

An Exploratory Study on History Education and the Construction of Patriotism among the Youth in Malaysia

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This study explores the importance of history education towards the construction of patriotism in a multiethnic society in Malaysia. The discussion is based on the experiences and views from the youth in the state of Johor Bahru, Peninsula Malaysia. A qualitative methodology using a phenomenology approach is used to gain insight from the thirty informants. There are four themes discussed, which includes the informants' experience in learning history in school, the expression of 'love' as Malaysians, the understanding of the Independence and 'making of Malaysia' and lastly, the informants' views on the common Malaysian identity in a multiethnic society. The findings emphasize the critical role of schools and higher education institutions in instilling the patriotic spirit through history education.

Key words: *History, Patriotism, Multiethnic, Youth, Higher Education Institutions.*

Introduction

Francis Fukuyama's essay entitled 'The End of History?' published in 1989 predicted that the end of history for international relations would cause the Third World¹ to be the terrain of conflict after the downfall of fascism and communism against the West (Fukuyama, 1989: 15). He was referring to the 'Unipolar' power, which was successfully posed by the United State

¹ International Relations dictionary to categorize Third World states in Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia (excepting Japan) and the Pacific islands (Excepting Australia and New Zealand) which have experienced decolonization over the last two centuries.



(U.S) with the dissolution of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1989. As a small state in Southeast Asia, Malaysia (known as Malaya before 1957) had a 'roller-coaster' experience in its struggle for independence and in the struggle for 'survival' as a sovereign state in a post-independence period. One of the longest and challenging national security threats post-independence was the threat imposed by the armed communists. If the US won the battle against the USSR in the Cold War, Malaysia would attain victory against a threat from armed communists. Nevertheless, there is a question as to whether this history is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the new era of the society 5.0? History as described by Ibn Khaldun², is an art of valuable doctrine, numerous in advantages and honourable in purpose, which informs us about bygone nations in the context of their habits, the prophets in the context of their lives, and kings in the context of their states and politics, so those who seek the guidance of the past in either worldly or religiously matters may have that advantage (Ibn Khaldun, 1377, as cited in Al-Jubouri, 2005). Further, history can be defined as a collective memory of mankind and a narrative that helps construct the essence of a group's identity, how they relate to other groups, and ascertains what its options are for facing present challenges (Liu & Hilton, 2005). The application of history in various fields of studies like International relations, for example, are inevitable to some extent, and history is not only to 'imagine the past', but is also a 'yardstick' to measure and predict future behaviour and the actions that might be taken in safeguarding the territory and sovereignty of a nation against the possible threats.

As a developing state, Malaysia emphasized the creation of 'good citizen' equipped with a high spirit of patriotism. The introduction of National Ideology known as Rukunegara during the premiership of Tun Abdul Razak is a vital strategy in instilling the spirit of patriotism among the citizenry. Rukunegara emphasizes FIVE principles: - Belief in God, Loyalty to King and Country, Upholding the Constitution, Rule of Law and Good Behaviour and Morality. These FIVE principles were introduced after interethnic clashes escalated on the 13th May 1969³ in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. According to Tun Ghazali Shafie⁴ (1985), a society which does not have shared beliefs, values and principles is in the process of breaking up, of being overtaken by the events, by the developments and dynamism of the rest of the world. In order to shape the shared beliefs, values and principles within the multiethnic society, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (2011) in 1991 introduced the term 'Bangsa Malaysia,' which means that Malaysian should regard themselves, first and foremost as individuals with a common identity, known as Malaysian identity.

The shared Malaysian identity is important in preparing Malaysia to develop as envisioned in Vision 2020. How does one instil these common shared beliefs and identity in a multiethnic

² Muslim historian, famously known with his Masterpiece- *Muqaddimah* meaning Introduction published in 1377.

³ Racial riot escalated in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia declared as the State of Emergency.

⁴ Former Minister of Home Affairs (1973-1981) & Former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1981-1984).

society for Malaysia Baharu? According to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, achieving Bangsa Malaysia will require a focus on the education system. ‘Love’ and ‘pride’ in the nation-state need to be nurtured or else the development of the spirit of ‘oneness’ and patriotism is merely a vision without substance.

