. Rather than ethnicity, 'race', '*bangsa*' and '*kaum*' are terms used interchangeably and colloquially in Malaysia. These terms are not only used by everyday actors but are also the preferred terms in official Malaysian documents. Arguments provided in the three empirical chapters explore different understandings of ethnicity in relation to analysis and practices.

In my analyses of the interviews, it can be observed that the respondents did not immediately recognise their respective ethnic boundaries within their lives. The boundaries were gradually built up through socialisation processes learnt in homes, schools and university - and were later taken into consideration during their selection of a spouse or partner (family), friends (social networking), working sector (the economy), and political orientation (politics). In order to fully understand the processes of ethnic identification and categorisation in Malaysia – or at least in Penang and Glasgow - I decided to begin the discussion with the earliest agent of socialisation: the family.

The present chapter is divided into three sections. They are guided by the research questions formulated in Chapter One of this work. In the first section, I

shall address the process of ethnic identification and categorisation in the Malaysian bureaucratic system; the roles of parents in the process; and finally, why parents want (or need) to accept the State's identification and categorisation. The main objective in this first section is to highlight the role of the State (authority-defined) in the construction of ethnicity and identity. In the second section, I shall highlight how the Malay and Chinese respondents defined one another, and how Malay-ness and Chinese-ness were reproduced or challenged during their everyday social interactions. The main aim of the second section is to emphasise the consistency of the Malay-ness and Chinese-ness and/or *potential* tension in relation to the authority-defined ethnicity. These two sections are exceptionally important as they serve as a foundation which will preface a broader discussion in successive sections and chapters of this work. In the third section, a particular field of practice – marriage – will be used to explore how the State's (macro-structures and forces) and everyday (micro-processes) identification of Malay-ness and Chinese-ness interact. The aim in this section is to explore the outcomes from the interactions which might affect the respondent's partner or spouse preferences.

2   State and Family: the Agents in making Self and Otherness

It was in the winter of 2013 that I had an appointment with Ramlah (a Malaysian-Malay) who had agreed to be one of my respondents in Glasgow. Upon my arrival, she politely invited me inside and offered me a cup of tea and biscuits - demonstrating Malays' common cultural courtesy towards their guests (*Fieldnotes*, Glasgow, 16 December 2013). After our introductory chat, I began the discussion by asking the question: 'how do you know that you are Malay?' She paused, thinking of an appropriate answer to the question. After a few minutes, she contentedly justified her identity by referring to her *MyKad* - the Malaysian citizen's identification card. She felt that she knew herself as Malay because the Malaysian social system had recognised her as Malay. For Ramlah, there was no better way to answer my question than her reply. Her answer was simple, indeed, and she was not alone in this. The same answer occurred in another two respondents' statements – before or after relating their identity to parents, religion and language in elaborating their ethnicity. However, instead

of referring to MyKad, these two respondents justified ethnicity on the basis of a person's birth certificate, as their statements below show.

> I know my identity because of my parents. My parents are Chinese. It is stated in my birth certificate that I am a Chinese. Being a Chinese is like a biological thing and part of it I guess is cultural ... emmm like language. (Jasmine, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

> One can be considered as a Malay or a Chinese based on their parents, religion and birth certificate. (Amir, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

Following their understanding of identity, I had the impression that ethnicity in Malaysia could not be easily understood without the presence of the State. Malaysia is a state that was built on the principle of ethnic diversity. Its plurality is recognised by the State. The Malaysian population census officially classifies Malaysians based on the cultural and religious boundaries. A Malaysian is defined as Malay if he/she is Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, and conforms to Malay customs. At the same time, the definition of a Malay also defines non-Malays. This fixed-definition thus demonstrates the State's role in identifying 'who is who'. Meanwhile, a Malaysian is considered to be Chinese or Indian if he/she is supposed to be the descendant of Chinese or Indian people who had migrated to British Malaya during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The concern is: why the need to categorise?

As discussed in the theoretical and historical chapters of this work, the Malaysian identification and categorisation system is a useful political tool for providing a controlled environment. It is also important for the State to satisfactorily distribute allocated resources within the education and economic sectors. Article 153 identifies Malays as one of the three privileged groups in Malaysia; the other two are the natives of Sabah and Sarawak. Under Article 153, a reasonable proportion of places for Malays and for natives of Sabah and Sarawak are reserved within education and the economy (employment in four sectors of public services). During the implementation of the NEP (1970-1990), Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak – with the addition of the aboriginal peninsular inhabitants – were identified and categorised as *bumiputra*. The *bumiputra* were entitled to privileges within education (quota-based admission to a local university and a scholarship) and the economy (the right to be

employed in a business). Although the NEP was officially discontinued in 1990, its *bumiputraism* has remained available and relevant within the Malaysian education and economic structures. The importance of ethnicity within these societal structures will be further discussed in the succeeding chapters of this work.

As for the present discussion, there are two ways in which the Malaysian ethnic identification and categorisation work at the level of the State: maintenance of ethnic identity through knowledge - particularly history - and the bureaucratisation of ethnic identity. I identified these two methods as *epistemological* and *practical* approaches to ethnic construction. Both are important and they are intricately related to one another.

The epistemological approach to ethnic construction and understanding

The epistemology of ethnic identity and group construction took place in two stages. The first stage refers to the creation of *assumed shared-history*. I have argued in the theoretical and historical chapters that the epistemology of ethnic identity in Malaysia is grounded on the colonial discourse of 'racial' categorisation and nation-state. During the nineteenth century, the colonial administration made a generalisation about the local Muslim population in the peninsula as 'Malay', by relating them to the Malay-Malaccan diaspora and the Malay-Malaccan Sultanate institutions. Today, the Malaccan Golden era is considered to be the Malay communal Great Tradition. This assumed shared-history tends to overlook the historical and archaeological facts that some of the regions in the peninsula had established their own kingdoms prior to the Malaccan civilisation (such as Kedah and Terangganu), or that one of the traditional regional political systems (in Negeri Sembilan) was different from Malacca. The second stage refers to the *religious and cultural boundaries* drawn by the colonial administration in order to differentiate between local people and immigrants. The Malay Reserved Land Enactment of 1913 was first Act to define Malays by their religion, language and customs. The identification and classification system was later officially acknowledged in Article 160 in the Federation of Malaysia in 1957.

As we have seen, according to Weber (1996), an ethnic group is formed on the basis of a *subjective* belief that members share the same common descent due to physical appearance, custom, memories of colonisation and migration - and it does not matter whether a blood relationship exists or not. The assumed shared-history was considered important by the respondents in the present research. The Malays respondents, for example, acknowledged the Sultanate institution, foreign colonisation and occupation (Portuguese, Dutch, British and Japanese) as an important establishment and events for them. The Malay institution of the monarchy particularly serves as an immediate link between the modern Malay community and the Malay-Malaccan civilisation that was established prior to the first colonisation in 1511. With reference to this period, Malays understood themselves to be amongst the earliest settlers in Malaya in comparison with the Chinese, and the only group with a political establishment since the 1400s compared with other indigenous groups.

The form of everyday understanding based on an assumed shared-history seeks to justify Malays as the most supreme and rightful group in Malaysia. The locality status gives them the right to the privileges and advantages stated in Article 153. These rights were also recognised by the non-Malays during the social contract in 1956 which was formed between Malay, Chinese and Indian political representatives. On this, one Malay respondent stated:

> We [Malays] as a landlord should have advantages [Article 153] more than non-Malays. The right should be maintained. It was agreed between Malays and non-Malays in the social contract. (Norman, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

In addition to the Malaccan Sultanate, the British also acknowledged Malay sovereignty over the Malay peninsula. This acknowledgement possibly strengthened the Malays' self-understanding of themselves as the 'real' indigenous group, in comparison with other indigenous groups (aboriginal people, and natives of Sabah and Sarawak) and non-Malays. It brought a sense of pride to the Malay historical settlement. Regarding this issue, a Chinese respondent noted:

> I always think that the word 'Malaysia' came from the word Malay, so you guys [Malays] belong to Malaysia. We are different because all of

us migrated from China to Malaysia. (Melissa, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

This understanding suggested a significant role of the coloniser in crafting and imposing the 'racial' identification and categorisation within the Malaysian understanding of themselves and in relation to others. Another Chinese respondent admitted that the migratory history of their ancestors to Malaya under the British administration (as early as 1786) created an essential boundary which differentiated them from Malays. One Chinese respondent stated:

Chinese in Malaysia, we originated from China, like my grandparents who came to Malaysia in 1911 [...]. My grandfather and my father told it to me. (Alex, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

For these respondents, the assumed shared-history should be considered as a 'rational' explanation to include or exclude them in relation to others into a particular ethnic group. On the basis of this assumed shared-history, Alex, for instance, identified himself as part of the Chinese community in Malaysia. Rather than using 'I' or 'my family', he chose to use 'we' as a representation of the Chinese community in Malaysia as a whole. This commonality connected him with other Malaysian-Chinese as part of the same group, whereas Malays who have a different history of residence are excluded from this group.

The Chinese-Malaysian memory of their ancestors' migration to the Malay peninsula at the same time puts them into a different group from other Chinese nationalities. This preference was illustrated by a Malaysian-Chinese interviewed in Glasgow. They preferred to be identified as Malaysian, or at least as Malaysian-Chinese, during their interaction with others in Glasgow. For example, the Chinese respondent interviewed in Glasgow explained that:

First, I see myself as a Malaysian and second, as a Chinese Malaysian. But sometimes people [in Glasgow] will think that I am a Chinese from China, so I just say 'sorry, I am a Malaysian'. People always make this mistake because there are lots of Chinese from China here [Glasgow]. Being Malaysian is important for me because I was born there, my parents were born there, and my family was born there. That's the main difference between Malaysian-Chinese and China-Chinese. There is a difference between being compared as Malaysia-Chinese and as China-Chinese. I wouldn't feel offended if people refer to me as a Chinese when I am in Malaysia, but I will feel offended if people

accuse me of being non-Malaysian when I am in Glasgow. (Terry, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

His sense of belongingness to the Chinese community in Malaysia was based on his family's location of birth, which indirectly links to his previous ancestors' migratory background. In other words, commonality, connectedness and groupness are important concepts which caused various formations of groups and communities in Malaysia. The groupness was formed on the assumed shared-history. It is also being used as a foundation for the construction of the privileged and non-privileged groups. For such groups to persist, ethnic boundaries – religion, custom and culture – must be reinforced by social arrangements and practices. By doing so, it would solidify the group identity and heighten divisions between groups. This leads us to the second stage of the State's identification and categorisation: the practicality of ethnicity in the Malaysian bureaucratisation system.

The practical approach of ethnic construction and understanding

Malaysian parents are obligated to register their child's birth within fourteen days at their nearest local authority centre, and are required to officially declare their child's ethnic identity. According to the Malaysian Registration Laws (2015), an ethnic category for a newborn baby in the Peninsula and Sabah must be according to one of his/her parent's ethnic identity. In this case, parents are free to classify their child according to the father's or the mother's ethnicity. The ethnic identity of a newborn baby in Sarawak, however, must be based solely on the father's ethnicity. A couple in an endogamous marriage would not have any issue as both parents are of the same ethnicity.

Picture 1 shows that a child born in the Peninsula was immediately categorised as Malay without any problem by taking note of his parents' ethnicity. He was also instantaneously recognised as Muslim, an important criterion for being identified as Malay, as stressed in Article 160. It is also suggested that for Malays, religion is not a matter of choice, but an inheritance or a kind of naturally given identity (this will be discussed further in the next subsection).

Image removed due to confidentiality issues

Picture 1: An example of a Malaysian birth certificate in Peninsular Malaysia

The regulation to officially identify a newborn baby on the basis of the parents' ethnicity possibly created an everyday understanding for some respondents - especially those from an endogamous family - that ethnicity is fixed and natural. This may also be a reason why Ramlah justified her ethnicity by referring to her identity card at the beginning of this chapter. The answer seems simple because it was assumed that it had been there since her birth, a simple 'primordial fact' of life.

Under the influence of this 'primordial' understanding, some of my respondents justified their ethnicity on the basis of their parents or their lineage-relationship which they believed can be inherited and shown in a person's facial features and skin colour: Malay as 'brownish' and Chinese as 'yellowish'. My question to the respondents from endogamous marriages as to how they knew that they were Malay or Chinese was frequently taken as a joke or considered to be an odd question. They answered it by referring to their parents or to their physical appearance.

For my respondents, a person is a Chinese if he/she was born to Chinese parents, and looks 'Chinese'. The same justification applied to Malays in my research. For them, ethnic identity is established by family lineage and is also visible from their physical appearance. There were no complications because this understanding seemed simple and straightforward to the respondents. As two of them explained:

> It is very significantly that you can see that I am a Chinese (*laughs*). It depends on how people look like. (Lincoln, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

> (*Laughs*) Physically when I see myself in a mirror I see for sure that I am a Chinese. My family is a Chinese, a descendant of Chinese so in that way I knew it. (Terry, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

Although Malays and Chinese certainly do look different in regard to their physical features with the suggestive 'pattern' of their 'origin', sociologists have previously questioned the value of racial categorisation on the basis of physical appearance. The reason for this is because such physical differences are not absolute – they exist on a spectrum. This therefore gives no support to the idea that human beings definitely fall into distinct, bounded and exclusive racial

categories. The issue, then, is not in the differences in their physical appearance, but in the benefit that people can gain by believing that they came from the same ancestors and from the assumptions about the meaning of similarities in physical appearance.

Moreover, if the identification of Malays and Chinese is simply based on their parents' (lineage) and their appearance, then why would a Malaysian couple, in a mixed marriage, be obligated to identify their child with one of the parent's ethnic identity, as required by the State? My argument is that ethnicity should not be considered so simple as to relate only to physical appearance and lineage relationships. For some Malaysians, ethnicity is possibly related to life decisions involving educational and economic privileges. For couples in inter-ethnic marriages – especially regarding the *bumiputra* – the decision should be considered as critical. In terms of the educational and economic aspects, being a *bumiputra* has always seemed to be more beneficial than being non-*bumiputra* in Malaysia. Therefore, parents need to choose carefully as, with this official identity, the child will enter the Malaysian public domain where such an ethnic identity might affect most of the decisions made by or for him/her.

In the Malaysian context, inter-ethnic marriage is not the only way that someone can change his/her ethnicity formally. An adoption can do so as well. The transition from everyday assumed shared-history and assumed-fixed identity (physical appearances and lineage relationship) to situational identity frequently occurred in the late 1940s. During that period, there were many cases of Malay families adopting a child - usually a daughter who had been given up by her Chinese family due to economic and cultural factors (Wilson, 1967). Initially, the daughter was recognised as Chinese based on her natural parents' ethnicity, but was eventually given the identification of Malay when her foster parents decided to register the adopted child as Malay. One respondent, Aminah, shared with me the fact that her mother's identity had been Chinese before her ethnic identity formally changed to Malay after her adoption by a Malay family. She explained that:

> My mum was a Chinese but she is Malay now (*laughs*). She was
> adopted by a Malay family, so she does not have any Chinese culture
> in her blood. She is a Muslim since small [after adoption]. She is
> identified as Malay in her birth certificate. My grandfather, he was a

> village headman. And my mum's village is near Singapore. Most of the
> Chinese during the Japanese occupation became communists. Even if
> they were not communists, their life was hard because the Japanese
> wanted to kill the Chinese, right? So, when they had a child,
> especially a daughter, they would give her away to someone else
> because of their hard lives. Coincidently, my granddad was a village
> headman and was considered as rich. [...] My mum, even though she is
> a Chinese, her sentiment on Malay is stronger than Malays themselves.
> I always said to my mum 'mum, you are not even the real Malay'
> (*laughs*). (Aminah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

This testimony of direct experience enhances my argument that ethnicity is more than simply biologically inherited. Rather, I argue that it is situational, contextual and state-guided. In everyday life, Aminah's mother should be considered as Malay just by knowing it through religion, language and custom – even without official recognition – after her grandparents made her mother Muslim, taught her to habitually speak in Malay, and to practise Malay customs.

As stated earlier in this work, the British colonial administration was the first to classify Malays based on religion, language and customs in the Malay Reserved Land Act of 1913. The criteria were later officially acknowledged in Article 160 of the 1957 Federation (*see* Appendix E). Among the Malay respondents, there were some whose great-grandparents had become Malay only because they had fulfilled the definition of Malay. Therefore, the Indonesian-Muslims, Arab-Muslims, Thai-Muslims and Yunnan-Chinese-Muslims who had migrated to the Malay peninsula prior to 1957 (the year of independence), habitually spoke in Malay and practised Malay customs, would be officially identified as Malay - whilst their remaining family in Indonesia, the Arabian peninsula, Thailand and Yunnan would be considered to be non-Malay from the perspective of the Malaysian legal system. The descendants of these families would also opt to be known as Malay. They stated:

> I consider myself as Malay, but my paternal grandfather is a Bugis
> [Indonesian-tribe] and Siamese [Thai]. My father is a Kelantanese so
> his lineage is mixed with Siamese. From my maternal side, my mother
> is a Johorean and she is a Bugis-Javan. (Ridhuan, Malay male
> interviewed in Glasgow)

> I am a Malay. I acknowledge my identity as Malay because I was born
> as a Malay. Both of my parents are Malays [*pause*], but my
> grandparents on my father's side were actually Chinese. Not the
> Malaysian-Chinese! My grandparents were Chinese-Muslim from

Yunnan, but they are now Malays. So my father was born as Malay. (Asma, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

My dad's family lineage was from Arab, Chinese and Indian because they migrated from Saudi Arabia to Malaysia, but that was a few generations ago. On my mum's side, I think her ancestors were more like from Oman (*pause*) and again, Arab-like. But, they [his parents] are Malays because they were born in Malaysia and not from there [Arab countries]. They have been in Malaysia for five to six generation (*pause*), or longer. I consider myself as Malay too. (Suhaimi, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

These respondents not only considered themselves to be Malay, but additionally lived as such with pride and honour. For example, Ridhuan preferred to identify himself as Malay even though he was aware of his ancestors' history. Aminah's mother, who was once perceived as Chinese but officially became Malay after adoption, continued to live as Malay and at the same time equipped her children with *Malay-ness* which could be seen in Aminah's identity, such as through her dress, religion and customary physical behaviour during her interaction with me. Asma's paternal grandparents were Chinese-Yunnan but were officially recognised as Malay after they fulfilled the three official criteria: religion, language and custom. Her father was recognised as Malay as well, thus making Asma and her siblings Malay. She also clarified that her grandparents are not supposed to be categorised in the same group as other Malaysian-Chinese. Their difference lay in religion, as her grandparents were originally Muslim from Yunnan, whilst the general contemporary Malaysian-Chinese population are descendants of non-Muslim Chinese from other parts of China. Similar to Asma's paternal grandparents, Suhaimi and his parents decided to identify themselves as Malay after they too met all three criteria for being so. However, unlike Asma who had a Malay mother, Suhaimi and his family line were never involved in inter-ethnic marriages with Malays.

Following this finding, a question emerged: why do those who were born into Malaysian inter-ethnic families, or were adopted by a Malay family, or had lineage from a family which became Malay only after they met the three criteria (religion, custom and language), primarily prefer to identify themselves as Malay in everyday life? Why would they not identify themselves as someone with a hyphenated identity, such as Malay-Chinese, Malay-Bugis or Malay-Arab?

As argued in the theoretical chapter of this work, the selection of identity depends on the context, location, situation and consequences; it can be influenced by ethnicity, class, nationality or gender. Identity can *sometimes* be understood as an instrument to a particular end. Ethnic identity is used by the Malaysian official authorities for distributing resources, as stated in Article 153. The advantages were further enhanced in the NEP (1970-1990). Since there are only few ethnic categories recognised by the State – Malays, Chinese, Indian, aboriginal peninsular, and natives of Sabah and Sarawak – this thus ensures that the other identities with hyphens will be considered to be less important in Malaysia. The simplification of Malaysian ethnic diversity – from more than fifty ethnicities to just a handful of major categories – also indicates the State's tendency to ignore the hybridity that may exist between ethnicities.

However, it could be argued that the privileges may not be sufficient to create such a strong sentiment of pride as the Malay respondents display in this section. Identification as Malay, as early as in 1913 (or at least in 1957), could probably be understood as instrumental for securing particular rights and privileges. There is a possibility that after a few generations, the instrumentalism has been transformed into the *subjective* belief that they were *really* a group of people related by immemorial links such as religion and language. Since they consider themselves to originate from the same 'descendants', this would mean that they could have the same political glory (the Malaccan civilisation), histories and memories of settlement as someone who deserved to receive these privileges. The subjective belief that they were immemorially related was then habitually transferred on to the next generation. This can be understood as an on-going process of making individuals Malay or Chinese, as stated by the respondents quoted below.

> Since I was young, parents and people surrounding me told that I am a Chinese. I know that I am a Chinese because of my family, society and my physical appearance. (Shun, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

> Of course, no-one ever told me that I am a Chinese. We don't really go around and say like 'oh you are Chinese or whatever'. I think I kind of know it naturally by looking to and learning from our family, our practices, our language. (Ah Boa, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

As a consequence of the discussion offered in this section, there were at least two kinds of understanding present in the respondents in regard to their ethnic identity. The first category refers to the respondents from endogamous families. By referring to their parents, their ethnicity was considered unproblematic, simple, natural and fixed for them. If they were born to Chinese parents, they immediately would be known as Chinese. This understanding was also supported by their assumed belief about similarities or differences in physical appearance. Throughout their upbringing, they would have learned about the religious and cultural boundaries which make them part of their ethnic group.

The second category refers to the respondents from inter-ethnic marriages or from a family whose ancestors had fulfilled the requirements for a Malay (religion, language and custom) prior to independence (1957). For them, their ethnic identity was complicated and not absolute. Although they could see ethnicity as an arbitrary concept, they ultimately *needed* and *chose* to identify themselves on the basis of the ethnic category that was assigned to them at birth and in which they are continuously being recognised – at least in official matters – as required by the State. Moreover, the subjective beliefs (assumed shared-history and assumed fixed-boundaries) promulgated by the State and the surroundings to which they are exposed throughout their life help to increase their acceptance of the identification. In other words, ethnicity is not really fixed for them but needs to be accepted as fixed through the continuous identification and categorisation required by the Malaysian bureaucratisation system.

3   Malay-ness and Chinese-ness in Penang and Glasgow

In this section, I shall focus on how the Malaysian authorities have embedded ethnic boundaries - religion, custom and language – into the respondents' consciousness. In addition, I shall explore how these boundaries are preserved, observed or challenged by Malaysians during their inter-ethnic and inter-national relationships in Penang and Glasgow respectively. The Malay-ness and the

Chinese-ness in this sense applied to the core or essence of being Malays and Chinese respectively.

Religion

The Malaysian authorities recognise the freedom of religion under Article 11, Clauses 1, 2 and 3 (*see* Appendix D). Clause 4 of the same Article, however, restricts "the propagation of any religious doctrine or beliefs" amongst Muslims. Combining Clause 4 with Act 160 (Malays as Muslim) leads to the conclusion that Article 11 essentially excludes - or at least controls - Malays from any propagation of religions other than Islam. Functioning simultaneously, these two Acts indicate how Malays and Muslims in Malaysia are intricately related, in that the former, in particular, is considered incomplete without the latter.

There are several issues that can be retrieved from these regulations. First, Malays lack the opportunity for religious conversion and freedoms. Second, religion for Malays is no longer a personal issue but is rather constructed as and assumed to be a national affair by the Malaysian authorities. Malaysian law is particularly keen on protecting Malays and Islam, thus producing the popular connotation which associates Malay-ness with Islam, and *vice versa*, in Malaysian everyday life.

Thus, a key question emerges: Why does the State take such meticulous interest in Malays' religious affairs? The answer lies within a particular group's political interests, and can be considered as related to power manipulation. For example, at the moment of writing this thesis (early 2017), Malays are the most populous ethnic group with the highest electoral weighting. By law, Malays who commit apostasy should be categorised as non-Malay, as they no longer fulfil the Malay definition as described by the Malaysian Constitution. The consequences of apostasy are not obvious if it happens in small numbers, but could significantly jeopardise Malays' position as the majority in the demographic statistics if it were to take place on a vast scale. Thus, there exists State compulsion for Malays to remain Malay, particularly after the 1931 population census showed that the number of Malays was exceeded by that of non-Malays. The Chinese at that period were seen to be the closest challenge to Malays' political hegemony

as a result of their economic domination. In comparison with the Chinese, Malays' clear domination is only in politics, and the high population is important for maintaining their dominant position within Malaysian politics.

The respondents themselves understood Malay-ness and Chinese-ness to be related to religion. My interview analysis showed that Islam itself has become the most important indicator for classifying ethnic categories, both for oneself and others. The Malay respondents, for example, used the term 'Muslim' for self-identification either before or after the term 'Malay'. They additionally used the term 'non-Muslim' to describe Chinese-ness. The Chinese respondents similarly agreed that religion could be used as a valid classification to distinguish Malays from Chinese. In support of this, one respondent noted:

> Malays must be Muslims and a Chinese must be a non-Muslim …
> something like that. (Aminah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

Islam and Malays' entwined relationship has always been significantly present, particularly during the Malaccan period. Although there were Muslims in other regional areas of the peninsula between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it was in the Malaccan period that Malays started to be associated with Islam. In the Malaccan era, the colloquial use of *masuk Islam* (converting to Islam) had a connotation with the term of *masuk Melayu* (converting to Malay) (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). Even so, there are a number of non-Malay Muslims in Malaysia; studies conducted by Siddique (1981) and Ishak (1999) have suggested that the connotation remained relevant in the everyday understanding among the Malay community during the time that they conducted their research.