Literature Review

The efforts towards achieving national unity and social cohesion remain a major part of the agenda in Malaysian educational policy (Hazri & Raman, 2012). The determination to achieve national unity has been highlighted clearly in the Razak Report 1957. The report highlighted education as the medium to foster national unity in a multiethnic society. The Razak Report was published at the beginning of May 1956 (prior to Malaya obtaining independence) and was presented by Tun Abdul Razak⁵ with the ultimate objective being that the education policy must be crafted to bring together the children of all ethnic groups under a national education system, in which the National Language is the main medium of instruction (Paridah, 2008). Even though Bahasa Melayu is an official National Language of Malaysia, there is no restriction for other ethnic languages to be used, as long as the practise does not affect the harmonious or perhaps to a certain extent, deter the efforts to instil, encourage and nurture the spirit of patriotism in a multiethnic society. These politics of accommodation practised somehow managed to successfully maintain the survival of Malaysia as a state, without a common Malaysian identity as a Bangsa Malaysia. The discourse of education for integration in a multiethnic society and language are hardly to be separated.

In the context of West Malaysia which is different from the East Malaysia⁶ societal landscape, ethnic Malays (majority population in a Peninsula) and others have different aspirations and ‘different principles’ about rights in education, language for integration and socio-economic opportunities. This remain the dominant challenges in the education policy processes for nation-building (Hazri, 2010; Hazri & Raman, 2012). The ‘different principles’ somehow hinders the long efforts to achieve the ‘common Malaysian identity’ and distort the effort to construct the patriotic spirit in all Malaysian hearts and minds. Malaysia has to go through many challenging and difficult times throughout the history of its existence. Ironically, despite many turbulent periods, Malaysia has successfully managed to safeguard its territory as a sovereign state. The Father of Independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman once said that history has made this land of ours unique in many ways, as three of the main ethnicities of Asia mingle and merge in one home.

⁵ Malaysian First Education Minister under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

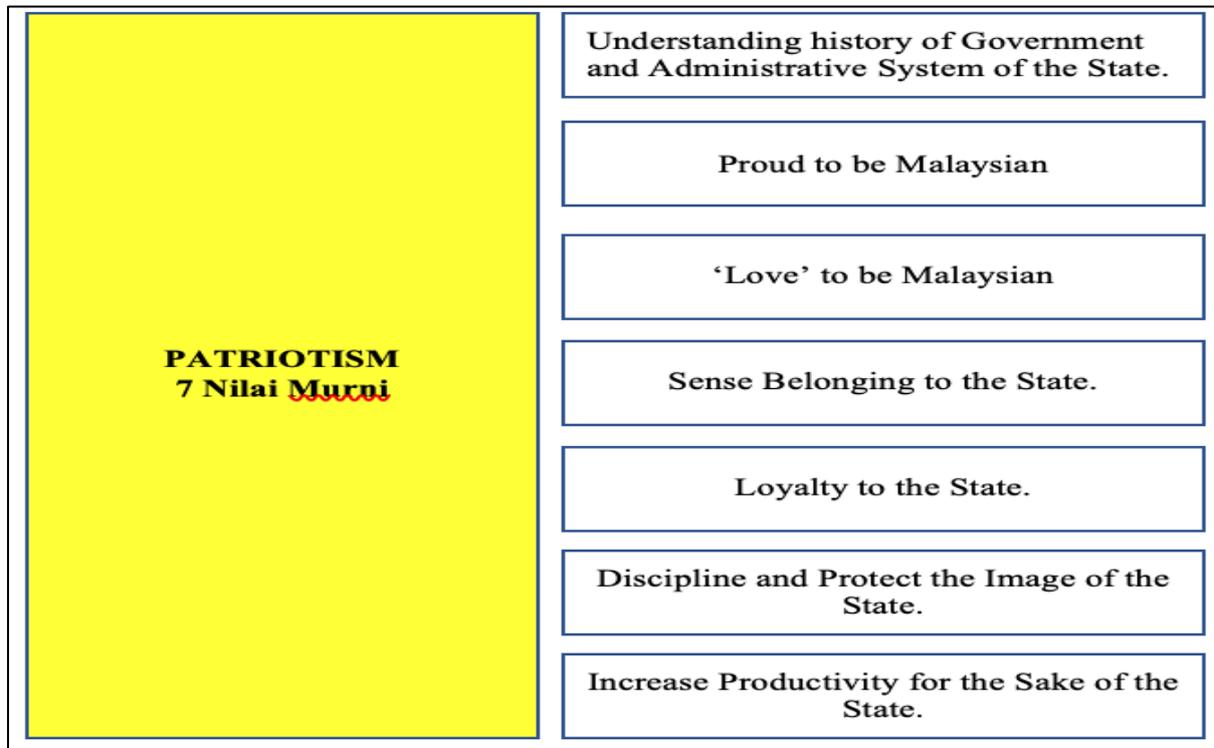
⁶ Consists of Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan, ethnic Malays is the minority, while the Malays are the majority population in the Peninsula, West Malaysia.