From the perspective of the State, a person can be officially identified as Malay only if he/she was born into a Malay family or, in selected cases, was adopted by a Malay family. A converted Muslim, such as a Chinese person, will remain officially identified as Chinese. If both of the partners are converted Muslims, they will officially remain identified as Chinese and their children will also be identified as Chinese. This is in conflict with the concept of '*masuk Melayu'* for everyday understanding. The clash between the State official identification system and everyday identification within society also shows that Islam is part of the Malay-ness which now reaches beyond the official understanding.

My interview analysis also demonstrates how Malays have been using Islam as their exclusive right in portraying their Malay-ness. They use religion in order to include and exclude someone from their ethnic group. This usage can be seen in two areas: *literature* and *space*. Literature and space in Malaysia are fully segregated on the basis of ethnicity, and every Malaysian is expected to respect these boundaries. The breach of any boundary will possibly create ethnic contention and disagreement. This was noted by one respondent:

> Lately, I feel that the politics is a little bit chaotic. I think the government never takes into consideration what the people want. Sometimes, it's too nonsense. For example, the word 'Allah' has now become an issue in Malaysia. There are statements that whoever says the name 'Allah' will be considered as a half-Muslim. Is that necessary? It is just a tactic to turn people against each other. The Christian Catholics have already used the word 'Allah' for hundreds of years before. Why is it an issue now? (Shui, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

Shui was interviewed in late September 2013. The interview took place during an on-going public argument between the Malay and Christian-Catholic believers that had been going on since 1998. The controversy started with the use of 'Allah' in *The Herald*'s Malay version. During the interview, Shui voiced her disappointment towards the Malaysian system in its handling of the term 'Allah'.

Allah is derived from an Arabic root word originating from the word *Iläh* with the definite article *al*. *Iläh* means 'he who is worshipped' or 'worthy of worship', and *Allah* means the Sole True God who is worthy of worship (Yusupov, 2015). Arabic is the main language of Islam, as the Quran evidences. In principal, Islam is a universally global religion which should, in theory, not be associated with any race, nation or ethnic groups. Historically, Islam has existed in the peninsula since the thirteenth century and was significantly recognised during the fifteenth century in the Malaccan period. From this starting point, the process of Islamisation can be seen in every aspect of Malay life. Malay literature, for example, has been through a transformational process in which its Malay-Sanskrit characters were changed to Arabic characters for its main inspiration. These transformed characters were later known as *Jawi* (see details in Chapter Three of this work). As Malays and Islam are strongly linked with one another, Malays consequently often end up being very particular about the use of all of the elements which are believed to be part of Islam, including the Arabic

language. The cautions about a breach of literacy boundaries were emphasised in 1986: the Malaysian government prohibited any usage of the words '*Allah*', '*Kaabah*', '*Solat*' and '*Baitullah*' in all religious publications other than Islamic publications (González, 2014, p.974).

In 2009, *The Herald* newspaper decided to bring the case to the Malaysian High Court. Under Article 11 Clause 1 (*see* Appendix D), the High Court gave permission for *The Herald* to use the term in its Malay publication. Following this result, the Malay-based association PERKASA and the Malay religious-based associations PEKIDA, ABIM and PKPIM held a number of demonstrations to protest the result. They also took the matter to the Malaysian Court of Appeals. In the Malay context, Allah is understood as God in Islam. Since there is a likelihood of confusion in the Malay community (González, 2014), the Malaysian Court of Appeals granted the usage exclusively for Islam in 2013. The justification for this decision was based on Article 11 Clause 4 which restricts "the propagation of any religious doctrine or beliefs amongst Muslims" (Federal Constitution of 1957).

Another respondent, Azlan - a Malay male - also shared his frustration at the Malaysian management regarding the issue of 'Allah'. Both Shui and Azlan were disappointed with the issue, but the foundations of their disappointment were different. For Shui, the Malaysian government had failed to settle the issue rationally, whilst Azlan believed that Malay politicians must try harder to protect Islam. He stated:

> I mean, they are not really protecting the religion, for example, the issue of 'Allah'. Are you aware about the issue of the term 'Allah'? What makes me feel bad is that there is no politician from PR fighting for it, not even from PAS. (Azlan, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

Space, on the other hand, refers to a building or establishment which is specifically built or established for a particular ethnic group. Two important spaces which cropped up in the interviews were places of *worship* and *eateries*. The former refers to mosques, *surau*, churches and temples. These usually have clear boundaries which exclude non-followers, compared with eateries, which are open to the public and dependent upon customers' preferences - such as restaurants, stalls or food courts. Mosques and *surau* in this case are considered to be exclusive spaces for Malays, whilst churches and temples belong to the

Christian and Hindu or Buddhist religions respectively. A mosque, for example, is not merely a building; it is a symbol of Islam and it is normally visited and used exclusively by Muslims. Every Malaysian acknowledges this unspoken rule, ensuring that non-Muslims avoid entering mosques in order to prevent any disharmony between different ethnic groups. There are only two mosques open to non-Muslims: the *Putra* mosque in Putrajaya and the National Mosque in Kuala Lumpur. They both serve as tourist attractions, but still the majority of their interior sections are restricted to Muslims only.

Throughout the years, there have been cases of crossed boundaries at such worshipping places which have caused some disputes among Malaysians, but were controlled by the relevant Islamic state councils such as JAKIM. The case mentioned next became national news in 2013. Buddhist rituals were performed by a Singaporean Buddhist monk in a surau at a resort in Johor. The monk was forgiven by the Malaysian Islamic authority on the grounds that he was Singaporean and possibly unaware of Malaysians' religious sensitivity regarding their exclusive praying places. The resort owner, on the other hand, was remanded for further investigation under Act 574, Section 295 (*see* Appendix D) for defiling a place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class. Commenting on this issue, Shui added that:

> In Malaysia, everyone knows which area that is specific for Muslims, Christians and Buddhists, right? Why would they want to pray in the Muslim prayer room? There will be a problem when people cross the religion line. (Shui, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Where to eat may sound like a trivial issue. However, it has real implications for Malaysians in their everyday life. In reality, the question is not simply about the dishes, but more about the space in which different ethnic groups can actually eat. As one respondent explained:

> There are Malay students in my lab. If we want to go out for lunch, we will find a place that is *halal* and suitable. Other than that, I don't think there should be a problem. (Peng, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

Similarly to praying space, eateries help to establish an unseen boundary within the processes of segregation between Malays and non-Malays. As Muslims, Malays

can only eat *Syariah*-permitted products, so *halal* signs are compulsory at specific restaurants where the food, especially animal products, has been certified as *halal* by JAKIM, the Malaysian Islamic agency. The *halal* eateries in Malaysia also indicate that there is no alcohol sold or served to customers. Ethnic divisions on the basis of religion are, however, hard to maintain in a city such as Glasgow. If a Malaysian Malay in Glasgow went to a restaurant without a *halal* sign, s/he would first ask whether the meat or chicken served there is *halal* or not. If there is no *halal* food there, s/he will order vegetarian food which does not contain alcohol, pork or other meats, as explained by one respondent:

> I usually went to a restaurant with a *halal* logo. If there is no *halal* logo, I would ask the waiter if the meat they serve is *halal* or not. Chicken is usually *halal*. *Halal* meats such as beef and lamb are quite difficult to get in any restaurant. If there is no option for *halal* food, I would order something suitable for a vegetarian or vegan. (Indah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

There exist two types of foods in Islam: the *halal* (حَلَال) or the permissible, and the *haram* (حَرَام) or the prohibited. Muslims are permitted to eat everything from land and sea under specific conditions: the product must not be harmful to its consumers, and the (land) animals must be slaughtered by Muslims prior to consumption by others. In addition, Islam prohibits alcohol and pork and its derivatives for Muslim consumption. In Penang, if there are non-Malays in a group, they will either have to agree with their Malay counterparts' decision or follow their personal taste and choice. This decision is significantly related to actors' life decisions, such as friendship, as suggested by Hoffsteadter – consequently resulting in "increasing withdrawal into one's own religion-ethnic milieu" (2011, pp.214-215). Consumption practices have often been central to the assertion of identity *because* they involve the choice of what one takes *into oneself*. The sense of internalisation is symbolically important here. It reveals the fact that identity is about a 'core' or essence from inside. It echoes the 'you are what you eat' attitude. This discussion also demonstrates how religion can be understood as a salient element for identifying and categorising Malaysians in their everyday actions, which in turn has an effect on the decisions and actions which are to be performed within the appropriate spaces.

Custom

Custom or *Adat* in the Malay community can be divided into two categories: custom practices in regard to major life events such as birth, marriage and death; and custom practices within everyday life, such as the types of food consumed and dietary regulations, dressing styles, housing rules, etiquette and social interactions based on gender and age. Since Islam is an important marker for Malays, its elements can be seen within Malay daily life - particularly in relation to a person's name, preferred food types and preparation, religious everyday obligations and lifestyles. For example, in the Malaysian context, an individual's identity is frequently and easily recognised from his/her name. A Malay's name usually sounds Arab-ish whilst a Chinese name has usually originated from Chinese words. One respondent said:

> I knew someone as a Malay or Chinese from their name. Malays' names
> are usually inspired by Arabic words. Some of them have a name
> based on Malay word vocabularies. I know someone is a Chinese
> because of his or her surname, but then you know, I might be wrong.
> (Ramlah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

Although Malays in general enjoy multi-ethnic cuisine, they are very particular about their own food consumption. The sensitivity towards food was frequently mentioned by the Malay respondents and regarded as crucial in their dietary regulations. The Chinese respondents recognised the Malays' sensitivities towards food items as associated with the guidelines of the Islamic faith. This awareness made the Chinese respondents more conscious in regards to *halal* and *haram* foods. The Malay and Chinese respondents repeatedly mentioned pork as the ultimate prohibition in Malay dietary regulations. Ah Man, for example, recognised pork as the main prohibited food for Malays, although he had difficulty in understanding the concept of *halal* foods:

> Last time when I was staying with Malay [*pause*], actually I didn't buy
> any (*pause*), actually I don't know which one is *halal* and which one is
> not. But I never buy any pork. I think my housemates did the same
> thing as me. We never brought pork. (Ah Man, Chinese male
> interviewed in Penang)

The dietary lifestyle involving pork is supposed to be considered as the least peculiar ethnic marker, yet it is very significant in differentiating Malays as

those who do not consume pork, and Chinese as those who can consume pork (Tong, 2010). For example, there was an online contention between Malays and Chinese that took place during my fieldwork in Penang. It coincidently happened during the month of *Ramadhan*. The controversy started when a Chinese couple wished a 'Happy Break-Fast' to Muslims by posting a picture of them eating *Bah Kuh Teh*[12] 'certified' by the *halal* logo. The post later went viral online and quickly attracted Malays' attention. The post was interpreted as a disrespectful insult to the Malay community. For them, pork is considered to be the ultimate prohibited food, religiously and culturally, associated with dirtiness and with unclean and polluted concepts (Neo, 2012; Noor and Muslim, 2014). Putting the *halal* certification on the *Bah Kuh Teh* bowl was therefore like making a suggestion to Malays to eat something that is considered by them to be dirty.

In regard to this issue, Cheung, a Chinese respondent residing in Penang, stressed that the action had caused ethnic resentment between Malays and Chinese. For him, some Malaysians just want to provoke another ethnic group's sensitivities. He said:

> You know that a Chinese couple have posted the *halal* symbol on some *Bak Kut Teh* just to create an ethnic issue. Many Chinese certainly do not support their action. This is a very (*pause*), I mean, this is a problem because consequently there are people who might want to bring up the issue again. The first action to maintain stability is to stop raising this issue, or any ethnic issue, even for politicians. (Cheung, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

Cheung was concerned about the insensitivity of the Chinese couple. From Cheung's personal perspective, group customs, values and preferences should be respected. The couple's action was subsequently condemned because it was considered to be disrespectful to the Malay community.

The permissibility of particular foods in the Malay community does not merely depend upon the ingredients – whether they are either *halal* or *haram* - but also takes into account the food preparation, including the utensils used in the cooking process. According to Malay respondents in Penang, Malays inevitably need to avoid eating in Chinese houses because the utensils or plates there may have been used to serve pork. The concept of dirtiness is built through processes

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[12] *Bah Kuh Teh i*s Chinese cuisine with pork as the main ingredient.

of socialisation, and one of the respondents mentioned that her mother had prohibited her from eating any food at their Chinese neighbour's house. She also mentioned that the Chinese usually understood a Malay's dietary requirements. Often her Chinese friends needed to explain whether the food served contained pork or whether the plate had been used to serve pork. She said:

> Actually, my mother is never against my friendships. It is just … kind of awareness when I go to their house, I cannot eat what they eat so I am not really close with my non-Malay friends. But, I think the Chinese and Indians are more sensitive with food. They understand that we cannot eat everything. They understand what is *halal*, they know that we Muslims cannot share utensils which were used to handle pork. So, they usually use separate plates and bowls for us. One of my Chinese friends was really concerned about our dietary obligations. So, every time we go out, she will tell me either we can or cannot eat in this restaurant. For example, if that restaurant serves pork or something like that. (Zuhaini, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

Based on the findings from my comparative analysis in Penang and Glasgow, the concept of cleanliness is relative and contextual in nature. The Malay respondents in Glasgow can be understood to have a higher food tolerance compared with their co-ethnic interviewees in Malaysia. For example, the utensils used for food preparation and serving do not necessarily need to be ritually[13] cleaned according to orthodox methods, which are strictly upheld by Malays in Malaysia. The utensils can be washed by using a special soap - the *Taharah* soap - as a replacement for the mud water, followed by cleaning six times using clean water. Some of the Malay respondents in Glasgow had even more tolerance in this matter. Indah, for example, preferred to use any plain soap to clean the plates which she might believe had been used to serve pork products:

> I think I learnt more about toleration in Islam as well, like you don't necessarily need to wash your utensils with a certain type of water to clean them, you can just use soap and water and can share your plates and mugs, so now I know that and I don't think I would mind much. (Indah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

In regard to manufactured foods, rather than relying on the *halal* logo, the Malaysian Malays in Glasgow tended to rely on the vegetarian label with non-

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13 For example, a utensil which has been used for pork products needs to be washed seven times before a Muslim can use it again; once with mud water and six times with clean water.

alcoholic ingredients. Pictures 2 and 3 show two different products targeted at two different sets of customers in two different locations. The Cadbury's chocolate in box A is designed for customers in Malaysia, therefore the *halal* sign is important. The *halal* sign on the Cadbury's chocolate, however, is absent on box B because it is designed for customers in Glasgow. This did, however, not stop the Malaysian Malays in Glasgow from buying it. The same applied to Pringles.

Picture 2: Cadbury's chocolate for the Malaysian and Glaswegian markets.
Box A represents a Cadbury product in Malaysia; Box B represents a Cadbury product in Glasgow.

Picture 3: Pringles in the Malaysian and Glaswegian markets
Box A represents a Pringles product in Malaysia, Box B represent a Pringles product in Glasgow.

From my understanding, the decisions made by Malays in Glasgow did not imply any religious immorality but rather their understanding of the general religious guidelines for foods wherein the core principle focuses on clean and harmless foods for the human body. Under *Syariah* Law, it is permissible for Muslims, particularly in areas where they are considered to be a minority, to consume any foods that they confidently consider to be 'clean' based on the two principles clean and harmless. In most manufactured food products, the vegetarian logo and any non-alcoholic products are enough to make the products permissible for Muslims as there exist a small number of Islamic organisations abroad to help Muslims with their groceries.

This understanding somewhat contradicts Malay understandings in Malaysia. In the Malaysian context, a *halal* logo is important for Muslim consumers. It must be legally acquired under the Trade Description Act 2011, Item 3(1) of Order 2011. There are six principles in the Order: the absence of prohibited animals (such as pork) or animals that have not been slaughtered according to *Syariah* law, the absence of impurities according to *Syariah* Law, the absence of any intoxicating substance, the absence of any part of a human being, the absence of any toxic or poisonous substance or anything which is hazardous to human health, and it must not be manufactured using any equipment contaminated with impurities or which have been in contact or mixed with any part of an animal prohibited by *Syariah* law. A Malaysian Muslim arguably would not buy any manufactured product without a *halal* logo. For example, in 2014, a controversy surrounding two Cadbury's chocolate products occurred when the genuineness of their *halal* certificates was doubted. This became national news involving JAKIM and the Ministry of Health. The issue was resolved when the JAKIM approved the Cadbury's *halal* certificate. This also shows how some Malaysian Muslim react to *halal* issues by considering it – the Cadbury's product – initially to be *halal*, then *haram* and then again as *halal* in response to the information which they were given.

In relation to manufactured food, Malays in Glasgow do have a wider range of choice, however meat products such as chicken, lamb and beef must be slaughtered according to Islamic guidelines. Thus, Malays have no other choice but to buy from a *halal* butchery or counter. In general, the different levels of

tolerance and practice between religious Malays in Penang and in Glasgow indicate that there are different degrees of ethno-religion practice depending on context, location and status as the majority or minority group.

A *halal* butcher located on Great Western Road, Glasgow.

Language

The Malay language is regional in nature, making it difficult for the different versions to be accumulated into a homogenous language. Historically, there are nine Malay states in Malaysia. In each of them the languages have been accumulated into four distinct dialects: northern, southern, central, and east-coast dialects. Chinese is also divided on the basis of dialects: Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka (Kheh), Teochiu, Hainan (Hailam), Kwongsai, Hokchiu, Hokchia and Henghwa. This raises obstacles to creating a homogenous identification and categorisation within the Malay and Chinese communities themselves. One respondent commented:

> I am not from any Chinese group that originates from here [Penang].
> So their slang (*pause*) I don't really understand. All of us migrated
> from China, so mostly there are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (*counting*) 6 to 7 dialects
> that are quite popular [...] Cantonese is mostly in Kuala Lumpur,
> Hokkien is around Penang. (Lincoln, Chinese male interviewed in
> Penang)

Even though there are different dialects, language continues to be considered an important marker for them in differentiating between Malays and Chinese, as stated by one respondent:

> I guess … it is quite easy to know your identity. When you grew up like that, you kind of know like … the language that you speak. (Jasmine, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

According to Jasmine, the language which he spoke was an indicator of his Chinese identity. Chinese people who cannot speak proper Chinese (dialect or Mandarin) will sometimes be considered out of place in comparison with other members of the community. They also will be labelled as 'Chinese-banana' or 'Chinese-ABC' if they tend to use English or the Roman alphabet rather than Chinese scripts, as was explained by some respondents:

> Those who cannot speak Chinese will usually be labelled as Banana, because it is yellow from the outside and white in the inside. (Kailee, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

> Actually there are lots of Chinese who cannot speak in Chinese. Among ourselves we would call them 'ABC' because they only write and speak in English. (Ah Man, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

The labels 'Chinese-banana' and 'Chinese-ABC' are signs of disapproval and double categorisation which are used within Chinese ethnic groups. These labels also act as reminders that you cannot to change your identity by using the language of others - in this case, English - as your primary language of choice. These labels can therefore be understood as indirect statements that Englishness inside a Chinese person will not make him/her an English person. This disapproval suggests that some people strongly believe that ethnic identity is fixed, even though it is culturally based. People usually refer an individual to a particular 'racial category' even though "the markers are primarily cultural" (Van Den Berghe, 2009, p.58). In this case, Chinese language - a clear cultural marker - is considered to form a significant part of the Chinese ethnic identity.

Looking at the discussion and analysis in this work thus far, it becomes apparent that cultural boundaries had become of great importance to the respondents' understanding of Malay-ness and Chinese-ness. As a result, the respondents had become very observant of these boundaries within their daily activities and

practices, which continued to maintain Malay and Chinese separateness. From the category of practice, different cultural and religious practices are considered as evidence of their ethnic differences, whilst from the category of analysis, it is the Malays and Chinese who generate and constitute such differences. This then continuously created and maintained the relevancy of ethnicity for the respondents in Penang and Glasgow. In the following section of this work, I shall examine how these assumed-fixed boundaries influenced the respondents' selection of a spouse or partner. This discussion provides a comparative analysis based on gender, ethnicity and location.

4   Ethnicity boundaries: their maintenance and challenges in the institution of marriage

Male respondents in Penang and Glasgow

This section starts with an examination of respondents' personal opinions on inter-ethnic marriages. The data analysis showed that the respondents, irrespective of gender or location, were overall very supportive of the idea of mixed marriage. The Malay respondents in Penang, for example, showed their support from an Islamic perspective by reasoning that it is actually encouraged in Islam. The Malay respondents in Glasgow, on the other hand, justified mixed marriage based on a scientific explanation in that it is believed to produce healthier children. The Chinese respondents in both locations did not have any objection towards inter-ethnic marriage and considered it to be an acceptable decision made by an individual. Some of my respondents considered mixed marriage as a good way to reduce ethnic differences in Malaysia. One respondent stated:

> I think that mixed marriage is a good thing. At least it can narrow down the gap … maybe in the future … hopefully there will be no more ethnic Malays, Chinese and Indians. (Aminah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

There are two rationales for this statement. First, it can expose those involved to different cultures. As was highlighted previously, ethnic identification and formation take place at an early stage of a child's development at home.

Second, those who were born within a mixed-marriage family will have the opportunity to be identified according to the father's *or* the mother's ethnicity. For example, Ramlah told me about her Malay friend who had married a Chinese man and had decided to register two of her children as Malay and one as Chinese:

> I have a very good friend, she married a Chinese and this is the weird thing about Malaysia. Her first child is considered as Malay. The second child is considered as a Chinese, and the third one is Malay. (Ramlah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

Her story is worth further investigation. Why did Ramlah's friend decide to formally identify her children as part of two distinct ethnic groups? Rationally, being a *bumiputra* can be understood as advantageous in terms of education and employment compared with being a non-*bumiputra*. Were the *bumiputras'* privileges inadequate for making Ramlah's friend to formally identify all of her children as Malay *bumiputra*? In some exogamous families, ethnicity may not be important; it is more of an appreciation of variation that they want to cherish. Indeed, this kind of attitude had made their inter-ethnic marriage possible in the first place. Thus, inter-ethnic marriage helps to blur Malay-Chinese ethnicity when these siblings learn to live together in harmony under one roof before moving on to the world outside the home. From this perspective of family, ethnicity can be considered as only a label which is essentially used for official issues as required by the State, whilst in their daily life, marriage has successfully broken down the ethnic boundaries specifically related to customs, values and language.

It may seem that the majority of the respondents were optimistic about the idea of inter-ethnic marriage. However, the actuality might be different when they need to make a decision in their own future lives. Only six Malay males and two Chinese males in Penang admitted that they were willing to enter into an inter-ethnic relationship. These respondents originated from the states of Sarawak, Sabah and Kelantan. Their justifications for their admittance can be explored through a case-by-case analysis. For example, Khai – from Kelantan – sought to marry a Kelantanese, and ethnicity was not an important issue. His statement led to another question: What makes him so enthusiastic about being a

Kelantanese? He admitted that this was due to his sense of belonging towards Kelantan, which was strengthened through his family and society. He explained:

> She must be a Kelantanese. After that, maybe I will look at her ethnicity or nationality. [...] I prefer to find someone from Kelantan. If I want to get married with a Chinese girl, that Chinese girl must be a Kelantanese. I cannot deny that I have a strong sentiment for being Kelantanese. Maybe because of my family's upbringing and the society itself. (Khai, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

Ahmad, from Sabah, on the other hand, gave no priority to regionality. He simply accepted inter-ethnic marriage in itself and said:

> I am planning to marry someone with different ethnicity. Right now, my girlfriend is a Chinese. She is from Sarawak. Her family is Chinese, her father is actually a Melanau and her mother is a Chinese. (Ahmad, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

He was currently in a relationship with a girl whom he casually acknowledged as Chinese, although her legal identity should be Melanau[14] since those who are born in Sarawak must be officially identified according to the father's ethnicity. At the same time, his identification of his girlfriend's ethnic identity indicated that official ethnic identity is not necessarily practical for everyone's everyday affairs. It also depends on the family upbringing, which might occasionally use the Melanau identity in relation to *bumiputras'* privileges. Alex and Danish were the only two Chinese male respondents who were willing to consider inter-ethnic relationships in regard to their own personal lives.

Alex lived in Sarawak for almost nineteen years before moving to Penang. Before his move to Penang, he experienced multi-ethnic communities and was familiar with inter-ethnic marriage within his family and by people surrounding him:

> My uncle, he married an Ibanian.[15] My uncle has no family issue with his inter-ethnic marriage. There are lots of us who are involved with mixed marriage. (Alex, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

Danish, in particular, was born to *bumiputra* and non-*bumiputra* parents and this can be understood to have equipped him with the confidence to follow his

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[14] Melanau is one of the native groups in Sarawak categorised as *bumiputra*.

[15] Iban is one of the native groups in Sarawak categorised as *bumiputra*.

parents' decision. He felt secure and comfortable with inter-ethnic marriage based on his life experiences within the family. Like Alex, Danish was also accustomed to inter-ethnic marriage in his family. Indeed, he actually preferred the administrative system in Sabah compared with Sarawak because inter-ethnic married couples in Sabah can choose to declare their child's ethnicity based on either one of the couple's ethnicity. He explained:

> My father is a Chinese and my mother is an Iban-Melanau. I think it [marriage] is good because of my father and mother. They look happy. Nothing is wrong with that. My auntie, she is married with Malay too. My father will not be angry [if Danish wants to marry Malay] and (*pause*) my mother should be okay because my elder brother has a Muslim girlfriend and they are going to get married soon. In Sarawak, there are lots of mixed marriages such as between the Chinese and Kadazan.[16] But I prefer the Sabah administration system because they can to choose either to follow the father's or the mother's side. They can choose to be a *bumiputra*. (Danish, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

The rest of the Malay and Chinese male respondents interviewed in Penang prioritised ethnicity and regionality as the main criteria for finding a potential partner. Islam was frequently mentioned as it is intertwined with Malay identity, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Therefore, a choice based on ethnic identity was also a choice of religion for these Malay male respondents. The Chinese males, on the other hand, argued that they needed to choose someone from the same ethnic group because of family and cultural pressures, especially the respondents from Penang. These examples suggest that one's hometown is one of the factors that can increase the possibility of inter-ethnic marriage and concurrently decrease the importance of ethnicity as a valued criterion for identifying a spouse or partner. For example:

> In Sabah, we don't have any priority that a Malay must be married with a Malay. What's important is religion. Other than that, I don't think it will be a problem. My priority is religion. (Ahmad, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

In contrast with these respondents in Malaysia, male respondents in Glasgow felt the need to include nationality as one of the possible criteria for choosing a potential partner. The Malay male respondents admitted that they prioritised

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16 Kadazan is one of the native groups in Sabah categorised as *bumiputra*.

'Malaysian-Malay Muslims' and 'Malaysian non-Malay Muslims', rather than 'non-Malaysian Muslims' or 'non-Malaysian non-Muslims'. Based on my analysis of the findings, the main factors in spouse or partner selection for the Malay men interviewed in Glasgow lay in nationality, religion and ethnicity. Three of the four Chinese males preferred Malaysian-Chinese over non-Malaysians with specific concern regarding religion (Buddhism) and culture.

At the beginning of the discussion in this section, it could be sensed that there was a possibility and tendency among the male respondents to opt for inter-ethnic marriage. However, the State identification and categorisation of fixed-identity seemed to be a general obstacle for the Malay and Chinese men interviewed in both Penang and Glasgow. More importantly, it also reflected the State's imposition of ethnic identity which acts as a brake on the hybridising effects of everyday interpersonal interactions. By the end, the analysis has suggested that the male respondents in Penang and Glasgow highly preferred endogamous to exogamous marriage. The respondents in Penang gave greater priority to ethnicity and regionality, whilst the respondents in Glasgow had concerns regarding nationality, religion and ethnicity. At the same time, they paid less attention to regionality than the male respondents in Penang. Instead of focusing on geographical boundaries between the local states such as Perak, Johor and Kedah, the male respondents in Glasgow focused on national boundaries - for instance between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Their decision lay within different situations with different audiences compared with the Malaysia-context, as the male respondents in Glasgow frequently interacted with different nationalities from around the world.

Female respondents in Penang and Glasgow

Comparative analysis of the female respondents' interviews in Penang and Glasgow suggested that the Malay females in Penang prioritised ethnicity as the main criterion for identifying and choosing a potential spouse compared with the Malay females based in Glasgow.

For the female Malay respondents interviewed in Penang, there were two reasons for justifying their spousal preference: religion and the cultural barrier.

As discussed earlier, Malay identity within Malaysia is closely tied to Islam, either by authoritative definition or by everyday experience. Second, as Muslim women, they were prohibited from marrying non-Muslims unless their partners are willing to convert to Islam. It is stated in the Islamic Family Law Act of 1984 (Section 10) that "no man shall marry a non-Muslim except *Kitabiyah* and no woman shall marry a non-Muslim". Therefore, an endogamous marriage within the Malay community is the easiest way to fulfil the expected social roles as Malay and Muslim. Indeed, religious families rarely accept inter-ethnic marriage. Some of the Malay respondents admitted that their parents would be worried about the possibility that they might deviate from Islamic teachings if they were to marry converted Muslims, particularly newly converted Muslims.

> I think my mum will think twice about this. Maybe because my parents are concerned about his religion. If he wants to convert into Islam, it must because of his decision and not because of me. It depends on his life styles, either he is a true Muslim or not. (Nina, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

> I think the biggest challenge in inter-ethnic marriage with a converted Muslim is (*pause*) food preparations (*laughs*) and also types of food. I mean when I am in his parents' house. (Zuhaini, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

They also worried about the perceived cultural differences between their non-Muslim in-laws particularly in regard to their food preparations, an issue discussed earlier in this chapter. Four of the five single Malay female respondents in Glasgow were open to being in an inter-ethnic marriage. First, this was related to positive exposure from their close or distant family members and friends, as was explained by one respondent:

> They are happy. They have children and the eldest daughter, who married a British man, she seems happy like there is no problem at all. (Siti, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

Second, the location of the interview was important as it contributed to the level of exposure to inter-ethnic relationships. The location suggested a different level of ethnic expectation. The Malay female respondents in Glasgow possessed greater tolerance and moderation in relation to Islamic practices compared with those in Malaysia. However, their religious tolerance never crossed their faith boundaries because in terms of legal issues, religion is still

very important. One Malay female respondent in Glasgow was married to a non-Malaysian and her husband had actually embraced Islam prior to their marriage. Their marriage ceremony was conducted twice: once for the UK official registration and another in the Malaysian Embassy. The second ceremony was important for Malaysian official registration because it was proof that she was married to a Muslim, important information if she were to return to Malaysia. Her marital status could be in jeopardy if she does not have any legal proof that her husband was Muslim before the marriage. She explained:

> In London we got married twice. One, with UK registry and the other one with the Malaysian Student Embassy Department [as Muslim] [...] it is not really difficult to register in Malaysia. You just go to your State Religious Centre and bring your *nikah* [marriage] certificate and the country certificate. The two of you must be there and then they will ask questions and you just have to sign. (Ramlah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

A relationship out of wedlock is prohibited for any Malay-Muslim in Malaysia; it is a religious crime based on Act 303 of the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territory). As discussed earlier, Islam and Malay ethnicity are inter-related in Malaysia and most Malay customs are based on Islamic teachings. A relationship out of wedlock is prohibited not only by Islamic law but is also a major taboo in the Malay community. In other words, Ramlah's official marital status not only served as proof of legal marriage in the Malaysian context, but also sought to verify her relationship with her partner in the Malay community. Since Malay identity is generally associated with being Muslim, this means that religion is one of the most important considerations in relation to inter-ethnic marriage.

Ramlah, at the same time, told me that her marriage to a non-Malaysian became an issue for some people in Malaysia. Although her family and friends approved of her marriage, she still faced informal objections from Malays in public who were total strangers to her. She was continually questioned on her marriage to a non-Malay non-Malaysian:

> People's acceptance towards my marriage (*pause*) some people are okay with that but I think in Malaysia (*pause*) let's say the acceptance was not easy as it is over here. Some people keep asking questions to me. I find that a little bit backward (*laugh*) and funny because most of the times they are people that I don't know. My family and friends are

happy with my decision. (Ramlah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

Only in some regions in Malaysia are inter-ethnic relationships or marriages warmly accepted. For example, one Chinese female respondent in Glasgow argued that inter-ethnic marriages could be accepted in Terengganu but not really in Kuala Lumpur. She added that she felt the pressure of being Chinese when she is in Kuala Lumpur but not when she is in Terengganu. The inter-ethnic relationship is also more acceptable in Sarawak than in Penang, as she explained:

> In terms of races, there is a barrier [...] I think it depends on the place where you are. When I go to Terengganu, I don't feel ... feel the tension ... between races. I would say because in Terengganu the Chinese are the minority. So I guess the pressure isn't there. In KL (*pause*) sometimes [I feel the pressure]. In Penang, when I hold my boyfriend's hand, people [mostly Chinese] will talk behind our backs saying 'why is that Chinese girl with the Indian[17] boy?' In Sarawak, no-one cares with whom you are friends. (Shui, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

Although some Malay women in Glasgow were willing to be involved in inter-ethnic marriages, they were also selective in relation to the country of origin of their potential spouse. The issue they highlighted was not only about religion but also focused on how the potential partner practised Islam. Based on my respondents' understandings, Islam is a religion that promotes kindness to women, but in some countries, the culture itself subjects women to patriarchal oppression. The Malay female respondents in this study appeared to be pleased with the Islamic judicial system in Malaysia as, according to them, it protects Muslim women from male injustice and oppression. The Malay female respondents shared the view that they preferred a man who can understand his wife and family and is kind to them, particularly when they know that these good virtues are those of Islamic teaching. Most of them, as well as their parents, were against a patriarchal society which subjugates women, as evidenced by one respondent's assertion:

> The eastern people, they are quite weird in their practice of Islam. They are not practising the real Islam. And they have ... I don't know,

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[17] Her boyfriend was a Chinese-Bidayuh but socially racialised by Penangites as Indian based on his physical appearances. Bidayuh is one of the native groups in Sarawak categorised as *bumiputra*.

> they are more patriarchal than Scottish people … so, I don't like patriarchal man … you know, I don't want [it]. (Siti, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

In terms of religion, customs, values and language, the Chinese usually face more disapproval than Malays, as those who want to marry a Malay must first convert to Islam. Since Malay customs are heavily assimilated with Arab elements, there is a tendency for Malays to be named using Arabic vocabulary. It is culturally expected that a newly converted Muslim within Malaysia would change his/her Chinese name to a Malay-Muslim name. This, however, creates issues for the Chinese, in particular for Chinese males. First, in China there are only a few hundred surnames that are commonly used. The purpose of a surname is to convey a symbolic message of belonging, signifying how a person is actually part of a particular line of family. A person with a particular surname is expected to treat others with the same surname as members of their own family even if they personally never knew one another before (Crissman, 1967). The Chinese surname is significant in China as a sign or cultural symbol which indicates a 'blood tie' to differentiate them from other Chinese. Individuals are also expected not to marry those with the same surname (Tan 2005). Therefore, from the perspective of Chinese customs, a Chinese man who might want to change his name usually gets more objections than a Chinese female because of his patriarchal responsibility of inheriting the family surname. In addition, the continuity of the family surname is preserved by some Chinese elders in Malaysia, and this was explained by one respondent:

> Well, because we have some kind of gender discrimination as well. In the traditional Chinese family, the guy is the one who will inherit the surname. For my grandparents, this is so important for them. Even though the guy may not mind, you still have to maintain the name [surname]. So, it is harder for the guy if he wants to marry a Malay compared to a Chinese girl because the girl obviously will follow the husband's name. (Melissa, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Since the pressure to maintain the family surname does not fall heavily on the Chinese female, one Chinese female respondent told me that she would be open to marrying a Muslim. As an individual, she had no problem following Islamic regulations in her daily life. However, she took a step back when thinking about her future children. In Malaysia, an individual will be Muslim either by birth or by choice, and Muslims are prohibited by Malaysian Islamic law from converting

to other religions. Her decision was not really focused on the religion itself, but more on the nation's policy towards religion:

> I actually, to be honest, don't really mind. Even though I need to get married to a Muslim, I need to be conscious that if I am married to a Muslim, I cannot eat specific food. I think most people are reluctant to get married to the Malays not because of the religion itself but it is because of the Malaysian policy in managing religion. [...] the policy in Malaysia for Muslim is that, if a Chinese wants to get married to a Muslim, she or he must convert into Islam. I am a Chinese and I am a Buddhist. If I want to get married to a Muslim guy, I need to change my name and I need to be a Muslim as well. I don't really mind that but what I think is … it is not really sensible in the sense that my children would not have a chance to choose. Yes, because in other countries such as in Egypt, Muslims can convert to other religions. (Shun, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Conversion to Islam has also been considered a debasing move by some Chinese families in Malaysia. Ma (2005) found that Malaysian-Chinese are believed to be economically and educationally better than Malays. Since the Malay identity is intricately related to Islam, a conversion to the latter is also considered to be an embrace of Malay-ness. For example, one Malay respondent stated:

> One of my lecturers, she is a Chinese and she is married to a Malay husband. Personally, I think she is being more Malay than Chinese. That is only from my observation. She speaks Penang slang, she eats Malays foods and … she speaks like Malay. We don't even expect that she is a Chinese. (Azlan, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

It is common for a newly converted Chinese-Muslim to be rejected by his/her own family (Ma, 2005) for cultural and status reasons. Some converted Chinese-Muslims frequently find emotional sanctuary with their in-law Malay families or Muslim friends. Through these new families, they go through a process of identity modification in becoming Muslim. Since the majority of Muslims in Malaysia are Malay, the newly converted Chinese-Muslim consequently ends up having his/her Chinese identity mixed up with Malay identity essence – expressed through religion, language and customs (particularly dress).

In addition, members of the Chinese community in Malaysia are followers of the 'Chinese religion', which includes "the elements of beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and ancestral worship" (Mariappan, 1996, p.22) but excluding Islam and Christianity. Most of the Chinese respondents in this

study were Buddhist; thus they were bound to their ancestors' traditional religious beliefs. Similar to Malays, to whom cultural tradition is frequently attached to Islam, Chinese cultural tradition is attached to Chinese religious teaching. According to Mariappan (1996, p.109), the cultural tradition acts as an "important factor in maintaining a strong family bonding among the community". This was demonstrated when one Chinese respondent added that sometimes it is about the culture and not about the religion:

> There also some culture barriers when I want to bring him [a Chinese-Christian] to my family, we have this … praying to our ancestor, maybe he will get pissed off with other family members. But, the relationship has nothing to do with religion. (Meiling, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

However, its importance cannot be proven as significant in all cases. Some of the Chinese elderly in Malaysia can accept inter-ethnic marriage in their family. As mentioned by one of the Chinese female respondents, her grandparents could accept inter-ethnic marriage after their experience with their grandchildren's marriage:

> It's getting more and more common. My cousin ... one is in a relationship with an Indian. Another one is with a Malay. [I don't know whether they have issue with their family]. I mean I wouldn't know in their house, kind of. Yeah. Probably the older people are more ... (*pause*) they don't ... but my grandparents they are okay now. (Jasmine, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Nevertheless, despite the challenges discussed above, only two female Chinese respondents in Penang and one in Glasgow actually said that they preferred Chinese men as a potential spouse or partner. The rest of the Chinese female respondents in Penang and Glasgow were more open-minded in regard to this. Two of the Chinese women in Penang were currently involved in inter-ethnic relationships with Chinese-Sikh and Chinese-*Bidayuh* men. The rest either preferred the idea of someone who is Christian or Malaysian - or someone with a good personality, as they put it. This preference towards diversity can be understood as related to their educational background, residential area and exposure to inter-ethnic marriage among their family members and friends. For example, one of the two Chinese female respondents who were involved in an inter-ethnic relationship used to study in National 'Malay' Schools (primary and

secondary) and had experience of being friends with people who were not Chinese, alongside a great deal of exposure to and knowledge about other ethnicities.

The decision to be involved in inter-ethnic marriage for the respondents in this research should be understood to be a gendered issue. Although the location of interview is important, gender seemed to be one of the crucial determining factors. In regard to marriage, ethnicity in Malaysia works inside its 'gendering', creating different gender expectations which are central to ethnic reproduction.

5 Conclusion

Throughout the discussion in this chapter, it can be seen that ethnic identification and categorisation in Malaysia is a result from the Malaysian ethnic bureaucratisation system. The system works in two important prongs: epistemology and the practicality of ethnic construction and understanding. The *epistemological system* refers to the development of assumed shared-history and assumed shared-boundaries (religion, language and customs) which used to differentiate Malaysians into their respective ethnic categories. The *practicality of the system*, on the other hand, refers to the requirement of identifying and categorising people into a particular ethnic category. It is in the latter system that Malaysian parents need to officially declare their children's ethnicity which must be based on the parents' ethnicity.

As a result, those who come from an endogamous marriage would think of ethnicity as simple, unproblematic and naturally inherited from the parents. But for those who come from an inter-ethnic marriage (be it their parents or the previous generation) or from a family whose ancestors had fulfilled the requirements of being Malay (religion, language and customs) prior to independence (1957) would see ethnicity as complicated and arbitrary. Nonetheless, even with the awareness of the complexity of their identities and origins, they ultimately chose to self-identify with the 'given' identity. This decision shows that there is a need to fit into one of the ethnic categories prepared by the state: Malays, Chinese, Indian, aboriginal people in the

peninsula, natives of Sabah or Sarawak or Others. What is impossible here is the idea of having a mixed or plural identity – at least in terms of the State's official categories. The decision also shows how the State identification and categorisation is very important in the Malaysian everyday identification which goes beyond the primordial understanding.

In this chapter it has also been argued how the Malaysian authorities have reinforced ethnic boundaries - religion, customs and language – into the respondents' consciousness through related laws and regulations. In the Malaysian context, the respondents agreed that the religious, language and customs boundaries are important in defining Malay-ness and Chinese-ness. They were observant of the boundaries which continuously generate and constitute ethnic differences in their everyday activities. However, the findings also suggest that outside Malaysia's geographical boundaries, religious and cultural separations are tolerated to a much greater extent. The reason for this is probably because these boundaries are less expected during Malaysians' interactions with non-Malaysians, which makes the importance of ethnicity contextual.

Even though the boundaries were observed to be less outside Malaysia, they still showed significance in relation to Malaysian preferences of spouses or partners. Religion and customs were particularly important. Since Malays and Islam are complicatedly related in Malaysia, this makes inter-ethnic marriage with any Malaysian-Malays a clear religious and cultural issue, particularly for the Chinese men, who by their ethnic culture must maintain their family surname. This time, it is no longer about their external social conduct which is flexibly based on location and interlocutors, but rather focuses on the essence of being Malay or Chinese, which works within particular gender expectations, hence making the importance of ethnicity situational as well.

Chapter Six: Ethnicity, the Malaysian educational system and Social Networks

1   Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the role of the State in identifying and categorising Malays and Chinese on the basis of the boundaries of language, religion and customs. The chapter also highlighted the role of everyday actors in maintaining, negotiating and challenging these boundaries in their daily life. A further exploration will now be made of the consequences of ethnic identification and categorisation based on the assumed shared-history and assumed fixed-boundaries in the Malaysian educational system and their consequences for the respondents' social networks.

As I briefly explored in the historical chapter, the Malaysian schooling system in the colonial period was language-divided: English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil. In the early years of independence, the Malaysian schooling system had an issue in deciding what language should be used as the medium of instruction in elementary and secondary schools. The Barnes Report of 1951 recommended that a single type of elementary school should be open to all students. The suggested languages of instruction that would be used in the schools were Malay and English. The Chinese immediately rejected the proposal, and that led to the formation of the United Chinese School Teachers' Association of the Federation of Malaya (Kwa, 2008). The Fenn Wu Report of 1951 recommended that the government should continue with Chinese vernacular schools at the elementary level, and with English as the medium of instruction at the secondary level. The Fenn-Wu Report is regarded as demonstrating the Chinese fear of cultural and identity extinction (Beng, 1988; Guan, 2009). It was also possibly a result of Chinese discontent over the Malay privileges stated in the Federation of 1948. Under that regulation, language was no longer seen as a means of communication but was symbolically used as a form of power to access and gain a political end (Bourdieu, 1993). Under the Razak Report of 1956, vernacular elementary schools were preserved with two conditions: the Malay language as a compulsory subject and a new standardised curriculum. In 1970, all Chinese and

English secondary schools were transformed into Malay-medium secondary schools. A few of the Chinese secondary schools decided to maintain Chinese as their medium of instruction and these were known as Independent Chinese Secondary Schools (ICSSs). At the same time, Islamic religious schools re-emerged in the 1970s. The establishment of these alternative schools further promoted educational segregation in terms of both religion and language.

There are three main points of focus in this chapter and they will be addressed in three different sections. In the first section, the perpetuation of educational segregation based on religion and language will be addressed. I shall also highlight the role of parents in the enrolment decision for their children. In the second section, I shall look into the importance of ethnic identification and categorisation in the Malaysian tertiary educational system and how this could have influenced the enrolment decisions in the respondents' secondary schools. In the final section, a specific platform – social networks and friendships – is explored in order to understand how language and religious boundaries in Malaysian schools influenced the respondents' social circles and friendships. I shall also explore and compare the respondents' friendships in the two higher institutions located in Penang and Glasgow.

2 Religious and language factors in Malaysian elementary and secondary schools

In the Malaysian educational context, parents do have choices and freedom about what they might think best for their children (Sua *et al.*, 2013). There is no law which restricts Malay parents from enrolling their children into a Chinese school or *vice versa*. The only limitation is applicable in the religious schools as only Muslims are permitted to enrol in an Islamic religious school. According to one respondent's understanding, this limitation is possibly due to Quranic and other Islamic literature that has to be taught in this type of school. She said:

> There were no Chinese students in my school. I think maybe because of our syllabus. We had more subjects in addition to the core academic subjects required by the government, such as *mutallaah, tafsir, sirah, imla', khat*. (Rohana, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

However, the curriculum itself should not be considered as the real reason for the outcome; the *rule* itself that limits non-Muslim enrolment into Islamic religious schools. Although there is no immediate restriction on school admission (except for religious schools), my empirical data show that the Malay respondents in Penang and Glasgow were registered by their parents into either a National Primary School or a Private Religious School. All but two of the Chinese respondents were registered in a National Primary (Type) Chinese School. The same pattern was shown in the secondary level of study where the majority of the Malay and Chinese students went to a National Secondary School and a National Secondary (Type) Chinese school respectively. Only three of the Chinese respondents had studied in a National Secondary School. The rest of the Malay and Chinese respondents had gone to private religious schools or ICSSs (*see* Appendix B).

The difference between a 'national school' and a 'national-type Chinese school' is in their medium of instruction. The national schools (primary and secondary) use Malay as the language of instruction whereas the national-type Chinese schools (primary and secondary) use Chinese as the medium of instruction. Colloquially, these schools are also known as National Malay Primary/Secondary Schools and National Chinese Primary/Secondary Schools. The reasons are because Mandarin is offered mainly in Chinese schools, the internal culture is identifiable either with the Malay or the Chinese community, and each school has a close relationship with its respective community. The student composition is also influenced by the language which is used as the medium of instruction. For example, the Vernacular School Report (2012) reported that more than 90% of Chinese parents in Malaysia enrolled their children in a Chinese primary school whereas the majority of the Malay parents registered their children in Malay primary schools. The empirical findings in this study also suggest that there are educational divisions based on religion and language. The main concern in this section is therefore to understand the educational pattern presented among the respondents interviewed in Penang and Glasgow.

Hoon (2011) stated that the school serves as a site for the construction and maintenance of boundaries: whether ethnic, religious or by class. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the respondents perceived cultural elements, especially

religion and language, as significant definers of Malay-ness and Chinese-ness. The question is, do these religious and cultural elements play a role in parents' educational decisions, or they are just assumed as *the* reason? According to one of the Malay respondents, religious education was important for her and her siblings, as she said:

> Religious teaching is important for my parents. Every one of my siblings went to a private religious school. This was probably because of the subjects. They are more ... comprehensive [...] To be honest; I prefer private religious schools because they have more religious subjects than national schools. (Rohana, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

The main concern for Rohana and her parents was religion. She stressed the religious subjects offered in the private schools. Her statement seems to indicate a lack of Islamic syllabus in the national schools. As was explained in the historical chapter, the Malaysian contemporary private religious school was a result of the Islamic resurgence in the 1970s. Muzaffar (1987) interpreted the resurgence as an outcome of urbanisation and westernisation which created Malay alienation and anomie. Additionally, according to Shamsul (1994), the resurgence was a result of Malay migration from rural to urban areas which created an identity and cultural vacuum which only Islam could fill. Lee (1990) described the resurgence as a Malay-*bumiputraism* defensive mechanism in urban areas.

As for me, I understand the resurgence to be a part of the response to the secularisation and westernisation of the Malaysian educational system (*see* the 1970s Islamic resurgence described in the Chapter Three for more details). In other words, the establishment and re-emergence of the religious schools resulted from different political ideologies between the State and the Malay religious NGOs and political parties. The Islamic NGOs and political parties especially aimed to empower Malays according to Islamic teaching, educationally and economically. This was due to the resurgence; the State started to offer an Islamic subject in the national schools and to take over some of the private religious schools. Some of the private religious schools which had been particularly established by PAS refused to accept the full government intervention. PAS is regarded as one of the backbones of private religious schools. Both UMNO (one of the ruling parties) and PAS (the opposition party)

highlight the importance of Islam in their political struggle. Their Islamic emphases however are different in level. In other words, there is competition between the State and the Islamic party to become the Malay-cum-Islam champion for the Malays.

In 2001, in order to limit PAS's advance through alternative schooling, the ruling government decided to reduce the financial aid to private religious schools, which according to the government had long been politicised by PAS (Sua *et.al*, 2013). According to one of my Malay respondents, her decision to transfer from a private religious school to a national secondary school was due to a rumour that students from the private religious schools would not be qualified to apply for pre-university admission. Regarding this, she said that:

> There were rumours saying that the private religious schools, I mean the students from *Sekolah Menengah Agama Rakyat* (SMAR), are not qualified for matriculation study [pre-university]. So (*pause*) most of us decided to transfer to *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (SMK). I am not really sure whether it is true or not but (*pause*) the government had already stopped giving financial aid to my school (*Sekolah Rendah Al-Hidayah*). (Rohana, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

As I stated at the beginning of this section, all of the Malay respondents went to either Malay primary and secondary national or private religious schools. What is important to highlight here is also what the Malay parents of the participants in this study *chose not* to do. Although Malay parents have the freedom to choose any type of school, they did not register their children in Chinese schools. There are two possible explanations here. First, there is greater future academic convenience offered in the mainstream schools and second, it would be likely that what kind of education is appropriate to which ethnicity is also crucial here. As experienced by Rohana in her comment above, although her parents emphasised the importance of religious education, the future academic prospects were ultimately an important factor for her education. The transfer, however, was conditioned by the language factor which caused her transfer option to be limited to a national Malay school.