‘Surely our past experience shared in common is the soundest guide of all to our future as one nation and people. Let us, therefore, reach out to even brighter horizons by building on the lessons of our past’. (Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1969: 206).

Historical literacy through the awareness of the past event is necessary to instil the spirit of patriotism especially among the youth. The state’s past experiences provide a lesson for the youth to be conscious and concerned with their important role in the multiethnic society. History education has to nurture a spirit of ‘love’ and appreciation for the sacrifice, struggle and hardship that the past generation has endured in securing and obtaining the ‘peace’ of today. The diversity in aspects of ethics, culture, religion and custom provides a rich societal backdrop, but in reality, it also presents a challenge for the state to foster unity and stability, hindering efforts for the construction of patriotism through a common Malaysian identity. Some scholars emphasized that ethnic diversity is an inherent problem for democratic stability and further argued that conflicts over culture are more likely to lead to intractable, large-scale violence (Waterbury, 2016). However, after 13th May 1969, Malaysia managed to maintain some form of stability and disproved the ‘sceptical’ prediction made by a few foreign leaders on the capability of Malaysia to survive as a sovereign state after the interethnic riot. New national policies have been introduced to regain the stability after the interethnic riot 13th May, to name a few such as New Economic Policy (NEP), National Culture Policy (NCP) and Rukunegara.

Encouraging the patriotic spirit in a multiethnic society is part of the top agenda after the interethnic riot. According to Primoratz (2002), patriotism can be categorized into two, value-based patriotism and egocentric patriotism. First, value-based patriotism refers to the ‘love of one’s county’ because of certain traits exhibited by the state, its distinctive merits and achievement. Second, egocentric patriotism is ‘love of one’s country’ without any influencing factors, the feeling of ‘love’ solely because ‘this is my country’. Further, Primoratz explained the former might be taught a ‘superficially’ as their loyalty is not directly for the state and cannot satisfy certain standards of value. The latter is much better as there is no unconditional factor influencing their loyalty and concern to the state. The discussion on the construction of patriotism in Malaysia as illustrates in *Figure 1: The Construction of Patriotism with 7 Moral Values or Nilai Murni* includes seven Moral Values or ‘Nilai Murni,’ which comprise understanding history of the state, government and administrative systems, Malaysian pride, ‘love’ for Malaysia as a state, a sense belonging to the state, loyalty to the state, discipline and responsibility for the state, and working for the sake of the state (Tuan Pah, Shamsul Anuar & Zaheruddin, 2016).