Alongside the mainstream national schools, there are other types of national school which were established during the NEP era (1970-1990): MARA science secondary schools (MRSM) and fully residential schools (SBP). Both of these types

were established for socio-economically disadvantaged *bumiputra* who performed with excellence in their academic work. In 2001, the government decided to 're-open' MRSM colleges, residential schools [SBP] and matriculation programmes to non-*Bumiputra* students (Abdullah *et al.*, 2012). Nonetheless, the students' composition in MRSM and SBP schools continued to be dominated by the *bumiputra* (Abdullah *et al.*, 2012). This further created an understanding for the respondents that admission into these types of school was mainly *bumiputra*-based and quota-based. Two Malay respondents said that:

> I think they [the State] allocated 10% of students for non-Malays in MRSM. (Azlan, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

> My school was a boarding school [SBP]. There were few Chinese and aboriginal people. I think they only took a few percent of other races apart from Malays into the school. (Asma, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

There are a few possible explanations for this outcome, such as real discrimination taking place in the Malaysian educational system. However, I could not find any statement that would suggest non-*bumiputra* discrimination in SBP or MRSM admission from the Chinese respondents in this research. As a matter of fact, none of the Chinese respondents had applied to SBP or MRSM schools. There is a possibility that formal discrimination does not have to be present because the assumed shared-boundaries (language and religion) could structure the feelings and prohibit such a move. Since the majority of the Chinese respondents in this research went to Chinese elementary and secondary schools, I made an assumption that language was one of the important reasons for the outcome.

In the Chinese everyday understanding, which is supported by many academic authors such as Ho *et al.* (2016), it is stressed that Mandarin is the heart and soul of Chinese ethnicity. Historically, the Chinese community worked hard to maintain Chinese education and language, especially between the 1950s and the 1960s. If Islam as part of Malay-ness was nurtured and fostered by the State and the family, then language as part of Chinese-ness was also cherished and fostered by Chinese educationists, icons and family. For example, a Chinese respondent stated that:

> I am a Chinese Malaysian. Chinese culture is ingrained in us ever since we are young. If you compare Malaysian Chinese with Indonesian Chinese, they [Indonesian Chinese] don't have their own language and I think this is because of our ancestors back then. They really emphasised the importance of Chinese education. Even if they don't get enough funding from the government, they would take money from their own pocket just to fund Chinese education. (Ah Boa, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

In other words, just as the Malay nationalist writings such as those of Syed Sheikh Al-Hadi, Za'aba, Kajai, and Ishak Hj. Muhammad in the 1940s highlighted the importance of language and religion for Malays, the Chinese pedagogical movement in the 1950s, such as the writings of Lim Lian Geok, similarly stressed the importance of Chinese education and language for Chinese children. The importance of Chinese education and language is therefore a habitus fostered as an important element of Chinese-ness. According to Tan (2005, p.702), "Chinese parents generally want their children to be literate in Chinese". Even in a family which uses English for everyday conversation, the parents will try to expose the children to the Chinese language, as Jasmine explained:

> Because my parents want us to learn Chinese […] I speak English at home […] my parents don't know Chinese. So, I grew up speaking English. (Jasmine, Chinese female respondent interviewed in Glasgow)

In some cases, the importance of Chinese education and language is strongly emphasised by the older generation, as one respondent had experienced:

> It was my grandparents' idea. The Chinese people really appreciate their mother tongue, which is the Chinese language. How should I put it? It is like a continuity of culture, right? […] My parents rarely give their opinion. They respect what my grandparents say. (Alex, Chinese respondents interviewed in Penang)

Most Malaysian-Chinese still live in a household with their extended family, in which the grandparents' words had a great influence on the respondents' parents' decisions. Alex's case gives an example of how school preference is sometimes not solely down to the parents' decision, but may also involve other family members, which in turn suggests the determination of the older generation to preserve the language as part of Chinese-ness.

Enrolment in a Chinese school is sometimes intensified by the Chinese teaching system. According to Sua *et al.* (2013), Chinese schools' assessment culture and learning environment, which stems from the high level of discipline, are a distinction between Malay and Chinese schools. Corporal punishment, particularly caning, for students' misbehaviour is traditionally used in Chinese primary schools. The Malaysian Ministry of Education had to prohibit this type of punishment, but "the Chinese primary schools continue to allow teachers to mete out corporal punishment on students but they are cautioned not to be excessive" (Sua *et al.*, 2013, p.330). Because of their conducive learning environment, Chinese schools have successfully produced excellent students, especially in Mathematic and Sciences (Sua *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, for some respondents, their enrolment in a Chinese school was primarily on the basis of it being a 'good school', followed by the importance of language, as stated by this respondent:

> My parents are both Chinese educated. Both of them previously studied in my primary and secondary schools. They sent me there because the schools produced excellent students. Another reason was they wanted me to learn my mother tongue. (Shun, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Based on these examples, it can be seen that Chinese educational enrolment depends on two main factors: language and the Chinese teaching system. However, there is a possible tension between parents and the Chinese educational system. For example, Alex explained that the Chinese educational approach is tough for some children, in this case referring to his brother. Alex's case suggests that there is a possibility for a new generation of Chinese to give some thought to their educational choices. He said:

> Two of my younger brothers went to a Malay school [...] Actually, at the beginning, one of my brothers, which is the one after me, went to a Chinese school but (*pause*) how should I say this (*pause*) the teachers there were extremely fierce and extremely harsh with children. It is the way the system is. Children are sensitive and we need to love them. He was just seven years old. He was really afraid to go to his school. So my parents decided to transfer him to a Malay school and it went well. When the time came for my youngest brother [to start school], they [our parents] decided to enrol him into a Malay school [...] At that time we had already moved out from our grandparents' house so they had less oppression from my grandmother

and grandfather. (Alex, Chinese male respondent interviewed in Penang)

Additionally, the chance for the Chinese respondents to study in a Malay elementary or secondary school depended on their regionality. For example, one Chinese respondent (Cathy) from Kelantan – the most homogenous state with a Malay population in Malaysia – graduated from Malay primary and secondary schools. Cathy's parents were the only parents who had graduated from Malay schools. Her parents had low proficiency in Mandarin because they never formally learnt it in school. They did, however, know how to speak in a Chinese dialect. Her parents' lack of Mandarin proficiency encouraged them to send her to a Malay elementary school. According to Cathy, this decision was more helpful for her studies, as she explained that:

> They [my parents] don't have any basic Chinese [Mandarin] because they went to a Malay school too. So, it would be difficult for them to help me with my homework and everything. That is why they registered me in a Malay School. You know that in a Chinese School, they will give us tons of homework. So, my parents probably would not be able to help me with that. The solution was to send me to a Malay school. But I still can speak Hokkien [dialect] and Mandarin. My Malay is good too. (Cathy, Chinese female respondent interviewed in Penang)

There are two possible explanations for her parents' decision. First, for some Chinese families, a Chinese dialect is possibly enough to define their Chinese-ness. They probably do not require any formal institution to recognise them as Chinese especially when they still can use, communicate in and practise a Chinese dialect at home. Second, regionality can produce different degrees of ethnic need and expectation. The different decisions made by Jasmine's (the respondent quoted on page 182) and Cathy's parents may have been related to different conditions of Malay-Chinese inter-ethnic relationships back in their hometown. Jasmine was a Chinese from Selangor, one of the most highly urbanised states in Malaysia. The Malay population there is 2,814,597 and the Chinese population is 1,441,774 (Department of Statistics, 2011). The number of Chinese in Selangor is higher in comparison with other Chinese populations in other states. Cathy, however, was a Chinese from Kelantan. In Kelantan, the Chinese are the minority with a population of 51,614, whereas the Malay population is 1,426,373 (Department of Statistics, 2011). Moreover, in Kelantan,

the socio-economic status between Malays and Chinese is arguably equal. The Chinese Kelantanese also experience a great deal of cultural assimilation with the Malay community. Therefore, what is important in Selangor is not necessarily important in Kelantan.

In another case, a Chinese respondent chose to study in a national Malay secondary school because of the unavailability of a national Chinese secondary school in his hometown. The only Chinese school available for him was an ICSS which charged a high rate of fees. He claimed that:

> I went to a Chinese primary school and an SMK [Malay school]. The SMK was cheaper than the Chinese private secondary school [ICSS]. In Johor, we only have two choices. The first is a private secondary school such as Foon Yew High school. Usually, after students graduate they will further their studies in China, Taiwan or Singapore. [...] My family's condition did not allow me to further my studies there. That was the reason for me to choose an SMK and if I had gone to a private university, I do not think my family would have enough money to support my study. (Ah Man, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

In his case, regionality, his family's socio-economic background and the prospect of future tertiary education were the main reasons for him to study in a Malay secondary school. He nonetheless learnt Mandarin during his elementary school years. As I stated in the historical chapter, the Unified Examination Certification (UEC) conducted in ICSSs cannot be used as a qualification for pre-university admission. The only qualification for pre-university admission is the SPM. Furthermore, some of the national Malay secondary schools – especially for a high number of Chinese students – do offer Mandarin as one of the subjects for the national examination (SPM). Even if there is no Mandarin course in the curriculum, Malaysian students can opt to take it as one of their elective courses in addition to other compulsory subjects.

Even if finance is not an issue, some Chinese parents are not interested in sending their children to universities located in Mandarin-speaking countries. The reason for this is related to their children's future career. These Chinese parents want their children to work in the Malaysian public sector and the Malay language is an important and basic qualification for getting a job in the public sector. The national secondary schools – Malay and Chinese – therefore offer two important things: language and qualification. However, the aim to nurture

Chinese-ness within a Chinese environment and the aim to get a national qualification for a local university and a job in the public sector made national Chinese secondary schools the best choice for the Chinese respondents in this study compared with a Malay secondary school or an ICSS. One respondent commented that:

> My parents maybe didn't want to send me to a Chinese private secondary school [ICSS] because of the opportunity offered there. They were not really keen to send me to Taiwan or China after my graduation. Those who graduated from this school furthered their studies in Taiwan, China or Singapore. Singapore is fine but you may not always end up with your choice. And they wanted me to have better BM [Malay language] and be able to speak BM. They want me to work in Malaysia one day so I should know how to speak in proper BM. Because those who went to a Chinese school [ICSS], although not all of them can speak in BM, there is a chance that their BM is not as good as those who studied in a national Chinese secondary school. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

The tendency for Chinese families to opt for a Chinese education offered by the Malaysian mainstream education would probably create an issue for Chinese opposition parties in creating and maintaining Chinese-ness through Chinese independent education. Koon (1996, p.52) commented that "even English-educated non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese political leaders must rigorously promote the cause of Chinese schools and Chinese education in order to win Chinese votes". One respondent stated that:

> You know that the Chinese parties always talk about how many Chinese schools we should build and how many Chinese should get scholarships. I don't think this is a good agenda. It is not doing anything good for nation building. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

The discussion above shows that there are many reasons for Malay and Chinese enrolment into national Malay and Chinese schools respectively. The reasons for this could be socio-economic background, regionality, future academic chances or career prospects, yet most of these reasons are conditioned by the religious, language and cultural boundaries of their respective ethnic groups. In other words, the choice of school remains ethnically divided based on religion and language. At the same time, it also shows a tendency for the Chinese respondents (and their parents) in this research to positively comply with the

State educational system – with a standard curriculum and syllabus. On the other hand, the maintenance of private religious schools and ICSSs arguably remains important for some politicians for creating commonality, connectedness and groupness in order to gain support for their political aims. Language and religion are both used as symbolic powers and instruments for political struggle.

3 The importance of ethnic identification and categorisation in the Malaysian local universities

The main issue in the local tertiary institutions is significantly related to the identification and distribution of *bumiputra* privileges. The term *bumiputra* (Malays, aboriginal people and natives of Sabah and Sarawak) was coined by Abdul Razak – the second Malaysian Prime Minister – during the implementation of the NEP in 1970. Although the NEP was officially discontinued in 1990 and in effect in 2002, the concept of *bumiputraism* remains important in the Malaysian tertiary educational system.

Prior to the NEP in 1970, the Malaysian tertiary institutions were monopolised by the Chinese and that consequently produced high numbers of Chinese professionals, as was reported in the 1968 Labour Report. Admission to Malaysian higher education institutions at that time was primarily based on merit. It was in the implementation of the NEP that the State decided to change merit-based admission to a quota-based system. The aim was to give Malays more opportunities to access tertiary education, especially in science and technology. Initially, the quota allocated 75% of quota-based admission places to *bumiputra*. Over subsequent years, the quota was slowly decreased to 55% for *bumiputra* with the rest distributed between Chinese (35%) and Indians and Others (10%). In 1990, admission into a local university was no longer based on quota but on merit.

During the implementation of the NEP, a new university – the University of Technology Malaysia (UiTM) – was opened exclusively for *bumiputra*. Additionally, although quota-based admission to local universities was discontinued, it was simply transferred and continued in the pre-university level:

Matriculation Centres and Foundation Study (colleges which prepare students for local university). Initially, the ratio of *bumiputra* to non-*bumiputra* in admissions to pre-university level was 90:10 but it recently changed to 55:45 (Raman and Sua, 2010). The pre-university qualification is important for Malaysians when they come to submit an application to Malaysian universities. Those whose application is rejected in the pre-university admission – regardless of their ethnic identity – can obtain the appropriate qualification by using another examination result: STPM. The STPM can be taken after two years of study in any national secondary school. However, a contention arises when one-year of study at pre-university level is treated as equivalent to two years of study in the sixth form.

Before the allocated quota goes to the right applicants, a definition of *bumiputra* must first be agreed. In general, *bumiputra* refers to Malays and aboriginals in the peninsula, and natives of Sarawak and Sabah. Legally, however, there is no definition of *bumiputra*. The Malaysian Constitution only provides the separate definition of these groups: Malays and indigenous people (Article 160 (2)), natives of Sarawak (Article 161A(6)(a)), and natives of Sabah (Article 161A(6)(b)) (*see* Appendix E). The definitive definition of *bumiputra* is offered by the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). According to the 2007/2008 Guidebook for entrance to public higher learning institutions for SPM/equivalent holders, an applicant living in the *peninsula* is considered as *bumiputra* if one of the parents is Muslim Malay or aboriginal as stated in Article 160 (2) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. In *Sabah*, an applicant will be categorised as *bumiputra* if the child was born in Sabah or the father was domiciled in Sabah at the time of birth, and one of the parents is an indigenous native of Sabah, as stated in Article 161A (6)(b) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. An applicant in *Sarawak* will be considered as *bumiputra* if both parents are indigenous natives of Sarawak, as stated in Article 161A (6)(a) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. These fixed definitions of *bumiputra* in a way therefore reflect colonial identification and categorisation discourse in which the definition of Malay was first outlined in the 1913 Malay Reserved Land Act in order to create a distinction between Malays and the Others.

In addition to the quota-based system at pre-university level and a longer duration of study in the sixth form (one additional year), local applicants must

first pass Malay language as the main requirement for local universities. In other words, there are a few issues which need to be taken into consideration in Malaysian tertiary level education. First, those who are in an inter-ethnic marriage need to consider the official identification of their children because according to the identification, a child's educational opportunities will be affected. Only in Sarawak is a child's identification based compulsorily on the father's ethnicity. For example, a child born to a non-*bumiputra* man (such as a Chinese) and a *bumiputra* woman (such as an Iban native) in Sarawak would be identified as Chinese. One Chinese respondent stated that his identity as Chinese was the reason for him being rejected by UiTM. He said:

> I applied for UTM and UiTM but my application was rejected. I am
> from Sarawak. Since my father is a Chinese and my mother is an Iban,
> I was considered as Chinese. I lost my chance to study in UiTM
> because I am not considered as *bumiputra*. (Danish, Chinese male
> interviewed in Penang)

Second, the Malay language is an important qualification for securing a place in a Malaysian local university. As I explained in the preceding section, future educational prospects are crucial for some Chinese in deciding between a national Chinese school and an ICSS. Since there is a quota-based admission system for pre-university (55:45 between *bumiputra* and non-*bumiputra*) and a Malay language requirement, the Chinese usually prepare themselves with a few tertiary educational alternatives in mind. Two Chinese respondents interviewed in Glasgow shared their disappointment about this, explaining:

> I had a difficulty in getting a place in a local university. Did you know
> that UKM, UM and USM are like the best universities in Malaysia for a
> medical course? If I were given choices, I would want to go to UM, but
> I didn't get the chance. Even for SPM holders, to get into university is
> like 90% for Malays and 10% for Chinese. So it is very difficult for us
> [Chinese] to get into these local universities. (Terry, Chinese male
> interviewed in Glasgow)

> I think it is difficult for us to get a place in the local university
> because of the quota. (Jenny, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

These two statements, however, came from the respondents' everyday understanding of the admission quota. In Terry's understanding, the quota was the main reason for his disadvantage in terms of tertiary educational

opportunities. Another Chinese respondent, however, believed that despite the existence of a quota at pre-university level, the opportunity still depends on the applicant's qualification. He said:

> Of course the quota system might influence our admission. But I think that is a minor factor. The major factor depends on the students themselves. (Lincoln, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

Chinese applicants from high-income households can escape the 'educational issue' by preparing themselves to study abroad in Mandarin-speaking countries through a UEC provided by ICSS, or English-speaking countries through A-Level grades awarded by private colleges. Another tertiary educational alternative favoured by the Chinese is a private local university such as New Era College (NEC), Southern College and Han Jiang College. The importance of ethnic identification and categorisation in Malaysian tertiary educational institutions would further create the everyday understanding that there is an unequal distribution between Malaysians. This outcome would also create a need for an alternative educational system (ICSSs and local private universities) especially for the Malaysian Chinese community.

4   Ethnicity and friendships

Respondents' friendships in Malaysian elementary and secondary schools

All of the respondents in this study had graduated from Malaysian elementary and secondary schools: national or private. Therefore, the discussion presented in this section reflects their friendships in the Malaysian schools exclusively. As I discussed above, the majority of Malay and Chinese respondents – whether for reasons of ethnic interest, future education or career prospects – had been enrolled into Malay and Chinese schools respectively. Several studies have suggested that friendships formed in Malaysian elementary and secondary schools are predominantly confined inside 'racial', language and religious boundaries (Santhiram, 1995; Jamil *et al.*, 2004; Sua *et al.*, 2013).

Empirically, my analysis suggests that the Malay and the Chinese respondents who had enrolled in national Malay and national Chinese schools respectively had no close friends from different ethnic groups. Language and religion were the main barriers to wider friendships. However, at the same time I also discovered that language could act as an extension for multi-ethnic friendships. Because of the possibility of different outcomes, I have provided here three different patterns of friendships that can happen in Malay-dominated schools, Chinese-dominated schools and relatively well-balanced Malay and Chinese schools in terms of numbers. These conditions are based on the respondents' experiences and educational backgrounds.

In the Malay-dominated schools, especially in the religious schools, it is possibly very difficult for inter-ethnic relationships to happen. My argument is not made on the basis of the respondents' social preferences but more on the chance and possibility of meeting different ethnic groups than Malay due to their religious differences. Additionally, since the SBP and MRSM are mainly dominated by *bumiputra* particularly Malays, this also limits the opportunities for them to meet and socialise with someone from a different ethnicity.

The same result occurred in the Chinese-dominated schools. The respondents who had graduated from these schools claimed that their friends were Chinese as the number of Malay students was relatively very small. Once again, this is not because of the degree of social preferences but the limited chances to meet more Malays in a Chinese school. Moreover, two different subjects (Islamic Subject and Morals) allocated for different categories of ethnic group in national schools could further pull them apart, as one respondent explained:

> There were no Malay pupils in my elementary school because it was a Chinese primary school. Emmmm ... but maybe there were one or two, but still they were not in my class. I went to a national Chinese secondary school. In my secondary school, we had to learn Chinese [Mandarin] and Moral subjects. The Malay students had to take an Islamic subject. During the subject period [Moral and Islamic subject], we would be divided into two classes. [...] I didn't have any Malay friends during my elementary and secondary school. (Meiling, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Additionally, a Malay respondent from a Chinese-dominated secondary school also stated that all of his close friends were Malays and Indians. Although he

could be friends with the Chinese students, language was the main barrier which prohibited him from being too close to them. Because of this obstacle, he confessed that he felt more comfortable being around Indians as they preferred to talk in the Malay language, even when conversing amongst themselves. He commented:

> My secondary school was an SMK, but it was located in a Chinese area. I was in the Science class. There were only a few Malay students. Most of my classmates were Chinese and Indians. They were all my friends but Indians were closer to me because they are same; they are like Malays. They speak in the Malay language even among themselves. (Amir, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

Although religion and language were barriers to inter-ethnic friendships, language at the same time could act as an extension between Malays and Chinese. For example, a Chinese who had studied in a Malay-dominated school and a Chinese who had studied in a Chinese-dominated school told me that:

> I know how to speak in five languages, Malay, Mandarin, English [...] Compared with my sisters, I have lot of friends. My sisters mixed around with Chinese only, but I mixed around with different people. So, I grew up with a lot of contacts. I feel very happy with a lot of friends. (Anna, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

> One of my best friends in primary school was Malay. He was a Malay student. He could speak very good Mandarin. He got B in Chinese language for UPSR. This was quite good because he came from a family that could not use Chinese like people who speak Chinese at home. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

Language indirectly can create commonality, connectedness and groupness. Although people probably do not consider themselves as being in the same ethnicity, the language can at least reduce the gap between them. In Anna's case, she knew how to speak Malay which helped her to extend beyond the Malay-language boundary. The same situation applied to Shaun's friend, who could extend his social circle through Mandarin. This suggests that language is an important medium for inter-ethnic relationships.

In the schools with relatively balanced numbers of Malay and Chinese students, I found that their social circles were mainly shaped by ethnicity. Most of these schools are located in urban areas. For instance, Ah Man – a Chinese respondent

who had graduated from a national Chinese elementary school and had later furthered his study in a national Malay secondary school – faced difficulty in interacting with Malay students due to his low proficiency in the Malay language. He admitted that he had struggled with the language during the early years of his study. He said that:

> I spoke Chinese since my childhood and then I studied at a Chinese primary school. I did not have any problem communicating with my friends there because we had the same identity, ethnicity and religion. We were in the same group. Whatever we talked about was the same thing. So, there was no problem for me. In my secondary school [a Malay secondary school], I think almost all of the Chinese students would group themselves with someone from the same ethnicity. The same goes for the Malay students. When we were in class, we liked to talk with someone using the same language. During my Forms One and Two, I think our BM was not really fluent yet. So, our communication with Malays was limited. But it changed when we were in Forms Three, Four and Five. (Ah Man, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

According to this account, he and the other Chinese students had inevitably formed their own circles, especially in the first two years of study, due to their lack of proficiency in the Malay language and of common interests as well as the religious barriers. Even though his Malay language was improving in his third year, the peer circle was already established – thus creating boundaries which are not easily broken. Another possible reason for his otherness from the Malays was different religious beliefs and scope of interest, which further created a distance between him and other Malay students. Ah Man's situation had also been experienced by another Malay respondent who went to a school with relatively balanced numbers of Malay and Chinese students. She said:

> I went to a national secondary school. It was a mixed school because it was an urban school. The Chinese were okay with us [Malays] but in terms of friendship, I think it was a little bit less. I mean they liked to be with their own people. (Noor, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

As a summary of this section, comments made by respondents from Malay-dominated schools, Chinese-dominated schools and schools with relatively balanced numbers of Malays and Chinese suggest that there was a high tendency for them to form a friendship or peer circle based on language and religion. However, inter-ethnic friendships could possibly happen if both sides (or even

just one side) know how to speak in the opposite ethnic group's language, as was experienced by two of the respondents quoted in page 192.

Respondents' friendships and networks in the tertiary institutions: Penang and Glasgow

Male and female respondents in Penang

It was in 2009 that I first travelled to Penang. The purpose of my visit was recreational. I still remember that at the end of my visit, I left with impressions that Penang is truly 'food heaven' and the second place – after Kuala Lumpur – where I could see so many Malays and Chinese. That was my basic understanding of Penang. During my four months fieldwork in USM in 2013, I got opportunities to observe, although briefly, the social pattern in USM. While waiting for my respondents – usually outside the library or in the university café – I saw that the majority of Malay and Chinese students would walk separately in different groups. They talked, joked and laughed in their mother tongue. There were a few times when a respondent and I would go for lunch after the interview in the university café. There, I once again noticed how Malays and Chinese would sit together with their Malay and Chinese friends respectively, looking comfortable within their own social circle (*Fieldnotes*, Penang, 23 July 2013). I had a chance to ask one respondent, Anna, about this. According to her, it was normal for the Malay and Chinese students to group themselves based on their ethnic identity, probably due to their familiarity with one another.