Figure 1. The Construction of Patriotism with 7 Moral Values or Nilai Murni



The construction of patriotism in a multiethnic society is necessary for state development, sustainability, and national security. In this context, the youth especially students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are the future asset for the state. They are the young educated generation that will lead, and subsequently govern, the state. Therefore, the need to understand the state's aspirations and 'sincere' willingness to participate in the development and progress of the state is crucial. However, the National Patriotism Index prepared by Biro Tata Negara (BTN) in 2014 highlighted a low score (average 3.8) of patriotism among public and private university students (cited in Ku Hasnita, Zatul Himmah, Ratna Roshida, Lee Yok Fee & Zarina, 2018). Ku Hasnita et al. (2018) in their survey reported that, while patriotic spirit among public university students is high, the average percentage is discouraging.

The study by Rashidah Mamat (2014) highlighted that Malays have a stronger patriotic spirit than non-Malays. The level of patriotism from one generation to another generation and from one ethnicity to another ethnicity signals the urgent need to have a continuous, not a seasonal, patriotism agenda effort. There are many factors that deter this effort in instilling the spirit of patriotism in a multiethnic society. Sitti Hasnah, Abdul Razaq & Mohd Mahzan, (2015) highlighted four challenges in fostering patriotism among younger generation. These are negative attitudes and preferred self-interest than national interest, lack of appreciation among the people of various ethnics on the history of Malaysia, a lack of confidence in terms of honesty and loyalty towards the state, and globalization with the infusion of foreign culture.



Based on the past studies conducted by Ku Hasnita et al, (2018), Rashidah Mamat (2014) and Sitti Hasnah et al. (2015), this paper seeks to explore the patriotism spirit among Malay youths through their experience in history education in primary and secondary schools. The significance of the study is to gain insight on how history education and literacy could instil the spirit of patriotism among the youth before they pursue their tertiary education in higher education institutions (HEIs).

Methodology

A phenomenology approach using a semi-structured interview was used to grasp informants' views and experiences. According to Moustakas (1994), the phenomenological approach involves a return to experience to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience. The strength of qualitative methodology lies in its unique capacity to conduct in-depth interviews and observation. In this way, the researcher is better able to see the world through the subject's eyes (Piece, 2009: 45). This study focuses on thirty (30) secondary students that had just finished their examination, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), in a secondary school around Johor Bahru, the Southern state in Peninsula Malaysia. All of the informants were waiting to further their tertiary education in HEIs and expected registration in the mid of 2019. All thirty (30) key informants selected are from the majority ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese and Indians aged in between 17 and 18 years old. They comprise five Males and five Females. Just recently on 16 July 2019, a Bill passed in the Malaysian Parliament has changed the aged of voting from 21 years old to 18 years old. It is indicated that the Malaysian youth not only can cast a vote in the next General Election (GE), but they also can be a candidate in the GE.

Obtaining the perspective from this group is essential, as they are at the transition period to pursue their tertiary education in HEI. The study takes an initiative to explore the informants' insight and experiences from the secondary school regarding history education and patriotism. The informants' details are illustrated in *Table 1: Informants' Social Characteristics*, *Table 2: Informants' Social Characteristic (Chinese)* and *Table 3: Informants' Social Characteristic (Indians)*.

Table 1: Informants' Social Characteristics

Informant	Gender	Name of School in Johor Bahru
Informant 1	<i>F</i>	SMK Aminuddin Baki
Informant 2	<i>M</i>	Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar (English College)
Informant 3	<i>F</i>	SMK Sultan Ismail
Informant 4	<i>M</i>	SMK Aminuddin Baki
Informant 5	<i>M</i>	SMK Sultan Ismail
Informant 6	<i>F</i>	SMK (P) Sultan Ibrahim
Informant 7	<i>M</i>	SMK Saint Joseph
Informant 8	<i>M</i>	Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar (English College)
Informant 9	<i>F</i>	SMK Sultanah Engku Tun Aminah
Informant 10	<i>F</i>	SMK Infant Jesus Convent

Table 2: Informants' Social Characteristic (Chinese)

Informant	Gender	Name of School in Johor Bahru
Informant 1C	<i>M</i>	SMK Aminuddin Baki
Informant 2C	<i>M</i>	Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar (English College)
Informant 3C	<i>F</i>	SMK Sultan Ismail
Informant 4C	<i>F</i>	SMK Aminuddin Baki
Informant 5C	<i>M</i>	SMK Sultan Ismail
Informant 6C	<i>F</i>	SMK (P) Sultan Ibrahim
Informant 7C	<i>M</i>	SMK Saint Joseph
Informant 8C	<i>M</i>	Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar (English College)
Informant 9C	<i>F</i>	SMK Sultanah Engku Tun Aminah
Informant 10C	<i>F</i>	SMK Infant Jesus Convent

Table 3: Informants' Social Characteristic (Indians)

Informant	Gender	Name of School in Johor Bahru
Informant 1I	<i>F</i>	SMK Aminuddin Baki
Informant 2I	<i>M</i>	Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar (English College)
Informant 3I	<i>F</i>	SMK Sultan Ismail
Informant 4I	<i>M</i>	SMK Aminuddin Baki
Informant 5I	<i>M</i>	SMK Sultan Ismail
Informant 6I	<i>F</i>	SMK (P) Sultan Ibrahim
Informant 7I	<i>M</i>	SMK Saint Joseph
Informant 8I	<i>M</i>	Maktab Sultan Abu Bakar (English College)
Informant 9I	<i>F</i>	SMK Sultanah Engku Tun Aminah
Informant 10I	<i>F</i>	SMK Infant Jesus Convent

All interviews were recorded for academic research with the permission from the informants and the sessions were conducted at various places around Johor Bahru area.

Results and Findings

The findings were arranged thematically under four sub-topics according to the main semi-structured questions used in the interview sessions.

Experiences in Learning History in School

Five out of ten informants shared that history classes are ‘boring’ and ‘dry’ compared to other subjects, the textbooks are too thick, and there are too many facts to memorize and read. The classes were conducted with either the teacher reading the textbook to students or vice versa. There was little in the way of explanation and an overreliance on the textbook, which was poorly situated in terms of other sources of history.

‘subject relying too much on textbook.... We want history subject to be teach in a creative way and outside the classroom’. (R: 9M)

‘Thick textbook and at the same time, there are many versions of history books that interesting outside’. (R: 2M)

Three informants said that they do enjoy the history classes as they can gain many new historical facts. As they aimed to be lawyers in future, these informants shared that their parents bought an additional history book to enhance their historical understanding and they do not rely only on the textbooks. During the school breaks, sometimes, their parents took them to watch a theatre in Istana Budaya, Kuala Lumpur or even a movie on historical events that happened in Malaysia.

‘My ambition is to be a Lawyer, history subject is important to me, so far I am enjoying learning a history. My parent advises me to score for a good mark for this subject’. (R: 1M)

Two informants said that they don't like the history subjects as the textbook over-emphasised political things, and from only one perspective. It needed to cover the ‘alternative history’ and not focus solely on certain political parties. For instance, on Malayan Emergency, the forum was held in July 2018 in Kuala Lumpur on topic – *Should we rewrite our history book?* The speakers highlighted facts which were not congruent with the historical facts in the textbook. The informants stressed that they are confused as to which are the ‘accurate’ historical facts. For Chinese informants, eight of them said the history classes were not that ‘enjoyable’ like the other subjects. The classes relied too much on the textbook.

‘Not that enjoyable like another subject, too many facts on the textbook that I need to memorize, I noticed the conversation in social media about the history different from what we learn’. (R: 9C).

Two informants shared that history subjects were too broad and concentrate too much on political issues. They also questioned the role of communist ‘freedom’ fighters, which was not included in the history textbook. Eight of ten Indian informants had a similar opinion that the history subject in school is boring as the classes relied too much on facts from the textbook. Two of informants shared that they found that the history subject is good, in that it allows them to know their root and origin.

‘I love history subject, I gained many knowledges about our origin from this subject. How Malaysia becoming a plural society, the ‘penjajah’ and many much more’. (R:4I)

Expressions of ‘Love’ as Malaysians

Seven of the informants said they love being a Malaysian. The reason expressed by them is because Malaysia is their country and they are born in Malaysia. The informants shared that in school assemblies they sing the State’s National Anthem ‘Negaraku’ and recite the Rukunegara and proudly expressed that Malaysia is always in their heart.