My explanation for all this rests on the religious and cultural factors. As I explored and discussed in the preceding chapter, religion and customs are intricately related in the Malay community. It is inevitable that Islam is a way of life for Muslims (Frisk, 2009) covering both public and private spaces (Sua *et al.*, 2013). Religion influences Malays' daily activities, especially food preparation, food consumption, gender expectations and relationships. On another separate occasion, one of my Malay female respondents invited me to her hostel dorm which she shared with another Malay girl. During our discussion, I asked her why she chose to live with another Malay. She replied:

> No … the hostel's administrator decided for us. (Amirah, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

In another interview with a Malay female respondent, I got the same answer. She stated that:

> The administrator would never put Malays and non-Malays in the same room. I am not really sure why. Maybe if (*thinking*) maybe the student would request to change the room if they had to stay with someone from a different religion. (Amelina, Malay female respondent interviewed in Penang)

Possibly, the religious expectations in Malays' daily activities have made selection of a roommate or housemate an important concern in the university residences. The Malay male respondents who lived in private accommodation expressed no issue about living with different ethnic groups, but stressed their preference to live with Malays or Muslims. The same answer came from the Chinese respondents, regardless of their gender. In this situation, language was considered to be a minor obstacle, since religious obligation and cultural expectation have now become the primary factor, as outlined by two respondents:

> It is easier if we are staying with Malays, especially for praying. We definitely understand each other. If we share our house with a Chinese (*pause*) it will be a hassle if they want to bring in something *haram* such as pork. (Hasyim, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

> Because we can eat everything, but for Muslims they need to eat *halal* foods only, right? I think that separates us from them. (Ah Man, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

The Malay female respondents, however, put an emphasis on their gender relationships. Two of the Malay female respondents highlighted the daily religious duties (especially praying five times) and gender expectations as important criteria for their friendships. Amirah, for example, stressed religious duty and gender as the main factors in her friendships. Amirah came from a dedicated Malay-Muslim family. She spoke of her concern about her gender expectations. Even though there is no definite prohibition in Islam against Muslim women becoming friends with men, the relationship must be based on what are considered to be valid reasons, such as educational, medical or economic connections. In order to preserve her identity as a Muslim woman,

Amirah was very selective about whom she could go out with during her leisure activities. She stated that:

> If I want to go out, I need to think about my religious obligations [daily prayers]. I don't have any problem if we only meet inside the campus. I would never go out with a man. I don't really mind if non-Malay women ask me to go out with them, but if it is a man, then I need to reconsider it. If I am studying abroad, my priority is still based on gender, regardless of her identity … I think. (Amirah, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

Amelina, on the other hand, asserted outright that she preferred Malay women as her potential friends. Similar to Amirah, Amelina was concerned about her religious duties, especially her daily prayers. As explored in the previous chapters, understanding ethnicity requires us to understand the maintenance of the boundaries which can separate one group from another. Since Islam is a significant boundary for Malay-ness, this made Amirah's and Amelina's friend preferences an ethnic issue. In other words, ethnicity always had a role in their friendships, as explicitly outlined by Amelina:

> My first priority is Malay. I prefer Malays because it is easier for me to pray, because I will have a friend to accompany me. We can pray together. I mean the Malay girls. (Amelina, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

On the other hand, the importance of language in the respondents' friendships depended on their regionality identity. The Chinese from Kelantan, Sabah and Sarawak were frequently mentioned by respondents (interviewed in both locations) as those whom they were more likely to socialise with and be accepted into the Malay community. The proximity between the Malays and the Chinese originating from these states is easily built due to their ability to speak in a Malay-regional language, as one respondent explained:

> I have a Chinese friend, but she is a Chinese from Kelantan. They are different, right? She is okay and she can speak Malay fluently, her best friend is a Malay, and she can stay in one room with her Malay friend. (Noor, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

As a Chinese from Sarawak, Danish noticed that there was a difference in the treatment by peninsular Chinese towards him. According to him, the Chinese-Penangites were the most unapproachable. He shared this experience with his

roommate – a Chinese-Penangite – and the outcome was quite detrimental. Danish's family dialect was FooChow/Hokchiu, which is different from the Chinese-Penangite dialect: Hokkien. Although both of them were Chinese, the dialect had heightened the boundary between them. He stated that:

> I am actually not really close to my roommate. He is a Chinese local [Penangite]. At first (*pause*), I don't know (pause), sometimes he like (*pause*) I don't really know. I can feel that he (*pause and thinking*) it is very awkward between him and me. We simply cannot communicate with each other. I tried to talk with him, sometimes […] Maybe because I am a FooChow. Most of the Chinese in my hometown are FooChow. (Danish, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

With the marginalisation of Chinese-Penangites (Hokkien speakers), the Chinese from Sabah and Sarawak frequently feel comfortable being around Malays. At the end of our discussion about his social circle, he admitted that most of his friends were *bumiputras*. He added:

> I rarely stay in my room. I prefer to stay in my friend's room. Most of my friends are Malays and *bumiputras*. I have Chinese friends but I feel like (*pause*) I don't know how to describe it. I think, Chinese in the peninsula are different from the Chinese in Sarawak and Sabah. They are not really friendly so I don't know why they are different (*laughs*). (Danish, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

Malays are not the only *bumiputra* living in Sabah and Sarawak. There are several other *bumiputra* groups there such as Bidayuh, Iban and Melanau who live side-by-side with Malays and Chinese in the east of Malaysia. Since Malays and Chinese are not the majority group in Sabah and Sarawak, the languages used in these locations are not necessarily Malay or Chinese. In Sarawak, the Iban language is also frequently used among the populace, as Alex explained:

> Most of the people there [in Sarawak] know how to speak in Iban so the Malay language is not the only language that can be used in the community. But, the Iban language sounds a little bit like Malay. (Alex, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

Alex also argued that his proficiency in the Malay language is actually rare for a Chinese in the peninsula. By proficiency, I mean his Malay pronunciation, which was almost as clear as that of the Malay respondents – making him the only Chinese respondent who could speak Malay extremely well. Based on his experiences of residing in two different locations (Sarawak and Penang), Alex

stressed the importance of language in friendships between Malays and Chinese residing in the peninsula. Another respondent from Sarawak also expressed the same idea, arguing that the gap between Malays and Chinese exists widely across the peninsula in comparison with her previous hometown. They both claimed that:

> I have noticed that after I moved to the peninsula, the culture is totally different between Penang and Kapit [his hometown in Sarawak]. In Sarawak, there are multiple ethnic groups. We live side-by-side and we don't mind at all. But in Penang, I can notice the concept of race, not to say racism, but we have a tendency to group people based on race. So, it is obvious that the Chinese will stick with Chinese, and so do Malays with Malays. (Alex, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

> I think (*pause*) this is just my opinion, the Chinese will try to find a Chinese first as their friend. That is why they like to be in their Chinese group. As for me, I came from Sarawak but I can be friends with any Malays. When I asked my friends from Sarawak, they told me the same thing. They said that the Chinese locals don't really like to be friends with Malays. I am sorry about this. (Shui, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

The importance of language was agreed by the Chinese-Penangites. The Chinese-Penangites were selective about whom they wanted to socialise with. Their preference was related to societal pressure in Penang and the strong religious and cultural barriers that need to be reconsidered during their inter-ethnic relationships with Malays. In some cases, favouritism was shown on the basis of intra-ethnic levels, since the Chinese-Penangites preferred to be with Chinese from Penang than from other states. This was explained by one Chinese-Penangite who said that:

> We will have group discussions and we normally gather with the island group (Penang). So, the mainland group will gather with their counterparts and the KL will gather with their KL members. So, normally in Penang, most of the students in my class are Chinese, so we gather with the Chinese. (Jenny, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

At this point, a question emerges: why can language significantly influence Malay-Chinese friendships more in the peninsula than in Sabah and Sarawak (east of Malaysia)? One possible answer may be that language is one of the main reasons for ethno-political contestations between Malay and Chinese perceptions

of the ideal nation. For Malay assimilationists, a homogenous language is important for building a nation, whilst Chinese pluralists want the Chinese language to be considered as part of Malaysian culture in order to ensure the coexistence of diverse languages and cultural elements (this issue will be further discussed in Chapter Seven). As suggested by Bourdieu (1993), language should be viewed not only as a means of communication (practical implication) but also as a medium of power through which individuals pursue their own interests and display their practical competence. This conflict of differing perspectives is more highly perceptible in Peninsular Malaysia than in the east of Malaysia, where the maintenance of Chinese vernacular schools is strong. Unfortunately, this leads to divisions between Malays and Chinese, which consequently become barriers which make their inter-ethnic friendships difficult. This can also be considered as one reason why the number of inter-ethnic marriages in the peninsula is not as high as in Sabah and Sarawak.

Friendships based on dialects did not only occur among the Chinese. The Malay respondents also had a tendency for groupness based on dialects, as one respondent confirmed:

> Even we, Malays, we have our own tendency to be with someone from the same state, right? That's why people always say that when a Kelantanese meets another Kelantanese, they will ignore their friends. (Azlan, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

This leads to the formation of voluntary associations which are based on cultural (language and custom) and religious boundaries. For example, on the USM official website, dialect and regional-based clubs are officially recognised, such as GAPP (Penangite Student Association) and AMLIS (Perlis-born Student Association). At the same time, there are also religious-based societies such as the Buddhist Association and the Catholic Association.

However, location can change respondents' attitudes to choosing friends. Ethnicity, according to respondents in Penang, is no longer significant if they are abroad. One respondent claimed that:

> The situation changes if I am abroad. It will be difficult for us if we are very selective. We don't have much option when we are abroad. Unlike here [in Malaysia] where we can choose our friends. We need

> to vary our options when we are abroad. Being abroad, we can get to know other *Bangsa* [ethnic group] too. Maybe at that time we would fully apply the concept of nationality; we are friends on the basis of nationality. (Nuh, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

Even though the respondents in Penang recognised religious and cultural factors as challenges for inter-ethnic friendships between Malays and Chinese, and different dialects for intra-ethnic friendships, they were very optimistic about Malay-Chinese relationships on the basis of nationality abroad. This suggests that situation and context could change identity preferences – on the basis of either ethnicity or nationality.

Male and female respondents in Glasgow

The religious factor remained significantly important for the Malays in Glasgow. In a previous chapter, I discussed the different levels of religious toleration between Malay respondents in Penang and in Glasgow. I also claimed that the respondents in Glasgow were more religiously tolerant during their relationships between different ethnicities and nationalities. Although there was a high degree of toleration, my findings suggest that both ethnic groups were relatively selective about whom they will live with, but are not so selective about who they will be friends with.

To choose their friends, the respondents in Glasgow (regardless of their ethnicity) were not so confined within their ethnic groups, in contrast with the respondents in Penang. However, the majority of the respondents in Glasgow were living with someone from the same ethnic identity and nationality. Religious boundaries were especially important in their decision. In this case, the religious boundaries were not really used to emphasise the differences between Malays and Chinese but rather to highlight the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. This situation is different from the Malaysian context where Malays and non-Malays can be differentiated on the basis of religion. The difference also suggests the importance of the State's identification and categorisation system in Malaysia. The difference is also possibly because of different socio-economic contexts with non-exclusiveness of religion on the part of the Malays.

The Malay female respondents were particularly strict in selecting their flatmate(s). The reason for this was their Muslim responsibility to preserve and practise the regulations, particularly in relation to religious obligations regarding *aurah*[18] and food preparation and consumption. As I discussed in the preceding chapter, although the Malay respondents in Glasgow had many choices regarding manufactured goods, they had limited choices for *halal* butchery. Additionally, the Malay respondents also needed to avoid pork products, which made it even more convenient to choose to live with other Malays. Those left with no choice would rather live with other Muslims regardless of their nationality – often Pakistani. Most Chinese respondents also agreed that food preparation and consumption was the main barrier preventing them from living with Malay Malaysians, as was explained by one respondent:

> There are advantages in staying with someone from the same ethnic identity. Malaysia is a Muslim country. We are Buddhist. We all grow up understanding that Muslims cannot eat some specific food like pork, and that all their food needs to be *halal*. For Chinese, we do not necessary need to eat *halal* food. In terms of cooking, it will be more convenient. I understand that I, a non-Muslim Chinese, cannot share my cooking utensils with Muslims. (Shun, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

The married Malay respondents, on the other hand, not only tended to choose a neighbourhood with a *halal* butchery but also a neighbourhood which is populated by other Malaysian families. Most of the Malay married respondents chose to stay in Govanhill, an area of Glasgow which has many Muslim facilities such as *halal* shops and a mosque. For example, one respondent explained:

> I am living around Govanhill. There are lots of Malay Malaysians there. At the beginning, I planned to find a flat in the city centre but the Malaysian community suggested that I should rent a flat in Govanhill because it would be easier for me to get *halal* foods. So far, that area is fine. The area is not really 'Glasgow' because there are lots of international tenants in my neighbourhood. Most of them are not Scottish. The majority of them are Pakistani. I am not choosy. I chose a particular area because of my family. (Rahim, a Malay male respondent interviewed in Glasgow)

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[18] These are specific dress codes which must be followed by Muslim women, such as hair and body cover.

He stated that his neighbourhood is not 'Glasgow' in nature because the surrounding population are mainly Pakistani-Muslim with whom a commonality can be formed on the basis of religion. Additionally, lifestyle choices and values such as alcohol drinking and cohabitation with persons of the opposite sex before marriage are prohibited in many Islamic practices, and might well be crucial decisive factors when choosing a flatmate. Chinese respondents were aware of this issue. Therefore, in order to avoid any problems in the future, both ethnicities implicitly agree to live separately whilst understanding and respecting each other's decision. They stated that:

> Sometimes I think it's just because of religion. Like I mentioned earlier, it is about the food. Yeah ... for Chinese and Indians, we can go and hang out together in any restaurant [...] For Buddhists, Buddha advised us not to drink. But somehow, we are like rubbish students (*laughs*). We do hang out like sometimes on a couple of nights. In Malaysia, we don't drink that much to be honest. I think it is mainly because of the food and our life styles. (Shun, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

> My Chinese friend actually asked me whether I am okay with a boy in the same flat. It was totally a no for me. I mean it is prohibited in my religion as well, but it is totally normal for them. You know, maybe at one time they will want to bring boyfriends home. So, I might be feeling uncomfortable with that. (Asma, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

The majority of the male respondents in Glasgow, regardless of their ethnicity, appeared to be less selective compared with Malay female respondents. They seem to have fewer issues with friends drinking, as long as the friends respect their rights in regards to praying and food conduct. With this attitude, some Malay male respondents had no issue about living with someone from a different ethnicity or nationality, as one respondent had experienced:

> I never purposely chose to stay with someone from a different ethnic background. I was already renting the place. They came later. Interestingly enough, I have never lived with a Muslim throughout my study here. I am in my fourth year here. It is just by chance. I found a place that I am comfortable with. They also respect my religion [Islam]. I have my own cutlery set with pots and pans, and we keep them separated. I share some [food] with them. If they want to share with me, they will buy something that is vegetarian-friendly. They also are not the party-type and even if they want to drink alcohol, they will make sure it is not in front of me. (Suhaimi, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

In contrast with the respondents in Penang, language can be considered to be the least significant barrier in regard to Malay-Chinese friendships in Glasgow, as English can be used to connect them. The primary language used during Malay interactions with Chinese in Glasgow was English. Thus, language as an ethnic boundary was not strongly maintained between the Malays and the Chinese in Glasgow compared with the respondents in Penang. This is because the pressure on being Malay or Chinese according to which language they use is less observed by or expected from them abroad.

Basically, the final result of friendships among the respondents in Glasgow appears to be less homogenous in comparison with the respondents in Penang. Moreover, being identified as Malaysian is more beneficial than being identified as Malay or Chinese in Glasgow. With national identity, most Malaysians abroad feel obliged to help any newcomer from Malaysia, as Ah Boa had found:

> When I first came to Glasgow, I didn't want to stay in student accommodation because it was very expensive. So I stayed at a temporary lodging in which some of the Malaysians allowed me to stay for two weeks. And, in the meantime, I was looking for a place to stay where another Malaysian had stayed previously. (Ah Boa, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

Hospitality on the basis of national identity was experienced by respondents in Glasgow regardless of their ethnicity. The respondents in Glasgow admitted that their compatriots were helpful in assisting them to set up their new life in Glasgow. Some respondents had received assistance from a Malaysian voluntary association such as Malaysian Glasgow Community/*Komuniti Malaysia Glasgow* (KMG) and Glasgow University Malaysian Society (GUMS) to find a flat and flatmate(s), and some had received suggestions about starting their life in Glasgow. The interaction was mostly conducted through the Facebook platform. The KMG and GUMS are both private groups on Facebook and membership must be approved by the group's committees. The KMG membership is open to all Malaysians in Glasgow whereas GUMS is limited to Malaysian students at the University of Glasgow. There is a possibility that this social networking may have influenced many of the respondents' decision-making processes and decisions in Glasgow – or at least in the early stage of their arrival in Glasgow.

There are also many Malaysian community events held in Glasgow throughout the year which aim for multi-ethnic attendance, such as Malaysian Cultural Nights, Malaysian Food Market (*Pasar Hari Malaysia*), Malaysian Independence celebration (*Hari Kemerdekaan Malaysia*), Malaysian Family Days (*Hari Keluarga Malaysia*) and Malaysian Sports Days (*Hari Sukan Malaysia*). In some religious celebrations and events, multi-ethnic attendances are encouraged, such as *Eid Fitri* and the Chinese New Year.

Picture 4: 2017 Chinese New Year Celebration taken from GUMS' Facebook page

Additionally, the picture below show some of the posters circulated on the KMG and GUMS Facebook pages promoting their programme to all Malaysians in Glasgow. The programme of events for the Malaysian community is sometimes not limited to Glasgow but also occurs in other parts of the UK, such as the 2016 Malaysian Independence carnival which was held in England.

Picture 5: Posters for Malaysian events in Glasgow and England

A comparison of the discussions with respondents in Penang and in Glasgow shows that ethnic boundaries – language, religion and customs – were important in both locations but to different degrees. The boundaries also influenced the type of voluntary associations established in Penang and in Glasgow. In Penang, some of the voluntary associations are based on regionality (such as for students from Kedah and Penang), religion (such as Buddhist and Catholic association) and ethnic group's language and arts (such as *Tionghua* cultural association), whereas in Glasgow voluntary associations were mainly based on nationality identity. The foundation of these associations was formulated on the basis of their different contexts, needs and interlocutors.

5   Conclusion

There are two main points that can be retrieved from the discussion above. First, the discussion in this chapter has shown that there is a dialectical relationship between the State and everyday actors which subsequently creates

the importance of ethnicity in the Malaysian educational system. Although enrolment decisions in elementary and secondary schools were made on the basis of regionality, family socio-economic status, future tertiary chances and career prospects, the decision always falls inside the language and religious boundaries, which ultimately have ethnicised the process of decision-making. In other words, ethnicity as something instrumentally used for personal or group profit seems limited within the State identification and categorisation of ethnicity and by the everyday actors' assumed shared-boundaries. On the micro-level, the everyday actors seem to have choice but to a larger extent, and it seems that these identities are experienced and dealt with as 'given' or as resting on factors which are felt to be 'given'.

Second, in regard to the respondents' social networking, religious and language boundaries seem to have influenced the respondents' friendships in their elementary and secondary schools. During their tertiary education, the respondents in Penang – especially the Malay female respondents – showed a high tendency to maintain the boundaries in their friendships. However, the importance of religious and cultural boundaries in Malaysia and Glasgow differed in degree, which led to different formations of voluntary associations in these two locations. In Penang, some of the voluntary associations for USM's students were based on ethnic boundaries (religion, language and arts) and regionality. In Glasgow, however, the main voluntary associations were based on nationality, such as GUMS and KMG. This suggests that the identification and categorisation of Malays and Chinese is contextual and depends on the nature of commonality, connectedness and groupness. What is important in Penang is not necessarily important in Glasgow, which supports my argument in the previous chapter that the importance of ethnic boundaries is contextual and situational. In the next chapter, I shall discuss how these educational qualifications affected the respondents' employment opportunities and challenges in the Malaysian labour force.

Chapter Seven: Ethnicity, Malaysian political economy and nation-of-intent

1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have explored the importance of ethnic identification and categorisation based on assumed shared-history and assumed shared-boundaries in the Malaysian bureaucratic system and in the respondents' interactions and decisions. The significance of ethnicity was expressed in the dialectical relationship between the State (authority-defined) and the everyday actor (everyday-defined). The results of their interactions were found to affect the respondents' school enrolment, choice of tertiary education, spouse or partner preferences and social networking. In this final empirical chapter of this work, the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia will be further discussed within the context of Malaysia's labour force and political affairs. This chapter is divided into two major sections: the *economy* and *politics*. In the 'economy' section, I shall discuss the issues pertaining to the implementation of the NEP and *bumiputraism* within Malaysia's labour force. In the 'politics' section, I shall highlight the respondents' political views and their definitions of an ideal nation in the competition for nation-of-intent between the State (the ruling political party) and the opposition political party. The discussion presented in this chapter departs from the theoretical point that ethnicity is an instrument used to achieve particular goals in economic and political projects.

2 Ethnic identification and categorisation in the economy: their maintenance and challenges within Malaysia's employment sector

According to the Malaysian Labour Report, Malaysia's workforce (public and private) is divided into five categories. The *first* category is the elite-primary or upper-tier primary core group of workers; it refers to university graduates or those with professional qualifications. The workers in this category are known as skilled workers. The *second* type of workforce is secondary-primary white-collar

workers. The workers in this category have a higher school qualification, such as SPM or STPM, but do not have a university degree. The *third* group is secondary-primary blue-collar workers, consisting of workers with vocational or technical qualifications. The *fourth* group comprises secondary workers with lower-intermediate qualifications (LCE, PMR and equivalent). They usually work as unskilled workers in production jobs such as factory workers or transportation workers. The *final* workforce group are the casual, marginalised, unskilled secondary workers. Those in this category are known as unskilled workers with no formal schooling. They might possess at most an elementary school qualification. They usually work in production jobs but the opportunities for them to move are extremely limited and they have no job security (Ling and Jomo, 2010).

Based on their educational background, the respondents in this study can be divided into two groups: undergraduate and post-graduate students. Most of the post-graduate students possessed work experience as elite-primary workers and most of the undergraduate students possessed work experience as temporary, secondary-primary white-collar workers or as temporary, unskilled secondary workers. Both groups' working preferences were as elite-primary workers in the public or private sectors. The discussion which follows will therefore reflect the respondents' aims to become elite-primary workers, with their experiences as elite-primary workers, temporary secondary-primary white-collar workers and temporary unskilled secondary workers. This 'economy' section is divided into two parts. In the first part I shall discuss the impact of the State's identification and categorisation of ethnicity and *bumiputraism* in Malaysia's working sector, and in the second I shall focus on the everyday understandings of ethnicity within the Malaysian workforce.

The NEP and *Bumiputraism* in Malaysia's public and private workforces

Historically, during the colonial era, ethnic groups were occupationally and residentially segregated. The Malays mainly specialised in agriculture, such as paddy planting and small-scale maritime activities. The majority of the Chinese worked in the mining areas or conducted businesses in urban areas. After

independence in 1957, particularly before the implementation of the NEP in 1970, Malay representation in the upper-level occupations, managerial and professional positions was small in comparison with non-Malays. Professional positions in this context refer to architects, accountants, engineers, dentists, doctors, veterinary surgeons, surveyors and lawyers (Malaysian Plan, 1981-85). The low proportion of Malays in this sector was due to their social and economic disadvantages. The NEP was formulated on the basis that Malays and other natives did not have a proportionate share in the national economy appropriate to their status as the indigenous people in Malaysia. With the implementation of the NEP, the labour force profile changed greatly (Ling and Jomo, 2010), with increased numbers of *bumiputras* in the managerial and professional sectors (Lee, 2012).

However, after the withdrawal of the NEP in 1990, the momentum of change in the Malaysian labour force showed a decline from the mid-1990s onwards (Lee, 2012). *Bumiputra* graduates in the mid-1990s faced more difficulties in entering the Malaysian labour force (both public and private), not because of their incompetence but because of the static nature of the upper-level occupations and their high concentration in the public sector which led to high competition between them. Additionally, Ling and Jomo (2010) found that, as a reaction to the *bumiputraism* in the public working sector, some employers in private organisations, especially Chinese-controlled and small-scale enterprises, preferred to recruit non-*bumiputra* as skilled-workers. Lee and Khalid even suggested that there was a mutual bias "against non-Malays in the Malay-controlled public sector and against Malays in the Chinese-controlled and foreign-controlled private sector" (2016, p.53).

Although the momentum of the NEP had started to decline, the *bumiputra* continued to have higher numbers as skilled workers in the public sector, but non-*bumiputras* were more likely to attain such positions in the private sector (Lee, 2012). The aim in this section is therefore to seek an explanation for the *bumiputra* and non-*bumiputra* domination within the public and private sectors respectively, from the perspective of the respondents interviewed in Penang and Glasgow. Was it really about the effect of *bumiputraism* and mutual bias, as

suggested by Ling and Jomo (2010) and Lee and Khalid (2015), or did it actually depend on individual and personal interest?

In regard to the respondents' working experiences, challenges and expectations, my early analysis had suggested two important findings. First, that Malay and Chinese respondents in both locations were aware of the Malay and Chinese employment concentration in the public and private sectors as the following comments made by the respondents show:

> I am working in Malaysian Nuclear Institution [government establishment]. There are not so many researchers there. It is a government sector and almost 90% are Malays. (Ridhuan, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

> I have experience working in marketing service at IMU [private institution]. I worked during my break before came to Glasgow. I had eight months for holiday. Majority are non-Malays. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

> I am working as research assistant here in USM. There are only one Chinese, and the rest are foreign students and Malays. (Nuh, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

Second, that personal motivation did play a role in their employment preferences. For example, the majority of the Malay respondents preferred to work in the government sector mainly because of job security and family tradition, as stressed by one respondent:

> I prefer to work in the government sector because it is more secure, especially for the pension, and maybe because all of my family members are working for the government. My parents, both of them are teachers and they have encouraged us to work in the government sector. (Amirah, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

Meanwhile, the Chinese respondents believed that the concentration of Chinese workers in the private sector was due to the sector's transparency in terms of promotion, high salaries and better employment contracts. They stated that:

> The Chinese don't like to work in the public sector because the salary range is not that high. They like to go to the private sector. (Anna, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

> It is not about why Chinese do not want to work in the government sector. We simply go to the private sector because there is more liquidity, more money and it is easier to get into. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

Regardless of these personal motivations, it still cannot be denied that there are privileges for *bumiputra* in the Malaysian public sector. Although the NEP was discontinued in 1990, affirmative action in the form of quota-based employment stated in Article 153 of the Federation of Malaya 1948 remains applicable in Malaysia's public workforce. Article 153's reference to quota-based employment in the public sector is applicable in four divisions: the Malaysian Home and Foreign Services (four Malays to one non-Malay), the Judicial and Legal Services (three to one), the Customs Services (three to one) and the police force (four to one). Except for these four divisions, the opportunities for Malaysians to get into government positions are equal between them. Additionally, no quotas were set for the professional and technical service (Means, 1972; Lim, 1985).

Although the quota is limited to four divisions only, the idea of quota-based admission seems to have been over-generalised for the Malay domination in the Malaysian public sector. For example, two of the Chinese respondents interviewed in Penang claimed that the quota was essentially the reason for the small number of Chinese representatives in the public sector. They said:

> I think it is difficult for a Chinese to get a place in the public sector. I think this is because of the Malays' quota. In USM, the number of Chinese staff members is smaller than that of Malays. Maybe 15% to 16% of the staff are Chinese. I mean, not in the academic field but as management. In my department, I only met one Chinese member of staff. So, this means that it is very hard and tough to get into the public sector. (Jenny, Chinese female interviewed in Penang)

> I am interested in working in the government sector. But I think for Chinese in Malaysia … errmm … it is quite hard for us to get into the public sector […] because the government had already set a quota. That's the point. (Ah Man, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

In Jenny's opinion, the *bumiputra* quota was the main obstacle preventing Chinese applicants from securing a place in the USM's management and administration department. Her statement was supported by Ah Man who believed that the Chinese face greater difficulties to entering the public sector.

The Chinese respondents in Glasgow, on the other hand, had a slightly different understanding of quota and ethnicity within the public sector. The majority of them were confident with the government's transparency in the public employment workforce:

> I think when it comes to job seeking, the quota is not important but in education, it is important. (Ah Boa, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

Most of the Chinese respondents in Glasgow were in receipt of a Malaysian national scholarship. The respondent quoted above, for example, was also supported by a JPA scholarship. Those Malaysians who receive a national scholarship have an obligation to work in an appropriate government agency depending on their field of study. Most of the Chinese respondents in Glasgow had already secured a position in the public sector and would therefore possibly have less hardship in their future employment in comparison with the self-sponsored Chinese students in Penang. Even so, the Chinese respondents in Glasgow were a little bit sceptical about the idea of career promotion in the government sector. One of them thought that priority for promotion would probably be given to the *bumiputra*. She stated that:

> In term of job promotion, I think that there are quotas allocated for Malays. It is an unfair competition between *bumi* and non-*bumi*. The government has a policy of reserving … let's say there are ten places; they reserve five for Malays, so I don't think that is fair. I don't mind if I don't get a promotion if I am not good enough, but I don't really prefer it if I don't get the promotion because the seat is being reserved for some people. (Shun, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

In sum, the *bumiputra* quota in the public sector was considered to be an important issue by the Chinese respondents in both Glasgow and Penang. However, their understandings varied at different levels. The majority of the Chinese in Penang thought that there was an immediate obstacle to them getting into the public sector, whereas the majority of the Chinese in Glasgow thought that the quota-based employment system was not really a barrier to getting into the public sector, but a potential barrier to promotion in a job.

For the Malay respondents, the high level of *bumiputras* relying on jobs in the public sector has created and increased competition between the *bumiputra* and the non-*bumiputra*, and within the *bumiputra* category itself. This was the main concern of the Malay respondents, as one explained:

> I prefer to work in the government sector but it will be very difficult because everyone is applying for the government sector. (Nina, Malay female respondent interviewed in Penang)

Since the privileges are limited to only four divisions, the *bumiputra* have to prove themselves eligible for such positions. According to Ali (2008), the main beneficiaries of political and economic privileges after independence were mainly the upper class – regardless of their ethnicity. One Malay respondent in Penang, for example, believed that there exists a biased distribution of the privileges within the public sector. He stated that:

> The *bumiputra* status is useful if you apply for a job in a lower rank. But if you apply for a high rank, I think it will be difficult. What you need right now is a 'cable' to help you to get the job. Today, everything is about having a 'cable' regardless of the sector [public or private] you want to apply to; it is same. (Ahmad, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

In Ahmad's opinion, it is easier for a *bumiputra* such as a Malay with no connections to get a job in lower-rank positions (particularly secondary-primary white-collar work), but he/she would possibly face the same difficulty as a non-*bumiputra* in securing a job in the government's upper ranks without a 'cable'. Literally, 'cable' – the English equivalent term would be 'string-pulling' - means an electric cable, but in Malaysian colloquial usage (particularly in this context), cable refers to a channel, medium or network which some people have in order to assist them in getting something they are interested in, particularly in economic and political affairs.

In Ahmad's understanding, he must compete with other *bumiputras* to get a job in the public sector, but the possibility for a *bumiputra* with internal influence to land the job is higher than for others, both *bumiputra* and non-*bumiputra* who have no internal influence. In his view, therefore, social capital is important. If that is the case, then employment in the public sector is no longer

centred around ethnicity, but rather on class and status hidden within a façade of ethnicity. One Chinese respondent, for example, stated that:

> Malays always get the advantage over Chinese in the public sector but I think the Malays still need to prove themselves. I believe that if you are good enough, you can always get the position. The problem is (*pause*) sometimes it is not transparent. How many Malays benefit from this policy? (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

In other words, although the implementation of the NEP in one way or another had caused expansion of the Malay middle class, it was not without struggle and hard work from them. I also found that the Malay awareness of class and status seems to be applicable only to the public sector. The majority of the Malay respondents expressed their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the treatment they had experienced in the private sector as a form of ethnic discrimination. For example, Norman shared his negative experiences in regard to the salary which he had received during his previous work in the service sector (the private sector). He stated that:

> I had no problem working with Chinese but I was not really satisfied with the basic salary. The basic salary between Chinese and Malay workers is different for the same job. As a waiter, the Malay workers get RM500 but the Chinese workers get RM800. I don't know why. We did the same job but from this experience, I can see that the employer will pay a salary based on race. (Norman, a Malay male interviewed in Penang)

Another Malay respondent interviewed in Penang thought that there does exist difficulty for Malays to be promoted to a job in a higher position in the private sector. He stated that:

> Well, we can see it right? The Chinese fill the majority of the top positions in the private sector. It will be difficult for us [Malays] to get promotion. I mean it will be more difficult because we need to compete with them [the Chinese]. (Yusri, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

Yusri shared his concerns that although Malays can get into the private sector, it is difficult for them to move above the glass ceiling (in terms of job promotion), which was, according to his understanding, because of their ethnicity. Ling and Jomo (2010) studied the Malaysian private financial establishment and found that it is common for Malays to secure jobs there. However, they found that the

Malays in the establishment often experience a glass ceiling in relation to job promotion. Although there is a possibility that there is a Malay glass ceiling in the private sector, Ling and Jomo's (2010) study was limited only to private financial institutions.

There is a possibility that the difficulty of entering the public sector and the glass ceiling experienced directly and indirectly by the Chinese respondents, and the different payment rates and glass ceiling experienced (directly and indirectly) by the Malay respondents in the private sector were perceived as discrimination towards their ethnic identification and categorisation. Thus, they were ignoring another potential factor class or related social capital. They considered these 'discriminations' as a problem which they are obligated to face and to solve together as a group. With this everyday understanding, there is a likelihood that continuous mutual bias is practised by employers in both the public and the private sectors. Unfortunately, this everyday understanding produces further ethnic concentration in one particular sector of the Malaysian labour force, as explained by Ridhuan, who said:

> I don't think this is about quota, but I think it is more to do with internal political organisation. When an individual gets promotion to the head of department, for example, regardless of their ethnicity whether Malay, Chinese or Indian (*pause*), they will bring their people to other senior positions which diminishes other races' chances for promotion. If you look at the private sector, it is actually worse than that. I don't think it is difficult for the Chinese to get into the public sector because they have equal chances with Malays and I was a member of an interview panel. For me, I will give him the job if he or she is qualified. But, maybe because of (*pause*) sometimes because of our racial sentiment, we will give a job to someone of our own race. Frankly speaking, I have that kind of sentiment. (Ridhuan, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

For Ridhuan, the main barrier facing an individual seeking to secure a job – in the public or the private sectors – depends on the ethnicity of the relevant authority. In other words, there is a possibility that the domination by a particular group of a particular economic sector is *not* a direct result of top-down authority but a choice made by the everyday actors present within the system. For example, Ridhuan admitted that his sentiments as a Malay would oblige him to choose someone from the same ethnicity. Ridhuan's perspective was that Chinese and Indians would probably make the same decision as he

made, but he never provided any justification for this likely action. His reasoning was arguably related to his self-presumed responsibility and obligation to help other Malays.

So in this part of the analysis, the respondents constantly created a circle of understanding that ethnicity is really important in the Malaysian employment sector and possibly causes mutual bias within the public and private sectors which would be difficult to break. It is also appears that ethnicity was continually used by respondents as a 'rational' justification for their direct and indirect frustration, and for the perceived discrimination in their working experiences. In other words, ethnicity is the easier explanation for their working experiences and expectations. The existence of this belief is an effect of the State's identification and categorisation (top-down) and of *bumiputraism*. In the next section of this work, I shall address the importance of language and religious boundaries which have contributed to the continuous importance of ethnicity in the Malaysian workforce as understood by the respondents in this study.

Everyday actors' language and religious boundaries in the Malaysian working sector

As I previously stated in the historical chapter of this work, Malay is a national and official language. As an official language, Malay is a basic requirement for employment in the Malaysian public sector. Graduates from both the national Malay and national Chinese schools are exposed to the Malay language, albeit at different levels. Graduates from ICSSs, on the other hand, are not really exposed to the Malay language. Additionally, their school examination (UEC) is not recognised by the State. Since the UEC is not recognised as a qualification by Malaysian universities, ICSS graduates usually continue their studies in Mandarin-speaking countries. Once they return to Malaysia, the only applicable employment sector for them is that of Chinese private companies. This would put them even further apart from other Malaysians working in the public sector. The respondents in Glasgow were particularly aware of issues surrounding language among the Chinese in Malaysia. Ah Boa, for example, believed that the

reason for the small number of Chinese employed in the government sector is related to their educational background and language. He stated that:

> I think one of the reasons for the Chinese to get fewer chances of securing a place in the public sector is because they [Chinese from ICSSs] were born outside the system, they are not in the system. They aim for Taiwan [as the place] for study after their high school graduation. So, they are not really used to this system and it will be difficult for them to get a job in the public sector. Those who went to these schools speak Chinese all the way [...] They were born in their own system because for them, it is like, you went to a Chinese primary school, a Chinese independent High school, and then after that you will go to Chinese universities maybe in Taiwan or China, and then they come back and the only place that they can work is in the private sector. And I think in some [parts of the] private sector, they just need to acquire a B or C grade in Malay for the SPM requirement. (Ah Boa, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

There are two important issues highlighted here. First, educational background plays an important role in the Malaysian working sector. Second, language and educational background are related to one another. A Chinese student who attended an ICSS and later a Mandarin-speaking university might face difficulty securing a job in the government sector where Malay is mainly used as the official language. Chinese graduates with this educational background would have no choice but to work solely in the private sector, particularly for Chinese private companies. Moreover, the basic ICSS qualification is considered a valid requirement equivalent to the SPM qualification that can be used in some Malaysian private companies.

Additionally, according to one Chinese respondent, Mandarin speakers are important in the private sector for two reasons. First, a shared language creates easier communication between the workers, especially when the private sector is monopolised by the Chinese. Second, it creates easier communication between Chinese dealers or investors from China and other Mandarin-speaking countries. He also added that Mandarin is not an obstacle only for Malays, but should also be regarded as a barrier for those Chinese who cannot speak Mandarin. He stated:

> Because most of the workers in the private sector are Chinese, or [the businesses] are owned by Chinese, they [employers] want their employees to be able to speak Mandarin. Maybe because they deal

with Chinese people as many Chinese have factories which are involved in the import and export business. They travel a lot to China and they need employees who can speak proper Chinese. Even for Chinese, some of us cannot speak Chinese so it is not limited to Malays only. I don't think race is a problem. It is a language issue. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

According to Shaun's everyday understanding, this difficulty is not based on ethnic category but more on language proficiency. As argued in Chapter Five of this work, language is understood to be one of the boundaries used to indicate and distinguish between Malay-ness and Chinese-ness. Therefore, the language requirement in the private sector was considered by the Malay respondents to be an issue related to their ethnic identity. Two Malay respondents stated that:

I think they [Chinese employers] want to employ Chinese workers and use language as a requirement. They never state 'for Chinese only', but they state 'someone with Mandarin proficiency'. From that, we can know who this advertisement is targeting and what race it actually prefers. (Norman, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

If you read any job advertisements in Penang, they will state something like 'prefer Chinese only'. That is for a job vacancy. And we then can see that in terms of house renting too, they will state 'prefer Chinese'. This statement of priority should not happen in a multi-racial country. If they don't state something like 'prefer Chinese only', they state 'prefer someone who can speak and write in Mandarin'. There are many job advertisements in Penang that give the same criterion, except for jobs in factories […] Mostly in private companies. (Fiona, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

According to Norman's understanding, there is the possibility that some Chinese companies indirectly discriminate against Malay applicants by stipulating a language requirement. However, if Malays can speak Mandarin, then there is supposed to be no reason for them to be excluded from this advertisement. In addition to language, cultural elements also are important concerns for some Chinese employers. According to Shaun, there is a possibility that some private Chinese companies will prefer Chinese applicants because of Malay-Chinese cultural differences. He stated:

I think some Chinese companies prefer Chinese because of the cultural problem, so they just prefer to have Chinese employees. But, I think most private employers prefer to have competent employees and do not pay much attention to race. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

Malay identity and Islam are intricately related to one another. Malay culture and custom is related to Islamic teaching regarding traditions such as food, male/female social conduct, dress code (particularly the *hijab*), daily prayers and one month of fasting during Ramadhan. These social and religious codes can possibly create difficulties for non-Muslim employers. Religious duties such as five daily prayers and gender expectations regarding attire and dress code may have reduced the potential for Muslims to be recruited by non-Malay employers. For example, Zuhaini stated that there is a possibility that a female Malay job application would be rejected because of the dress code. Her statement however was more a personal speculation as she claimed that:

> I am not really sure but from what I have heard, there are situations resulting from religious issues. For example, they rejected your application just because you were wearing a headscarf. But, I never faced this personally. (Zuhaini, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

As discussed in the previous sub-section, there were tendencies for the majority of Malay and Chinese respondents to justify their frustration at direct and indirect assumed-discrimination in Malaysia's private and public work sectors as an ethnic issue resulting from formal ethnic identification and categorisation and *bumiputraism*. Meanwhile in this sub-section, I have discussed how language and religious boundaries have had an impact on the respondents' future employment. Language and cultural boundaries create a tendency for Malays to apply for jobs within the government sector where Malay is the official language and where their cultural and religious beliefs can be properly observed. The Chinese are expected to have no religious or cultural barriers to working in the public or private sectors. However, Chinese who have graduated from ICSSs and tertiary institutions located in Mandarin-speaking countries may have difficulty getting a job in the public sector which requires decent proficiency in the Malay language. In sum, the ethnic concentration in one particular working sector might be an outcome of the State identification and categorisation of ethnicity and everyday actors persevering to maintain the assumed shared boundaries in Malaysia's work sectors.

3 Ethnicity, nation-of-intent and respondents' political views

As I have explained throughout the previous chapters of this work, British rule in Malaya contributed not only to the formation of a multi-ethnic society, but also to the native epistemological understanding of ethnic categories, particularly through the imposition of official censuses, maps and museums. The census in particular institutionalised ethnic identification and categorisation. It was used to distinguish the native (Malays and other indigenous groups) from the non-native people (Chinese, Indians, Europeans and Arabs). The census worked on the premise that everyone had a distinct place in society, with no overlap. At the same time, it also created an ideological contestation between the ethnic communities in Malaysia. The formation of political parties in the late 1940s was founded on the basis of particular ethnic groups' needs, demands and aims. Today, the main political parties in Malaysia remain ethnicity-based. The ruling coalition consists of UMNO (Malays), MCA (Chinese) and MIC (Indians), and the opposition parties represent PAS (Malays), PKR (Malays) and DAP (Chinese). Both sides have specific social and economic aims in the form of a 'nation-of-intent'. Nation-of-intent refers to the political ideology for achieving an ideal nation involving Malaysia's territory, language, population, culture, symbols and institutional aspects.

The ruling party and the opposition parties' nation-of-intent views are different. Both sides compete for Malaysians' political support in achieving their nation-of-intent. The ruling political coalition runs Malaysia on the basis of objectified and systematic ethnic identification and categorisation. Its nation-of-intent view was formulated around the historical, social and economic considerations of the *bumiputra*. Its main political ideology is to provide service based on 'equity'. In my understanding, the equity concept may be limited to the ideology; it is not necessarily effective in its implementation because of the disruption caused by class interest.

On the other hand, the opposition's nation-of-intent can be divided into two parts: the non-*bumiputra's* and the Islamic-*bumiputra's* nation-of-intent. The non-*bumiputra's* nation-of-intent primarily promotes plurality and 'equality' in

Malaysia's socio-economic and cultural structure. The DAP, for example, "has always asserted that the Malays, or more correctly the government, want to abolish Chinese language education and force the Chinese and Indians to remain as second and third class citizens" (Ali, 2008, p.133). Meanwhile, the Islamic-*bumiputra's* nation-of-intent has continuously promoted Islamic regulation and jurisdiction in seeking to secure its place among Malay voters. However, their nation-of-intent is being used as a counter-move by non-Malay politicians in order to gain support from non-Malays. Within Malaysia's political affairs, both the ruling and the opposition parties have always used religious and cultural elements as the main issue to gain support from Malaysians.

As I suggested in the theoretical and historical chapters, the formation of the political parties in order to protect their religious and cultural boundaries was less primordial but more instrumental. In this section, I shall highlight the respondents' political views about the competition over a nation-of-intent between the State (the ruling political coalition) and the opposition parties. At the end of this discussion, I shall relate the Malaysian political system to the formation of Malaysia as a nation.

Chinese respondents in Penang and Glasgow

The early empirical findings presented in this study showed that the majority of the Chinese respondents in Penang and Glasgow were aware of Malaysia's ethnicity-based political parties. Some of the respondents rationalised the political segregation as 'necessary' for assisting those from the same community, whereas the rest were not very content with Malaysia's existing political structures. For them, ethnicity has long been used as a tool for political manipulation. They stated that:

> Having ethnic-based political parties does not necessarily mean bad news. We still need a different leader, different parties … because each *kaum* has different necessities, different needs, for example Chinese have their own Chinese education, Malays want Islam to be protected and Indians want … errr … the Indians have their community requirement … this is what we call our right. Right for every *kaum*. (Alex, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

> Politics in Malaysia is very racial. Whenever you have an election, they still keep using racial issues to get support from voters. Lot of people have a very narrow-minded outlook but it is getting better. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

In terms of their political views, the Chinese respondents in Penang and Glasgow seemed to hold similar opinions regarding Malaysian politics. The majority of them preferred a political party which seeks to bring *equality*, regardless of the politicians' ethnic identity. This was related to their direct and indirect experiences and understandings of ethnicity within the education and economic realms, as discussed previously. For example, one Chinese respondent stated that:

> What the Chinese want is (*pause*), actually we want a fair government. Fair treatment for everyone, fair for *bumiputra*, fair for all ethnic groups. For example, the opportunity to go to the local university is the same for Malays and non-Malays. We [*Chinese*] want everything to be fair. This means that they [the government] should provide equality to all. The Malays just want a government that is free from corruption. (Ah Man, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

In Ah Man's understanding, the Chinese community wants a political party which can offer equality in education to Malaysian citizens, regardless of their ethnic category. From his perspective, it seems like there is a chance that the Chinese will vote for any political party that can provide them with equal socio-economic development. For example, the Chinese have proved themselves to be supporters of the PAS in Kelantan, an Islamic-*bumiputra* political party. There are several factors which caused this outcome.

First, as I stated in the historical chapter, the Malay Reservation Enactment (MRE) stated that neither State nor private land owned by Malays within the area of Malay Reservation lands could be transferred or sold to non-Malays (Kratoska, 1983). I also stated that Terangganu, Perlis, Kedah and Johor were excluded from the same enactment. The MRE in these states is different from the MRE in Selangor, Perak, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan, and also from one another. Under the Malay Reservation Enactment Kelantan of 1930, the Malay Reserved Lands can only be owned and transferred to natives of Kelantan. Natives of Kelantan in this context referred to native Kelantanese – Malays or non-Malays – born in Kelantan. This meant that the reserved lands in Kelantan could not be purchased

by or transferred to any other non-Kelantanese persons, regardless of whether or not they were Malays. This made non-native Malays disqualified for MRE in Kelantan, but made native Chinese-Kelantanese eligible for lands in Kelantan (Sathian and Ngeow, 2014). The restriction "created a sense of exclusiveness as Kelantanese" (both as Malay and Chinese) and at the same time, gave "them a sense of privileges for being born and bred in Kelantan" (Sathian and Ngeow, 2014, p.389).

Second, the Chinese-Kelantanese in the early 1900s also avoided potential conflict and competition with the local people by working in separate economic activities such as mining and trading (Sathian and Ngeow, 2014). The unthreatened feeling came from equal social status as Kelantanese and from the economic stability between Malays and Chinese open to cultural adoption and adaption. As a result, in Kelantan, Chinese assimilation to Malay culture is high. Malay respondents from Kelantan also tended to distinguish between the Chinese-Kelantanese community and other Chinese communities in other states. For example, one Malay respondent claimed that:

> Personally, I think they are different. I think the Chinese in Kelantan (*pause*) they are already Kelantanese. He is not Chinese but he is Kelantanese. Most of my friends who come from outside Kelantan felt shock when they heard a Chinese Kelantanese speak because they speak in the Kelantanese dialect, in the flea-market, in banks, everywhere. (Rahim, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

Cultural assimilation can be easily seen in the Chinese-Kelantanese dialect, food and dress. The use of the same dialect creates solidarity and a sense of group belonging amongst them. Up to a point, the Chinese-Kelantanese community has even adopted several Muslim terms in their daily interactions with the Malay-Kelantanese community, a*s* Ridhuan explained:

> All Chinese in Kelantan can speak Malay Kelantanese because we are close. Sometimes, the Chinese will use some Muslim terms such as *InsyAllah* [with Allah's permission] [...] if you compare them with the Chinese from southern parts, they are totally different. The Chinese in the south-east would never wear the *kain pelikat* [the typical traditional Malay male lower garment] or the *kain batik* [the typical traditional Malay female lower garment]. In Kelantan, most of the Chinese prefer to use *kain pelikat* and *kain batik*; they are known as *mek* for an old Chinese woman and *cik mek* for a young Chinese woman. (Ridhuan, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

As stated by Ridhuan, some Chinese-Kelantanese use *InsyAllah* as part of their daily conversation and its usage is accepted by the Malay-Kelantanese. The use of the term 'Allah' by a Chinese person would be treated in a different way outside Kelantan. This issue was discussed in detail in Chapter Five regarding how religion and its elements can create boundaries and exclusive rights for Malays. The social equilibrium in Malay-Chinese Kelantanese relationships also creates a strong regional identity, as explained by one Chinese respondent who originated from Kelantan. He said:

> I prefer to see myself as a Kelantanese rather than a Chinese because
> I love my state. (Kent, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow).

The outcomes which can be seen in the Chinese-Kelantanese preferences for regional-based identification, Malays-Chinese's socio-economic equilibrium and cultural hybridity in Kelantan are possibly founded on the Chinese-Kelantanese historical trajectory. Historically, it is difficult to estimate the time of the arrival of the Chinese in Kelantan (Purcell, 1951). "There is clear evidence of Chinese settlements in Kelantan in the 18th century and it seems likely that Chinese presence existed considerably earlier" (Reybeck, 1980, p. 250).

As I stated in the historical chapter, there were small numbers of Chinese in Malacca, Kelantan and Terangganu before the huge wave of Chinese migration in the eighteenth century. The Chinese in Malacca were known as *Baba-Nyonya* and the Chinese in Kelantan and Terangganu were mostly known as *Cina-Peranakan*. The Chinese in Kelantan in particular were descended from Chinese who had migrated to and resided in Thailand. They later migrated to Kelantan after a chaotic situation in southern Thailand developed (Beng, 1982). They were also identified as 'village-Chinese' and sometimes 'Hokkien-Siam' on account of their forefathers' inter-ethnic marriages with Siamese and the high degree of Thai cultural influence (Beng, 1982). This identification differentiated them from 'urban-Chinese' living in Kelantan who were seen by village-Chinese as descendants of more recent immigrants in the eighteenth century. These village-Chinese still mainly speak Malay-Kelantanese and their Chinese dialect (Hokkien-Siam) is also influenced by Malay and Thai, which makes it difficult for Chinese-Hokkien from outside Kelantan to understand (Beng, 1982).

Additionally, Kelantan was one of the former Unfederated Malay States and according to the Malaysian Population Statistics for 2011, Kelantan was experiencing the lowest rate of urbanisation in comparison with other states in peninsular Malaysia. Since most of *Cina-Peranakan* stayed in Kelantan's rural areas with high interaction with Malays and Thais and lack of exposure to other Chinese, this would prevent the process of assimilation to the mainstream Chinese way of life from occurring (Beng, 1982). The term 'mainstream Chinese' in this context refers to Chinese descendants of those who had migrated mainly to the Straits Settlements during the eighteenth century.