‘Very proud to be Malaysian living in a peaceful and harmony country’. (R: 2M).

One of the informants said that she was upset with the blogger Namawee, because of his controversial rapping parody of National Anthem, ‘Negarakuku’. His parody of the National Anthem is an insult to those who loved Malaysia.

‘Negaraku song should be respected, sadly our fellow Malaysia- Namawee make fun of our Negaraku song, what is his intention to make that parody using our National Anthem song?’ (R: 6M).

Another three informants conveyed that ‘love’ appeared as the achievements of Malaysia like having their own brand of car, Proton, having the tallest skyscraper like Petronas Twin Towers and having the chance to celebrate many festivals from each ethnicity. Only one informant shared a ‘neutral’ feeling. It is because, from his experience, he has to explain to his foreign friends unsolved issues that attracted international interest like the mysterious disappearance of MH370, the ‘shot down’ flight MH17, the repeated kidnapping cases in tourist hot spots like in Borneo, corruption cases, and the depreciation of currency - Ringgit. These issues do affect him in defending the state. Four Chinese informants highlighted that they love being in

Malaysia. Six of the informants said they are ‘neutral’, ‘less’ Malaysian and feel ashamed to be called Malaysian as they believe many incidents happened in Malaysia that need to be resolved by the authority, ‘minority issues,’ for example education-vernacular, ‘jawi’ and religion issues. Apart from that, they shared in social media, that there are many conversations that incite hatred among Malaysians on many issues. These issues make them feel ‘ashamed’ to be called Malaysian with outsiders.

‘Browsing the social media, many sensitive issues from the conversation that downgraded us Malaysians, I felt ashamed to be called as Malaysian’. (R: 7C)

‘I felt less Malaysian being as a minority, why we can’t for example, you asked about history subject in school, why highlighted many good things about the Malay political things? Many policies given preferential treatment to Malays’. (R: 9C)

Five Indians informants said that they are proud to be Malaysian living in a multiethnic society with differences in background. One informant felt inspired with the leadership of Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in governing Malaysia.

‘I am proud Malaysian, even though I am Indian, a minority ethnic, but I do respect other cultures and differences in the society’. (R: 4I)

‘I really adore our Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir, he is a good leader for Malaysian, thus, I am proud to be Malaysian to have such a good leader’. (R: 8I)

Another five informants highlighted that they felt ‘neutral’ as Malaysians. One informant highlighted many issues involving the Indian community throughout the year 2018 and 2019, such as Seaford Sri Maha Mariamman Temple Violence, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and Zakir Naik’s racial sentiments.

Understanding of Independence and ‘Making of Malaysia’

Eight informants shared their historical literacy by mentioning that Malaya obtained Merdeka in 1957 and was ‘free’ from Colonialism and Communism. They acknowledged the contributions of leaders like Tunku Abdul Rahman dan Tun Abdul Razak in the making of Malaysia. One informant expressed her gratitude towards the past leaders in ensuring the peacefulness of Malaysia by pointing out the interethnic riot on 13 May and how the leaders at that time managed to secure peace after the riot. They also mentioned the contributions of Tun Dr. Mahathir, the oldest and longest-serving Prime Minister in the world. Two out of eight informants mentioned two important dates in the ‘making of Malaysia’: the 31 August 1957 and 16 September 1963. Four Chinese informants questioned why the history textbook doesn’t

highlight the role of communist ‘freedom’ fighters. Seven of the Chinese informants and six Indian informants gave an inaccurate answer on the date of independence.

Sub-Question: Do you know that after the Malayan Emergency 1960 (War against the Communism and at the same time reluctance to accept the proposal of Malayan Union by British Colonial), Malaysia has another ‘undeclared Second Emergency’?

Two informants said that they do know about the continuous struggle with limited information, while others don't have any ideas on that. According to the informant, the history subject in schools does not emphasize this historical fact.

Sub-Question: If I shared with you the stories that Malaysia won the War against communism during this Second Emergency? That this past event makes you proud to be a Malaysian and more patriotic?