Since Beng's study was conducted in 1982, potential changes could possibly have occurred because of their increased exposure to the Chinese mainstream. However, based on the understanding of local Malay-Kelantanese and Chinese-Kelantanese in this current study, the cultural hybridity of the Chinese with Malay culture remained unchallenged and was practised by the Chinese in Kelantan. In my understanding, their official and secure status as native/local people in Kelantan has created different priorities which have led to different type of commonality, connected and groupness. This makes Kelantan a unique state, both to the Kelantanese themselves and to others. The Chinese-Kelantanese political support for PAS is possibly related to the need to preserve the socio-economic benefits achieved through their inter-ethnic stability and harmony, as Kent (a Chinese-Kelantanese) went on to explain:

> I have to be honest. I am from a different state. I am from Kelantan. In Kelantan, we are very peaceful and you don't have to worry about anything. I would say that because everyone treats everyone else like a friend. I mean, I wouldn't say that all Chinese are good, but I wouldn't say that all Malays are bad either. But I think that in other states, there is racism. Actually, to be honest, I prefer the opposition. I prefer Kelantan's present situation and condition. If I want to vote, I will vote for PAS. I shall vote based on their political credibility, because I trust them and have confidence in them. (Kent, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

Penang, on the other hand, is the only state administered by the DAP, a non-*bumiputra* political party which has mostly Chinese membership. Because it is one of the major metropolitan cities in Malaysia, the economic activities in Penang are at a different level and scope compared with the economic activities in Kelantan. The comparison in terms of economic achievements between Malays

and Chinese may also be more visible in Penang than in Kelantan which creates potential economic and political concerns between ethnicities. This could heighten the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This is probably the reason why cultural assimilation in Penang is low compared with Kelantan. Language in particular is highly preserved amongst the Chinese-Penangites. They are also proud of their heritage in Penang in comparison with Chinese in other states. For example, Lincoln, a Chinese from Negeri Sembilan, shared with me the view that:

> Hokkein Chinese in Penang have a kind of sense of arrogance. Maybe because of their political achievements. It makes them have that sense of arrogance; they think they are the best, like the Japanese and Koreans. I am not going to argue about this, it is the truth. I can't say that Penang's foods are not delicious, they will get angry. (Lincoln, Chinese male interviewed in Penang).

The comparison between Kelantan and Penang shows that possible socio-economic and political benefits or threats can affect people's political views. Therefore, Chinese respondents at the same time did not deny that there is a possibility of the Chinese community opting for a political party based only on its ethnic identity. My empirical findings suggest that this possibility is not limited to the Chinese community only but is also present in the Malay community. Shaun, for example, described the tendency as resulting from an ethnic group's distrust and insecurity, which can only be addressed by those from the same ethnicity. He stated that:

> Malaysians are easily influenced by racial politically-based thinking. It is human nature: you always want to stick with a group of people which can be identified as yours. It is a kind of survival instinct. Different races have different agendas. They are easily scared; they don't have an idea what the real objective is. (Shaun, Chinese male respondent interview in Glasgow)

As Shaun commented, some Malaysians seek to rely on political actors specifically from the same ethnic group as themselves. From their perspective, these political actors would possibly understand what their ethnic members need, mostly through empathy and similar experiences. Since ethnicity is important in Malaysia, any political support and trust is also grounded in a subjective belief based on assumed-shared history and assumed-fixed identity

(language, religion and customs). This creates a demand for ethnicity-based political parties, as Marc stated:

> A party can only survive by demands. A political party can give us a picture about the society. If race is no longer contentious, the party will use another issue. The politicians use that issue because the issue is still valid for us. It's a rule of supply and demand. Each party is trying to surpass the others. (Marc, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

Communal claims and statements made by politicians are probably easily accepted by Malaysians, who understand themselves to be part of a particular ethnic group due to the formal ethnic identification and categorisation within the Malaysian bureaucratic system. For example, UMNO parades its ideology as the 'Malay protector' by defending Malay rights as the country's 'landlord' and upholding the superiority of the Malay language, customs and royalty. PAS supports the establishment of an Islamic state, which is obliquely linked only to Malays and Muslims. DAP promotes the Chinese language and Chinese education as a platform for making the Chinese Malaysians remain 'Chinese', thus neglecting the status of Malay as a national language.

Additionally, ethnic accusations and racial remarks made by politicians also further create distrust and insecurity among Malaysians. In regard to this issue, one respondent asked me a question:

> Do you remember the incident involving a *keris* by one of UMNO's leaders? I think it was a racist action and should not happen, especially by someone who holds a position in the cabinet. (Jasmine, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Jasmine was referring here to an infamous scene created by the UMNO's former youth leader Hishamuddin, who brandished a *keris* (Lee, 2008, pp.188–189) by unsheathing and kissing it at UMNO's 2006 and 2007 annual general meetings. Many non-Malays considered his action to be a racist gesture and saw it as a threat to themselves (Malaysiakini, 2005). This is because the action of drawing a *keris* – a Malay traditional sword – is considered to be a symbolic action for fighting, either to defend or to attack someone. The incident was interpreted as an ethnicity-related issue because it took place at a Malay political gathering. In other words, the gesture showed either the action of defending Malays or of

attacking non-Malays. The gesture subsequently created a feeling of threat and distrust among the Chinese community in Malaysia. UMNO's members condemned the action because it would give a negative impression of the party. On a different occasion, the DAP's vice-president also made a public remark about the Malay Sultanate which created unease among Malays (Hamid and Ismail, 2012). In short, the subjective belief that each ethnic group is different, and continuous remarks, claims and statements by Malaysian politicians, potentially create further economic insecurity, political distrust and competition between the opposite groups.

The discussion above shows that the Chinese respondents in general seemed to give themselves more political options depending on their socio-economic conditions and the benefits or threats as illustrated differently in Kelantan and Penang. At the same time, I cannot deny that insecurity and distrust can easily build up following politicians' ill-conceived remarks, actions and claims. The Chinese respondents therefore did not guarantee that other Chinese would not want to fall in with other political possibilities.

Malay respondents in Penang and Glasgow

Similar to the Chinese respondents, the early empirical findings on the political perspectives among the Malay respondents in Penang and Glasgow also show awareness of Malaysia's ethnicity-based political parties.

> The political parties in Malaysia are absolutely ethnic-based, for example, UMNO for the Malay, MCA, DAP for the Chinese and MIC for the Indian. (Aminah, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

> I think it is quite obvious that our political parties are based on ethnicity. (Fiona, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

According to my interviews with the Malay respondents, the political aims of the Chinese for education and economic *equality* created concern for most of the Malay respondents interviewed in Penang. Language, for example, was the biggest political concern for some of the Malay respondents. For them, the preference of the Chinese for Chinese schools (national and private) was considered a sign of rejection and disapproval of the state's efforts to forge a

homogenous society through education and language. Norman expressed the view that:

> When we talk about 1Malaysia, everyone keeps focusing on *bumiputra* privileges. They [non-Malays] want it too. But, when we make a suggestion to reform the Type Schools in order to build 1Malaysia, they absolutely say no. When we suggested Malay as the national language, they disagreed. They want equality but have a problem with accepting Malay as a national language. I think that it is a small rebellion. In Malaysia, we are impressed when we meet a Chinese or an Indian who can speak fluent Malay. Why should we be impressed? A Malaysian is supposed to know how to speak Malay. But now it seems like the Malay proficiency among Chinese is a unique thing. (Norman, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

There are national efforts for promoting and making the Malay language the Malaysian language. However, the language remains an important boundary between the Malays and the Chinese within Malaysia. The Malay respondents interviewed in Penang wanted the Malay language to be accepted as the national and official language by other Malaysians. The formation of a nation on the basis of an homogenous language creates issues for some Chinese politicians, particularly in the DAP. They see it as an effort to assimilate Chinese culture with Malay culture. In this case, maintaining the Chinese language should no longer be seen as a means of communication but also as a means of achieving political support and ends.

The Chinese respondents – the young generation – who now see Malaysia as their home desire a fair government which can serve all Malaysians regardless of their ethnicity, but at the same time, their parents prefer to equip them with their specific ethnic group's language and maintain its existence by sending their children to a public or private Chinese school. Only a few of the Chinese respondents had no objections towards the *bumiputra* institution by recognising it as equitable, or accepted the Malay language as the national and official language as part of being Malaysian. With these different conceptions of the ideal-nation among the Malay and Chinese communities, it is understandable that the members of each group will want to channel their support into a political party which claims to protect or to fight for their ethnic rights and interests.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, the majority of the Malay and Chinese respondents were aware of Malaysia's ethnicity-based political parties. Some of the Malay respondents admitted that they were indeed sceptical of BN's transparency which had led to the emergence of corruption and cronyism. They seemed, however, to have limited political choices due to a lack of trust in the opposition coalition to manage the rights of the *bumiputra*. One Malay respondent said that he preferred to vote for BN (UMNO) because the DAP (Chinese) in the *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) coalition seemed to have more voice than PAS (Malays) or PKR (Malays). He claimed that:

> Although PR consists of PKR, DAP and PAS, I think PR is actually dominated by the DAP, the Chinese. Whereas in BN, the authority is still held by UMNO, the Malays. I mean, if PKR and PAS can prove to us that they can hold the authority, then it should be fine. I actually prefer if UMNO, PAS and PKR can discuss together how they will fight for Malays and Islam. (Yusri, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

The DAP domination in PR creates fear and insecurity concerning the rights of the Malays in education, economic affairs and the position of Islam in Malaysia. One respondent was concerned about this; he said:

> As for me, I think both parties [UMNO and PAS] are not really good (*laughs*). But I still prefer Malay leadership. It will be easier, I think. The Malays are more tolerant compared with other ethnicities because we already tolerate them now, right? [...] Maybe I will vote for PAS because I think (*pause*), DAP is more on human rights and they never fight for religious rights. They should be more concerned about religion too because religion is important. (Azlan, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

According to Azlan, his vote remained with the Malays even though they did not sufficiently meet his wishes. For him, it would be better to support Malay over Chinese candidates because any unexpected outcome is possible with a change of vote. Moreover, based on his previous political understanding, Malays are more lenient towards non-Malays. He was also not really sure about non-Malay attitudes towards Islam and the future of Islam if non-Malays were to successfully take over the State. The same view was expressed by the Malay respondents in Glasgow. Their continuing support for particular political parties emerged from their economic concerns. For example, one respondent argued that:

> I think the government protects the *bumiputras'* rights because Malays as a group cannot protect themselves. I think for Chinese, they do have informal associations to protect them. For Malays, we don't have that kind of association to protect us except for the government. If they [the Chinese] want to get the same rights as Malays, that means they will get more chances because it is additional to their current support from their associations. If we are open for all, I think it is unfair to us, particularly in economic issues. (Rahim, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

Most Malay respondents' issues surrounding language, religion, insecurity and distrust were related to their concerns regarding the socio-economic advantages offered by the *bumiputraism*. For some of them, the current government (*Barisan Nasional* or BN) was doing a good job in protecting Malay privileges, as Siti claimed:

> [...] the party in power right now is Malay, right? They are the Malay party which is UMNO in BN. Their concern is to protect the interest of the *bumiputra*. I think PR (*pause*), if they won the election (*pause*) I think they will abolish all of that. (Siti, Malay female interviewed in Glasgow)

The biggest socio-political concern for Siti was to maintain Malay rights in Malaysia. In her opinion, UMNO's political absence can only cause socio-economic harm to Malays in general. Her statement also indicates distrust towards non-Malay politicians. Another Malay respondent added that:

> The politicians [UMNO] like to threaten us [Malaysians]. If they [Malays] don't cast a vote for UMNO or BN, there will be a possibility that Malays' rights will be removed. They are threatening us with something that we aren't even sure about yet because we haven't even tried it! We have already got used to this kind of politics since Independence. Everyone might be afraid to vote for a change. We never give a chance to other political parties. (Aminah, Malay female respondent interviewed in Glasgow)

According to Aminah, some Malays believe that the rejection of UMNO could only jeopardise the *bumiputra's* rights. Her statement also indicates that the majority of Malays believe in UMNO as the party which provides and protects Malay rights from being destroyed by non-Malays, thus creating a barrier and preventing changes from taking place in Malays' political orientations.

Interestingly, some of the Malay and Chinese respondents were aware of the importance of the class issue within Malaysia's political affairs. Class awareness among the respondents was possibly due to their socio-economic condition in urban areas and the high living standard in the cities which required changes from Malaysian politicians and government. Class awareness among urban dwellers also pushed the Malaysian respondents to display their feelings of rejection toward the current government. Azlan stated that:

> Some Malays who are living in the town or city have a higher tendency to vote for *Pakatan Rakyat* [the opposition coalition]. I think, maybe because they face more difficulties in terms of the cost of living and whatsoever, this made them protest about the state administration. For example, when the media announced the new price of oil, they were willing to queue all night before the official prices were enforced. I mean, logically, they were actually wasting their fuel by queuing. They just wanted to protest and didn't want the fuel stations to make easy money from the new price. (Azlan, Malay male interviewed in Penang)

However, the Malays in rural area and the Chinese in the New Villages - resettlement locations established during the Emergency in the 1950s – mainly stick to the ethnicity-based political orientation. According to Ali, "opportunities for good jobs and facilities for education and medical services, particularly the private ones, are, to some extent, more easily available to both Malays and non-Malays from mainly the upper and middle classes" (2008, p.134). In other words, Malays and non-Malays in the lower classes suffer greater exploitation, and yet their feelings of dissatisfaction are always expressed in terms of the ethnic issue due to their trust in their political representatives. One respondent stated that:

> You can see that the voters in the city, they actually vote against the government now. They are interested in PR [*Pakatan Rakyat*] but the voters in the villages, including the Chinese in Kampung Baru, they actually preferred BN [*Barisan Nasional*]. Before the general election, we were already separated based on income status but the lowest class still preferred the BN because they were less educated and they came from the villages. Whereas for the middle class, we are supporting the PR and the top class are still supporting BN in order to protect their interests. (Ah Man, Chinese male interviewed in Penang)

The PR coalition also received little enthusiasm from Malays in rural areas, as explained by Amirah:

> I am a little bit disappointed when people, especially in the villages, still voted for someone who cannot provide good public welfare. Maybe … first, maybe they don't get the exact information especially in the rural areas. Second, maybe because they think that the new government cannot be as good as the current one. And maybe they don't think that all of the election promises from the opposition party can be accomplished. (Amirah, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

Rallies and street demonstrations were not new in Malaysian cities as they had already been held during Anwar's premiership in 1998. From Anwar's time, Malay and Chinese middle-class urban dwellers have directly and indirectly shown their distrust and disappointment towards the Malaysian government through episodes of rebellious action. Following this, the opposition coalition – *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) – managed to take over four states[19] during the GE2008. Two of these states (Selangor and Penang) are the richest states, with high levels of urbanisation and development. There was a tendency among urban dwellers to change the government by voting for the opposition coalition: PR. However, PR is actually a coalition which consists of multi-ethnic political parties: PKR (Malays), PAS (Malays) and DAP (Chinese). As a matter of fact, the opposition coalition had adopted the same strategy used by the ruling BN coalition which comprises UMNO (Malays), MCA (Chinese) and MIC (Indians) for gaining votes from multiple ethnic groups. Therefore, there was a possibility that the vote actually went to their respective ethnicity-based political party. In other words, during the GE2008, there was a possibility that the vote only changed from a particular political party (Malay or Chinese) to a particular political coalition (Malay and Chinese).

Even though the importance of class was starting to bloom within Malaysian politics, insecurity and distrust toward different ethnic groups has never been completely extinguished. In GE2013, the number of states won by PR in GE2008 fell from four to three.[20] The mass media, in this situation, can be considered to be a double-edged sword. Although the mass media can be helpful in stimulating class awareness, they can also provoke ethnic hatred and scepticism. Some respondents commented on this:

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[19] In GE2008, the opposition coalition managed to win Kedah, Selangor, Penang and Kelantan from the BN.

[20] In GE2013, BN managed to win in Kedah, leaving Selangor, Penang and Kelantan to the opposition coalition.

> I think most of newspapers are biased and this thing actually creates hatred among Malaysian. For example, UTUSAN is a pro-UMNO newspaper and sometime it publishes something which can create hatred among Chinese towards Malays. Chinese and Indian newspapers can give us problem too because we don't know what they write about us. (Nuh, Malay male interviewed in Penang).

> Sometimes I feel like the news in the internet and FB influence me a lot. I was initially not interested with politics until the last general election [GE2013] and I got quite sad but probably … I don't know, probably because of … FB influenced me a lots. And I don't know which one is true and which is not. (Kailee, Chinese female interviewed in Glasgow)

Insecurity about Malay rights and Islam possibly caused the Malay respondents to narrow their political choice back to Malay candidates, hence leaving the possibility for class awareness to be overshadowed by ethnicity interests. Some PAS supporters decided to change their vote from PAS to UMNO (which are both dominated by Malays) because they no longer trusted PAS after its collaboration with DAP (dominated by the Chinese), as explained by Amirah:

> Some Malays are afraid and insecure about the collaboration. Some of the opposition supporters, especially PAS supporters, switched their votes to UMNO after PAS decided to collaborate with DAP. (Amirah, Malay female interviewed in Penang)

Moreover, unlike BN, PR had a clash in its nation-of-intent, particularly between DAP and PAS, which caused their break-up in 2001 (PR was formerly known as BA during that time). They decided to join forces again in 2008 but in 2015, PR once again ceased to exist, revealing the fragility in their political relationship.

In summary, the majority of the Malay respondents in this current study had a greater tendency to vote for the ruling coalition for the following reasons: fear of the loss of Malay privileges and religious affairs which was strengthened by the action of the non-*bumiputra* opposition party to challenge the proposal for a homogenous language in the Malaysian educational system. Meanwhile, for the Chinese respondents, there was a possibility for them to go beyond ethnic boundaries in their political perspectives depending on their socio-economic condition and the relationship between the Malays and Chinese as portrayed in Penang and Kelantan. Under the class factor, I also found that the urban dwellers' political support (regardless of their ethnicity) had a greater tendency

to cross over the ethnic boundaries whilst the people in rural areas (Malays and Chinese alike) were more into ethnicity-based political perspectives.

4   The Nation

Anderson defined a nation as an imagined political community "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991, p.6). This imagined community also has a finite territory within which the State can exercise its authority. As a result of the sense of identity inculcated into people's minds, there exists a sense of responsibility as they become aware of their own sense of purpose and affinity. Outside Malaysia, during their interaction with different nationalities, the respondents in Glasgow were consistently reminded of where they politically belonged. They then tended to look to elements which they were familiar with, and which are shared with other Malaysians under the category of nationality, such as the flag, the national anthem, food and values. This was put into words by one respondent:

> We all are Bangsa Malaysia, but we are in different races. Race and Bangsa is a bit different because Bangsa is about national identity. For me, I would say that I am a Bangsa Malaysian (Malaysian nationality) because I know how to sing *Negaraku* and I know all of *Rukun Negara* (*laughs*). (Ah Boa, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

In Ah Boa's understanding, *Bangsa* is simply a label for his nation-cum-nationality. When he says he is a *Bangsa* Malaysian, it means for him that he is a Malaysian from the nation of Malaysia. He identified himself as Malaysian because he specifically knew the Malaysian Anthem (*NegaraKu*) and the National Pillars (*Rukun Negara*). These two premises were useful symbolic markers to separate him from other nationalities such as British, Chinese (PRC) or Singaporean, and also a statement that he belonged geopolitically to a particular nation. The mapping system and its mind-set also created a sense of community which could unite Malays and Chinese in Glasgow. However, inside Malaysia's boundaries, the Malaysian identity becomes their secondary identity in comparison with their ethnic identity, as stated by these respondents:

> In term of politics, I might change my mind if I am in Malaysia. I will see myself as Malay-Muslim because there are many races in Malaysia. (Shauki, Malay male interviewed in Glasgow)

> In Glasgow, whenever I see a Malay, I will see a Malaysian and not a Malay. (Shaun, Chinese male interviewed in Glasgow)

This mind-set creates political differences and contention, especially for the Malay respondents in this research. In sum, the concept of 'nation' as an imagined community was meaningful for the Malay and Chinese respondents, but the type of 'ideal nation' seemed to be a clash between them because of the different types of nation-of-intent offered by Malaysian politicians.

5 Conclusion

The main aim in this chapter was to understand the importance of ethnicity in the Malaysian workforce and in political affairs. At the individual level, ethnicity was not necessarily the main reason for the respondents to work in the private or the public sectors. The main reasons for them to work in either of these sectors depended on their own personal interests, such as those expressed through family tradition, financial motivation and job security. However, the impacts of the NEP, *Bumiputraism* and ethnic identification and categorisation have made the respondents' working expectations and experiences (direct or indirect) an ethnic issue. The *Bumiputraism* gives the impression that there is a bias – in the form of quota-based employment – within the Malaysian workforce (macro-structure). Meanwhile, the language and religious boundaries (micro-level) inevitably created barriers for some of the respondents. The dialectical relationship between the state and everyday actors creates an understanding of the importance of ethnicity, even though there is awareness of the importance of social capital in the Malaysian labour force. It also promotes Malay and Chinese concentrations in the public and private employment sectors respectively. With this understanding, a mutual expectation – that there is a possibility of discrimination – circulated in the system, and would potentially encourage mutual bias in Malaysian employment. This, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced the respondents' political views.

Most of the Malay respondents had a tendency to be politically confined inside their ethnic boundaries due to their fears of Chinese domination within the economy and in politics. Meanwhile, the Chinese respondents want to kept their options open to more than one particular party. This outcome, however, is dependent on socio-economic needs, benefits and threats in the area, as happened in Kelantan and Penang. At the same time, urbanisation could also cause class awareness which influenced the urban dwellers (regardless of their ethnicity) to give their political support beyond their ethnic boundaries.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this study, I have attempted to understand the importance of ethnicity for Malaysians living within and outside Malaysia's geographical territories. In the process of achieving this, I have further carried out related inquiries on ethnicity formation, reproduction and challenges within the inter-ethnic relationships between Malays and Chinese in Penang and Glasgow. My findings suggest that ethnicity in reality is an intricate societal phenomenon. The findings also imply that ethnicity is not a simple concept which can be easily misinterpreted, theoretically or epistemologically. In this concluding chapter, I now reflect on the findings discussed throughout the thesis in four important points.

First, ethnicity is always considered as natural but this research has shown it to be part of a national political and economic project. Throughout the social history of Malaysia, I have demonstrated the process of how ethnic boundaries were socially drawn, institutionalised, heightened, modified and strengthened over time. At the same time, Malaysia's history also reveals the role of the colonial powers in the process of drafting and creating ethnic identification and categorisation. Ethnic identification and categorisation in post-colonial Malaysia are indeed a legacy from the colonial administrative system and the colonial economy. Instead of loosening and undoing them, the State has proliferated and reified ethnic identification and categorisation in the post-independence context thus maintaining a divide-and-rule mentality between ethnic groups in Malaysia.

In the Malaysian setting, people often adhere to, perform and embody ethnicity as essential and absolute. The reasons for this are that, first, there were political and historical projects to indigenise one particular group over another; second, there was a need to maintain the allocated indigenous status and privileges in education and employment, which meant that identification and categorisation were continuously emphasised in the Malaysian bureaucratic system; and finally, the avoidance and rejection of Malaysian hybridity in the State's official categories. Although some of my respondents (mostly from inter-ethnic marriages) were aware of the complexity and arbitrariness of their ethnicity, they ultimately *had* or *needed* to self-identify with a 'given' identity – at least in formal affairs – as required by the Malaysian bureaucratic system.

The findings in this study have also shown how the assumed shared-history and assumed shared-boundaries (religion, language and custom) are significantly important in defining Malay-ness and Chinese-ness. Through the process of socialisation, these understandings and boundaries transferred to the respondents. The main agents of socialisation for this understanding are the State and the family. The State formally maintains, creates and endorses enactments, laws, acts and regulations to seclude Malaysians within their ethnic category. For example, Article 160 defines the Malays in a way which at the same time defines the non-Malays. The Malay Reserved Enactment Land (MRE), for instance, was a colonial project which was preserved and maintained by the post-colonial State for securing Malay privileges in economic interests. Through everyday life, it is then possible to be caught up in the notion that ethnicity is a simple primordial aspect of life which 'racially' and culturally can be differentiated on the basis of religion, language and custom. The family hence informally equipped, taught and practised the language, customs and religious activities which were supposed to make Malays and Chinese different. These boundaries were later observed during ethnic groups' interactions and had to be practised within the appropriate space and context.

Second, ethnicity is widely considered to be primordial and fixed, yet this research has demonstrated it to be contextual and situational. The findings suggest that ethnic boundaries are not necessarily important most of the time. There are levels of toleration depending on context and location (nationally and regionally). This comparative study between Malaysians inside and outside Malaysia has shown that the boundaries are contextual and situational. Within Malaysia's boundaries, the cultural and religious boundaries were closely observed by the respondents, whereas outside the country's boundaries, religious and cultural separations were much more tolerated. In addition, the comparative analysis and findings have also suggested that there is a different toleration of ethnic boundaries between regional boundaries within Malaysia: Kelantan and Penang.

In Kelantan, most of the Chinese are culturally assimilated with Malay culture. They speak in the *Kelantanese* dialect, wear Malay dress and enjoy Malay cuisine. To an extent, they used the term '*Allah*' in their language, which is

socially acceptable to the Malay Kelantanese. In the respondents' understanding, however, cultural assimilation is rare in Penang. The Chinese maintain and protect their language, cuisine and custom. The different outcomes in Kelantan and Penang can be explained and justified by the Malay and Chinese socio-economic relationship. In Kelantan, the local Chinese are eligible to buy, lease or sell land in the Malay reserved areas due to their living status in Kelantan. They are also not intimidated by each other's economic activities. On the other hand, Penang is the only state in Malaysia administrated by the DAP (the majority of its members are Chinese), which equips *Penangite* Chinese with more political dominance in Penang. This possibly creates a political threat to the other ethnicities which makes ethnic boundaries significant and important. The outcome in Kelantan suggest that the lack of economic and political threat can open a path for cultural assimilation, undermining the importance of ethnicity and generating new hybrid identities.

The outcomes also suggest that there are two different ways of how ethnic boundaries work for Malaysians – or at least according to the respondents' understanding. First, in terms of Malaysia's national geographical boundaries, ethnic boundaries work significantly in Malaysia compared with Glasgow. Second, within Malaysia's regional geographical boundaries, Penang and Kelantan showed that ethnicity is significant in one place and not in another. Despite these differences between the national and regional factors, ethnicity continues to be used as an instrument for maintaining privileges or protecting particular ethnic groups from threats and/or disadvantages in the economic and political spheres. It is possible to think of ethnicity as a reservoir which is always present in the respondents' understanding and which can be actively drawn upon to shore up political projects. In sum, ethnicity is not a simple everyday primordial projection; it is instrumental and circumstantial depending on potential socio-economic and political needs and threats.