All the informants agreed that they are proud to be a Malaysian knowing the struggle of past generations in protecting Malaysia from being indoctrinated by foreign ideologies and domination. Three of the informants concurred the historical stories like struggle and victories in war could trigger them to be patriotic, because if the past generation had to go through hardship in protecting Malaysia, they also have to be responsible in protecting Malaysia like the past generation and its leaders.

Malaysian Identity in a Multiethnic Society

Eight informants expressed their concern on other ethnicities in regard to their ‘sensitivity’ and respect towards differences in society. Like the case of Namawee, who made fun of the National Anthem, Chinese bloggers Vivian and Alwin inciting religious enmity during Ramadhan (Holy Month for the Muslim), and in a recent case, insulted Yang di-Pertuan Agong (YDPA) as well as Islam under the account name of ‘Ayea Yea’, ‘Eric Liew’, and ‘the Sabah-Sarawak’ on two social media platforms. According to these informants, their attitudes might not represent the whole community, but sadly it can stir hatred in a multiethnic society like Malaysia. One informant expressed her concern on the statements made in 1866 by William Higby, a California congressman. The informant pointed out their worries on the statement as they do not want the repetition incident of 13 May 1969 because of the certain ‘unchangeable’ traits imposed by this ethnic group. The informants are very critical saying that common identity started with using a single national language, Bahasa Melayu, which is only used for formal matters. This was said without neglecting the importance of the International Language of English. Further, the informants highlighted no common Malaysian identity when ‘language’ is the measurement. Informants added that each ethnicity ‘obsessed’ with their cultural tradition and neglected or purposely neglected the importance of the national language as a language of

unity. Two informants highlighted the 'possible culprit' of multiple identities being the differences in education streams, and suggests that we separate all of them to fully understand each culture and their differences. The usage of National Language as a medium of interaction for the national unity purposes needs to be fully understood. The National Language is not for only formal matters per se, it is a language to bind the differences. Thus, to serve its purpose, the language is to be used in interactions between Malays and Malays, between Chinese and Indians, Indians and Kadazans, Chinese and Ibans, and among all other ethnicities in Malaysia. To relate with the history and construction of patriotism, the informants shared the possibility to instil the patriotic spirit with a similar national historical narrative through the textbook using National Language in all vernacular schools. Common Malaysian identity in a multiethnic society could be achieved through the usage of a single language. Education and history could create a better Bangsa Malaysia with a high spirit of patriotism. Chinese and Indians informants agreed that education is crucial in creating the shared Malaysian identity among the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. They also agreed that single stream education using the National Language will have a positive impact in instilling the spirit of patriotism among the youth.

Figure 2. The Construction of Patriotism Spirit among the Youths in Johor Bahru.



Conclusion

From the preliminary findings, common shared identity or Bangsa Malaysia need to be nurtured at a very young age. As with patriotic spirit, the need to respect differences of background in a multiethnic society is highlighted in National Ideology-Rukunegara and the Constitution. Historically, Rukunegara was to unite the different groups in a multiethnic society after the May 13 tragedy of 1969. To not repeat the traumatic event of 13 May, the need to learn from past mistakes and ensure the success of the young generation through the history of education is necessary. The construction of patriotism is a never-ending process in order to achieve the 'ideal' of 'Bangsa Malaysia' in a multiethnic society. From the findings, the informants highlighted a lack of interest in the history subject because the classes conducted failed to capture the interest of the students. The teachers need to have the skills and knowledge in delivering their classes, and find creative ways of teaching history beyond the conventional method.

The history textbook syllabus needs to be revised with the inclusion and expansion of historical facts from various perspectives. The informants had mentioned the efforts of the parents in encouraging the interest of their children to learn history outside the classroom by visiting the National Museum, the National Archives of Malaysia, the War Museum, the National Monument, or even to watch theatre and film that could spark their patriotic spirit. Public forums discussing a national defined history of Malaysia should be closely monitored by the experts in the field. The discussions of historical facts cannot simply be left to those well-informed. Contradicting historical facts will lead to more confusion in understanding history and deter the effort to instil the patriotic spirit among the youth. The findings show that the majority of informants expressed their love to be a Malaysian. As defined by Primoratz (2014) egocentric patriotism is the love of one's country without any influencing factors. This is important as the informants said the feeling came naturally and was nurtured by the patriotic routine practised in school, singing a National Anthem and reciting Rukunegara during school assemblies.

A few informants fell under the category of a value-based patriotism, which sees love to be a consequence of certain factors, merits and achievement. In the findings highlighted, the informants were proud to be Malaysian because the state has its own brand of automobile, skyscrapers like Petronas Twin Towers and much more. Interestingly, the majority of respondents expressed their understanding of the 'making of Malaysia' and Independence. Unfortunately, there are informants that are not aware of basic historical facts such as the date of independence. Apart from that, there is limited knowledge from the informants on the important historical events like Malaysia victories against the armed communists in the Second Emergency. This is due to the fact that they rely heavily on the textbook with limited information on past events. The library in the school should provide more historical books from



a local perspective and organize the program with the input of historical experts and researchers from higher education institutions (HEIs). From the findings, these informants were excited to know more about the stories related to war and the victories of Malaysia against foreign invasions. From the feedback given by the informants, historical stories like this could spark more patriotic spirit. The informants highlighted their worries regarding the National Language for unity. In reality, from the informant's view, the construction of patriotism manifests by the use of single language, education and a common accepted narrative of national history. The construction of patriotism is a long process and the efforts need to be continuously and creatively implemented. The existence of vernacular schools in a multiethnic society of Malaysia has sparked a controversial debate that hinders the efforts of creating a common Malaysian identity and Bangsa Malaysia. Since, the discussion of vernacular schools will not end, and continues to delay the process of construction of patriotism, it is the time for schools and HEIs to collaborate in finding the best mechanism to enhance the pedagogy of teaching history to attract the interest of students in the history subject at schools. At the same time, more research has to be conducted at the higher education level for the improvement of national historical narratives.

HEIs is a place for a young educated generation of Malaysia to gain the knowledge and understanding necessary to be a future leader of Malaysia. Nevertheless, are HEIs ready to take a role as an agent of change for inspiring the future generation? HEIs played a very critical role in shaping and training youths to be good leaders with a strong patriotic spirit. It is the time for HEIs to expand its horizons and take an active role in creating continuous awareness on the importance of history in the construction of patriotic spirit in a multiethnic society. HEIs need to engage actively with the primary and secondary school management, teachers and students. Based on the preliminary findings, history education has the potential to instil the spirit of patriotism among the youth. Nevertheless, based on informant experiences, the history subject became a 'dull' and 'boring' subject to learn. The conventional ways of teaching history using a textbook need to be creatively improvised and harmonized following the era widely discussed in the HEIs forums and conferences, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0). The purpose of history education is to mould the young generation to be a better by appreciating the past, learn, relearn and unlearn from history. Securing Independence in 1957 from the Colonial regime is not a fairy-tale story, it is a sacrifice made by past generations for the 'prosperity' and 'peace' that we, as Malaysians, 'enjoy' today regardless of ethnicity.

Upholding the strength of unity in diversity in a multiethnic society is not without challenges. This is a preliminary study with limited informants from three major ethnic groups in the state of Johor Bahru. The findings can be a novel foundation to comprehend the complicated discussion of history and the construction of patriotism in a multiethnic society in Malaysia. Future research can be expanded with more informant or involve other ethnic groups in a different location.



As hypothesized by Ghazali Shafie (1985), in the ‘journey’ to achieve the oneness in Malaysia through the creation of Bangsa Malaysia, the multiethnic society needs to participate in the same value orientation, and needs to be conditioned by mutual contacts and exposure to the same environment. This will synthesis and record the value systems in the culture of each ethnic group. The narrative of Malaysian history, especially in the school text book needs to be updated, and the pedagogy and andragogy needs to be improved to attract student interest and attention in learning history.



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