Third, ethnicity is considered as real because its boundaries sometime do have a 'real effect' on the respondents. Due to the importance of ethnic identification and categorisation in the Malaysian bureaucratic system and macro forces, this had inevitably ethnicised many decisions made for or by the respondents especially in term of marriage, education, employment and politics. In the

Malaysian context, Islam and Malay are intricately interwoven with one another, which makes inter-ethnic marriage with Malays an ethnic challenge, especially for Chinese men. The reason for this is because in Chinese culture, men need to maintain their family name. Those who marry Malay women are required by law to convert to Islam and are required by Malay custom to change their name. The importance of ethnicity in this case works within different gender expectations between Malays and Chinese. At the same time, there is concern over religious freedom for Muslims as apostasy is a crime in Islam. The boundaries in term of customs such as food preparation and toleration also create another issue for inter-ethnic marriages.

The Malaysian schooling system is also indirectly ethnicised on two levels. First, the school system is divided into public schools (such as national primary schools and national primary-type (Chinese) schools), and private schools (such as Islamic private schools and ICSSs). Second, within this public and private dichotomy, there are divisions based on language and religion. The division on the first level refers to competing political ideologies between the State and the opposition party. The division on the second level creates a colloquial understanding by regarding a national school or private Islamic school as a 'Malay school' and a national-type Chinese school or ICSS as a 'Chinese school'. Generally, there is no restriction on Malaysian primary and secondary educational preferences except for religious schools. But Malay and Chinese students mainly go to Malay and Chinese schools respectively. For the respondents, these decisions were underpinned by religious and language concerns which made it an ethnic issue. The type of schooling therefore indirectly influenced the respondents' social circles in schools.

In the employment sector, the respondents regarded the respective dominance of Malays and Chinese in the public and private sectors as an ethnic issue. The maintenance of ethnic identification, Article 153 and the aftermath of the NEP (*bumiputraism*) made ethnicity an easy explanation for the dominance. This understanding tends to neglect the fact that the allocated privileges in Act 153 refer only to four divisions, with no specific quota in the professional and service sectors. The understanding also ignores the fact that class and social capital sometimes are important in the Malaysian employment sector. Although class

was identified as important by some respondents, most of the time it was contained within the ethnic understanding. This understanding potentially creates mutual bias between Malay and Chinese employers for protecting the members of their particular group. Educational background was also an important aspect of the dominance. Some of the respondents had a tendency to cross over the sectors but the Malay language as the official language in the public sector and Mandarin as a basic requirement in most private-sector jobs created an issue for the Chinese and Malay respondents respectively, which they regarded as an ethnic challenge.

The identification and categorisation also created issues which developed around Malays' privileges in education and employment which strongly mobilised potential ethnic contention in the society. This was reflected in the divided Malay and Chinese political parties' nation-of-intent concerning educational and economic issues. Ethnically divided political views emerged from a belief that their ethnic group (related by assumed shared-history and shared-boundaries) was oppressed by another group with a different communal history and shared boundaries. The decision to politically rely (or not to rely) on assumed similarity could be observed in Kelantan and Penang. Due to the absence of or fewer economic threats in Kelantan, the Chinese were willing to vote for the PAS, the Islamic *bumiputra* political party, in order to preserve the ethnic harmony and socio-economic status which they had enjoyed. Additionally, the difference between urban and rural areas also creates different types of political perspective. In urban areas, class awareness makes the urban dwellers likely to opt for a competent political party, whereas in rural areas, ethnic awareness is possibly higher due to the fear of change, especially when the political issues are primarily based on ethnic issues in education and employment.

Fourth, ethnicity is considered to be the most significant aspect in Malaysia which undermines other important and potential concepts such as class, nationality and gender. What I have understood in general from the findings in this research is that people always need to connect with those whom they assume have shared-similarity in a threatening situation – whether economically, politically or psychologically. Ethnicity appears to be important in Malaysia because of its major presence in the Malaysian bureaucratic system and macro-

forces. On the micro level, ethnicity is not necessarily important all the time. Sometimes people can relate with one another based on regionality, language, gender and nationality or whichever identity can make them feel safe as part of a group.

For example, I discovered that the language factor in Penang could be an obstacle/bridge to inter- *and* intra-ethnic relationships. The inter-ethnic division refers to Malays-Chinese whereas the intra-ethnic relationship depends on regional dialect. In this case, the Chinese from outside Penang, particularly from Kelantan, Sabah and Sarawak, can reach into Malay social circles because of their high exposure to the Malay language and culture in their respective hometowns. At the same time, there are also students who are only close with those from the same region, such as Chinese Penangites and Malay Kedahans. A different commonality, connectedness and groupness within the different contexts in Penang and Glasgow also led to different types of voluntary association. In USM, voluntary associations are based on regionality whereas in Glasgow they are based on nationality. On the other hand, the respondents in Glasgow had no social barriers in language but were more observant of their religious barriers. Religious boundaries were not really important in their selection of friends; they were only important in their selection of flatmates. The Malay and Chinese female respondents in Glasgow were particularly concerned over this issue. These examples highlight the regional, gender, nationality and religious interests in the respondents' decision-making. This makes the importance of ethnicity only situational and contextual, as highlighted previously.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

There are two principal limitations of the present study which should be taken into account for future research. First, this study only focused on Malay and Chinese inter-ethnic relationships in Penang and Glasgow. I have justified the reason for my choice to focus on Malays and Chinese, but it would be useful for future research to expand the sampling to other ethnic groups, particularly the Indian ethnic group. The reason for this suggestion is that Malays, Chinese and Indians are the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia, even though the first two

have had more contention with one another. It is also recommended that future research should concentrate on other *bumiputra* (the aboriginal people of the peninsula and natives of Sabah and of Sarawak) in regard to the Malay-Chinese relationship. Second, the findings and the analysis in this study were limited to the younger (and more educated) generation of Malays and Chinese, possibly the third generation after independence in 1957. Their justification and rationalisation of the educational decisions made by their parents and themselves, for example, reflected only their personal understanding. What would be their parents' understanding and rationalisation of those actions? A comparison between respondents and their parents would help future researchers to understand the maintenance or changes of ethnic boundaries during Malaysian inter-ethnic relationships. It is therefore suggested that research in this particular dimension be further pursued in order to enable an understanding of any significant differences which might exist between the old and new generations of Malaysians on the aspects concerned.

Appendix A
(Plain Language Statement [PLS] and Consent Form)

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Plain Language Statement (PLS)

1 **Study title and Researcher Details**

My name is Khauthar Ismail. I am a PhD student in the University of Glasgow, Scotland. I am undertaking a PhD in sociology and I am interested in ethnic relations and migration. Currently, I am conducting research for my PhD thesis on 'the importance of ethnicity: a comparative study of Penang and Glasgow'.

2 **Invitation paragraph**

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research study is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

3 **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of this research is to find out the importance of ethnicity for Malaysians. The importance of ethnicity will be explored through a comparative analysis between Malaysians in Penang (Malaysia) and in Glasgow (Scotland). The results are expected to show the significance of ethnicity in everyday life, in different contexts and in future planning.

4 **Why have I been chosen?**

In order to get a better understanding of ethnicity and identity formation among Malay and Chinese Malaysians, I plan to interview 30 students in each of the two locations: Penang and Glasgow. A student will be chosen as a suitable participant for this research on the basis of his/her need to move from his/her hometown to a new place with a different socio-cultural setting. The differences between experiences inside and outside Malaysia's geographical boundaries are important for understanding the importance of ethnicity for the respondents.

5 **Do I have to take part?**

Participation is based on a voluntary decision. Your participation or rejection will not influence your academic performance. You will not be paid, or receive any other incentives during the interviewing. You will not be penalized if you decide to not participate in this study and/or change your mind at any point and decide to stop participating.

6 **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you agree to participate in this research, I would like to conduct a face-to-face interview with you. Additionally, with your permission, I would like to record the interview on audio-tape in order to transcribe it afterwards. However, if you feel uncomfortable with the recording, you can request me to switch off the recording device at any time.

The appointment date, time, and location will be based on our mutual agreement. Basically, the location will be in a public place or in the university setting. The interview will only be conducted in the daytime. The interview is expected to last between 45 minutes and one hour. At the beginning of the interview session, I shall briefly explain the nature of the research and provide proof of ethical approval from the university. You can stop or decline to participate in this research at any time.

7 **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Your personal information, like name and identity, will be kept anonymous by the use of pseudonyms or code identifiers. The related personal data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Glasgow and the electronic file will be kept in a computer which is password protected and the password will be known only by the researcher. Unless a post-doctoral project arises from this research, all data collected in the course of this study will be destroyed after the completion and submission of my PhD. thesis. In addition, you have the right to request a copy of the transcript of your interview.

8 **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this research study will form the basis for a doctoral (PhD) thesis at the University of Glasgow. The findings of this research may be used in academic articles, conference papers and a book.

9 **Who is organising and funding the research? (If relevant)**

This research study is not funded by any party and is affiliated with no organization other than the University of Glasgow.

10 **Who has reviewed the study?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the College of Social Science, University of Glasgow.

11 **Contact for Further Information**

Khauthar Ismail, k.ismail.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Supervisors: Prof. Satnam Virdee, Satnam.Virdee@glasgow.ac.uk / Mr. Fred Cartmel, Fred.Cartmel@glasgow.ac.uk

If you have any concern related to this research, you can contact the College of Social Science Ethics Officer, Professor John McKernan, at

John.McKernan@glasgow.ac.uk

![University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences]

Example of Consent Form

Title of Project: The importance of ethnicity: a comparative study of Penang and Glasgow.

Name of the Researcher: Khauthar Ismail

1   I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3   I have been informed that I am entitled to a copy of my interview's transcript.

4   I have been informed that the information collected by this research will be used in preparing a PhD thesis and possibly for further academic publications such as journal articles, conference papers and books.

5   I have been informed that my data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Glasgow, while the electronic file will be kept on the computer whose password is known only by the researcher. I understand that my data will be destroyed through a shredder machine and all electronic files will be deleted after the researcher has completed her PhD study, unless a post-doctoral project arises.

6   I have been informed that my identity will be referred to by a pseudonym in the transcript or any publications arising from the research.

7   I have been informed about my rights regarding the audio-recording procedure. Therefore (please tick a box),

   a   I agree that the interview will be recorded   ☐

   b   I do not agree that the interview will be recorded   ☐

8   I agree / do not agree (delete where applicable) to take part in this research.

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Appendix B
(Respondents' Demographic and socio-economic profiles)

No.	Anonymous name	Location of interview	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Hometown	Marital status	Educational status	Educational background	Sponsorship	Working experiences
1	Nuh	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Perak	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
2	Hasyim	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Kedah	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
3	Yusri	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Johor	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MYBRAIN	Yes
4	Norman	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Kedah	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
5	Shah	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Kelantan	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	No
6	Khai	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Kelantan	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	KPT	Yes
7	Azlan	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Pahang	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MYBRAIN	Yes
8	Ahmad	Penang	Male	Malay	Islam	Sabah	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MYBRAIN	Yes
9	Fazura	Penang	Female	Malay	Islam	Kelantan	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
10	Noor	Penang	Female	Malay	Islam	Kedah	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
11	Fiona	Penang	Female	Malay	Islam	Perak	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
12	Nina	Penang	Female	Malay	Islam	Kelantan	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK -MRSM	Self-sponsored	Yes
13	Amirah	Penang	Female	Malay	Islam	Kedah	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMAR – SBP	MYBRAIN	No
14	Amelina	Penang	Female	Malay	Islam	Kedah	Married	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK -MRSM	MYBRAIN	Yes

15	Zuhaini	Penang	Female	Malay	Islam	Selangor	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MYBRAIN	Yes
16	Cheung	Penang	Male	Chinese	Buddhist	Penang	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	KPT	Yes
17	Marc	Penang	Male	Chinese	Buddhist	Penang	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: ICSS	Self-sponsored	Yes
18	Alex	Penang	Male	Chinese	Christian	Sarawak to Penang	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	Yes
19	Ah Tai	Penang	Male	Chinese	Buddhist	Ipoh, Perak	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	Yes
20	Ah Man	Penang	Male	Chinese	Buddhist	Johor	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMK	MYBRAIN	Yes
21	Lincoln	Penang	Male	Chinese	No religion	Negeri Sembilan	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	Yes
22	Danish	Penang	Male	Chinese	Christian	Sarawak	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	Yes
23	Peng	Penang	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Perak	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	MYBRAIN	Yes
24	Jenny	Penang	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Penang	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	Yes
25	Huan	Penang	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Johor	Married	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC – SMK	MYBRAIN	Yes
26	Anna	Penang	Female	Chinese	Buddhist Hindu	Perak	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	KPT	Yes
27	Cathy	Penang	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Kelantan	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	No
28	Juan	Penang	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Penang	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: ICSS	Self-sponsored	Yes
29	Shui	Penang	Female	Chinese	Christian	Sarawak	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	Yes
30	Linda	Penang	Female	Chinese	Christian	Penang	Single	PG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	Yes
31	Salim	Glasgow	Male	Malay	Islam	Johor	Single	UG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	JPA	No

32	Suhaimi	Glasgow	Male	Malay	Islam	Negeri Sembilan	Single	UG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	No
33	Rahim	Glasgow	Male	Malay	Islam	Kelantan	Married	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	KPT	Yes
34	Ridhuan	Glasgow	Male	Malay	Islam	Kelantan	Married	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	KPT	Yes
35	Amir	Glasgow	Male	Malay	Islam	Selangor	Single	PG	Primary: SAN Secondary: SMAR-SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
36	Ishak	Glasgow	Male	Malay	Islam	Terangganu	Single	UG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	Self-sponsored	Yes
37	Shauki	Glasgow	Male	Malay	Islam	Kuala Lumpur	Married	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MARA	Yes
38	Saleha	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Kedah	Single	UG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MARA	No
39	Rohana	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Perak	Single	PG	Primary: SAN Secondary: SMAR-SMK	MARA	No
40	Asma	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Terangganu	Single	UG	Primary: SK Secondary: SBP	JPA	No
41	Siti	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Kedah	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MARA	Yes
42	Aminah	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Johor	Married	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	GU	Yes
43	Ramlah	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Johor	Married	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SBP	Self-sponsored	Yes
44	Faridah	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Pahang	Single	PG	Primary: SK Secondary: SMK	MARA	Yes
45	Indah	Glasgow	Female	Malay	Islam	Selangor	Single	UG	Primary: SAN Secondary: SMK	MARA	No
46	Terry	Glasgow	Male	Chinese	Christian	Selangor	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	No
47	Ah Boa	Glasgow	Male	Chinese	Buddhist and Taoist	Negeri Sembilan	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	Yes
48	Shaun	Glasgow	Male	Chinese	No religion	Johor	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	Yes

49	Kent	Glasgow	Male	Chinese	Buddhism	Kelantan	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	No
50	Jasmine	Glasgow	Female	Chinese	Christian	Selangor	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	No
51	Kailee	Glasgow	Female	Chinese	No religion	Perak	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	Self-sponsored	Yes
52	Meiling	Glasgow	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Kedah	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	No
53	Melissa	Glasgow	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Selangor	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	Yes
54	Zhen	Glasgow	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Selangor	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	Yes
55	Shun	Glasgow	Female	Chinese	Buddhist	Johor	Single	UG	Primary: SKJC Secondary: SMKJC	JPA	No

Appendix C
(Interview Guide)

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduce myself.

2. Explain the research briefly and provide the plain language statement to the participant.

3. Explain that this research has been approved by the Glasgow University Ethics Committee.

4. Obtain the written consent and begin to record the interview.

5. Begin the interview.

PART ONE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

1. What is your year of birth? What is your marital status? What is your religion?

2. What do/did your parents do for living? How many siblings do you have? Do you know any friend or family friend from a different ethnic group?

3. Where did you go for your primary school? Was that a private or public school? What did you like about your primary school? What did you dislike about your primary school?

4. Where did you go for your secondary school? Was that a private or public school? What did you like about your secondary school? What did you dislike about your secondary school?

5. Are you an undergraduate or a post-graduate student in USM/GofU? Where did you study for your undergraduate study? Was that a private or public university? What made you interested in applying to that particular university? Can you estimate the student composition in your university based on ethnicity?

PART TWO: IDENTITY

1. What is important in describing yourself? Why is/are these things important for you over everything else?

2. How do you identify yourself as Malay or Chinese?

3. How do you identify others as Malay or Chinese?

4. Have you ever been mistaken as someone from another country than Malaysia? When? Where? What was your reaction at that time?

PART THREE: RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCES

1. Where is your hometown? Is this the first neighbourhood area that you have lived in? If 'Yes', can you describe the population composition in your current neighbourhood? What are the advantages of staying there? What do you enjoy most about your current neighbourhood? Did your previous neighbourhood have the same population composition as your current place? What motivated you to move to a same/different composition area? What are the advantages that you get when you stay in an area with the same/different composition?

PART FOUR: SOCIAL LIFE AND EXPERIENCES

1. Can you tell me about your friends in Penang/Glasgow? Are they Malays/Chinese? How did you meet them? What kind of activities have you shared with your friends?

2. Where are you staying in Penang/Glasgow? What are the reasons for you to stay in that particular area? Do your parents like the area that you are staying in now? What did/do your parents say about your housing area?

3. Can you tell me a bit about your roommate(s)/flatmate(s)? What are the advantages/disadvantages of staying with people from the same/different ethnicity?

4. Can you describe a social group in the university? Do they socialise with others? Do you think that they tend to 'hang out' with friends from the same ethnic group? How about you?

5. Do you have a friend from a different ethnic group?

6. If 'Yes', how did this relationship begin? What kind of activity do you do together? Is the friendship still taking place? If 'Yes', how have you maintained it? If 'No', what caused the relationship to end? Do you think that this relationship would have ended if s/he had been the same ethnicity as you? Can you elaborate your answer?

7. If 'No', what kind of barrier made you unable to have a friend from a different ethnic group? Was that due to location, education, family or limited contact with different ethnic groups?

8. Do you think that the decision to make a friend will be different if you are living abroad?

PART FIVE: WORK EXPERIENCE

1. Do you have any work experience? Where did you work? Is that in the private or the public sector? Can you estimate the composition of workers in your workplace based on ethnicity?

2. Did you face any difficulty in dealing with workmates from different ethnicities? Do you object to working with someone from a different ethnic group? Will you work under someone from a different ethnicity than your own?

3. Would you work for a male/female employer? If 'Yes', would you work with a male/female employer who comes from a different ethnic group?

4. Do you see any barrier to gaining employment in the public/private sector?
Probe 1: The majority of Malays work in the government sector: do you think that it is difficult for you to get a job in the government sector?
Probe 2: The majority of Chinese work in the private sector: do you think that it is difficult for you to get a job in the private sector?

5. Are you interested in working in the public/private sector in the future? What are the reasons for you to work in the public/private sector? Do you think that your ethnicity contributes to your decisions in job seeking?

PART SIX: POLITICS

1. What do you think about the political situation in Malaysia?

2. Do you think that politics in Malaysia is shaped by ethnic interests?

3. What are the criteria for a good political party/coalition?

PART SEVEN: MARRIAGE

1. What is your opinion regarding inter-ethnic relationships or marriage?

2. Do you know anyone who is involved in an inter-ethnic relationship? What are the main challenges in inter-ethnic marriages?

3. Would you consider marrying someone from a different ethnic group? Would you consider marrying someone from a different religion? Would you consider marrying someone who has the same religion as you but a different nationality?

CONCLUSION
1. What do you think can improve your life? Are you already satisfied with the current situation?
2. How can your position be improved?
3. Is there anything else that you want to add before we end the interview?

Thank you for your time.
End of interview.

***

Appendix D
(Malaysian laws and regulations related to religion)

Section 119 Syariah Law

Renunciation of the Religion of Islam, Enactment 10, Administrative of the Religion of Islam (Negeri Sembilan) Enactment 2003.

Islamic Family Law Act of 1984 (Marriage)

Section 10 – Persons of other religions

(1) No man shall marry a non-Muslim except a Kitabiyah

No woman shall marry a non-Muslim

Article 3 Federation Constitutions – Religion of the Federation

(1) Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation.

(2) In every State other than States not having a Ruler the position of the Ruler as the Head of the religion of Islam in his State in the manner and to the extent acknowledged and declared by the Constitution of that State, and, subject to that Constitution, all rights, privileges, prerogatives and powers enjoyed by him as Head of that religion, are unaffected and unimpaired; but in any acts, observances or ceremonies with respect to which the Conference of Rulers has agreed that they should extend to the Federation as a whole each of the other Rulers shall in his capacity of Head of the religion of Islam authorize the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to represent him.

(3) The Constitution of the States of Malacca, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak shall each make provision for conferring on the Yang di-Pertuan Agong the position of Head of the religion of Islam in that State.

(4) Nothing in this Article derogates from any other provision of this Constitution.

(5) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall be the Head of the religion of Islam in the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya; and for this purpose Parliament may by law make provisions for regulating Islamic religious affairs and for constituting a Council to advise the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in matters relating to the religion of Islam.

Article 11 Federation Constitution – Freedom of religion

(1) Every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and, subject to Clause (4), to propagate it.

(2) No person shall be compelled to pay any tax the proceeds of which are specially allocated in whole or in part for the purposes of a religion other than his own.

(3) Every religious group has the right—

    (a) to manage its own religious affairs;

    (b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and

    (c) to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.

(4) State law and in respect of the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Labuan and Putrajaya, federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.

(5) This Article does not authorize any act contrary to any general law relating to public order, public health or morality.

Article 121(a) Federation Constitution – Judicial power of the Federation

(1) There shall be two High Courts of co-ordinate jurisdiction and status, namely—

    (a) one in the States of Malaya, which shall be known as the High Court in Malaya and shall have its principal registry at such place in the States of Malaya as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong may determine; and

    (b) one in the States of Sabah and Sarawak, which shall be known as the High Court in Sabah and Sarawak and shall have its principal registry at such place in the States of Sabah and Sarawak as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong may determine; and such inferior courts as may be provided by federal law; and the High Courts and inferior courts shall have such jurisdiction and powers as may be conferred by or under federal law.

    (1a) The courts referred to in Clause (1) shall have no jurisdiction in respect of any matter within the jurisdiction of the Syariah courts.

Section 295 Penal Code – Injuring or defiling a place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class

Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons, with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons, or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with fine or with both.

Section 296 Penal Code – Disturbing a religious assembly

Whoever voluntarily causes disturbance to any assembly lawfully engaged in the performance of religious worship or religious ceremonies shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine or with both.

Section 297 Penal Code – Trespassing on burial places, etc.

Whoever, with the intention of wounding the feelings of any person, or of insulting the religion of any person, or with the knowledge that the feelings of any person are likely to be wounded, or that the religion of any person is likely to be insulted thereby, commits any trespass in any place of worship or on any place of sepulchre or any place set apart for the performance of funeral rites, or as a depository for the remains of the dead or offers any indignity to any human corpse or causes disturbance to any person assembled for the performance of funeral ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine or with both.

Section 298 Penal Code – Uttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person

Whoever, with deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person, or makes any gesture in the sight of that person, or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine or with both.

Appendix E
(Group definition and their privileges)

Article 160 Clause 2 – the Definition of Malays and Aboriginal peninsular

(2) In this Constitution, unless the context otherwise requires, the following expressions have the meanings hereby respectively assigned to them, that is to say —

"Aborigine" means an aborigine of the Malay Peninsula;

"Malay" means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and –

(a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or

(b) is the issue of such a person;

Article 161 Clause 6 – the definition of natives of Sabah and Sarawak

(6) In this Article "native" means—

(a) in relation to Sarawak, a person who is a citizen and either belongs to one of the races specified in Clause Clause (7) as indigenous to the State or is of mixed blood deriving exclusively from those races; and

(b) in relation to Sabah, a person who is a citizen, is the child or grandchild of a person of a race indigenous to Sabah, and was born (whether on or after Malaysia Day or not) either in Sabah or to a father domiciled in Sabah at the time of the birth.

(7) The races to be treated for the purposes of the definition of "native" in Clause (6) as indigenous to Sarawak are the Bukitans, Bisayahs, Dusuns, Sea Dayaks, Land Dayaks, Kadayans, Kalabits, Kayans, Kenyahs (including Sabups and Sipengs), Kajangs (including Sekapans, Kejamans, Lahanans, Punans, Tanjongs and Kanowits), Lugats, Lisums, Malays, Melanos, Muruts, Penans, Sians, Tagals, Tabuns and Ukits.

Article 32 Federation Constitutions – Supreme Head of the Federation, and his Consort

(1) There shall be a Supreme Head of the Federation, to be called the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who shall take precedence over all persons in the Federation and shall not be liable to any proceedings whatsoever in any court except in the Special Court established under Part XV.

(2) The Consort of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (to be called the Raja Permaisuri Agong) shall take precedence next after the Yang di-Pertuan Agong over all other persons in the Federation.

(3) The Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall be elected by the Conference of Rulers for a term of five years, but may at any time resign his office by writing under his hand addressed to the Conference of Rulers or be removed from office by the Conference of Rulers,and shall cease to hold office on ceasing to be a Ruler.

Article 153

(1) It shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article.

(2) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, but subject to the provisions of Article 40 and of this Article, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall exercise his functions under this Constitution and federal law in such manner as may be necessary to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and to ensure the reservation for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government and, when any permit or licence for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then, subject to the provisions of that law and this Article, of such permits and licences.

Appendix F
(Language and education)

Article 152

152. (1) The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in such script as Parliament may by law provide:

Provided that –

(a) no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language; and

(b) nothing in this Clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation.

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