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CONSENSUS AND CONTESTATION IN THE FORMATION OF MALAYSIAN STUDIES: A PARADIGMATIC COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

Our paper aims to question the proposition put forth by Abdul Rahman Embong (2014) regarding the "rakyat" paradigm in Malaysia as an analytical tool for Malaysian society. The "rakyat" paradigm was introduced by Abdul Rahman Embong in response to Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (1996)'s paper on Ethnicity, Class, Culture or Identity as competing paradigms in Malaysian Studies. While Shamsul (1996) conceptualised these dimensions as parallel, if competing paradigms, Abdul Rahman claimed that "rakyat", a term roughly indicating "folk" or "the people" (whose etymology we will interrogate) is yet another parallel paradigm. However, we wish to question if this is truly so, given that "folk" suggests an entire collective or lumpenproletariat. The "rakyat" paradigm, we argue, would fall short of representing a significant social category as it ignores the existence of stratification, inequality, and yet assumes a utopian collectivity. Abdul Rahman also appears to be both wary of, and supportive of, a British-based epistemological understanding of the concept of folk. Thus in this essay, we chronicle the evolution of Malaysian Studies to assess the suitability of a folk-based paradigm. Using a timeline-based approach, we chart the development of Malaysian Studies alongside significant milestones in Malaysian history, intertwining content and context. We argue that the development of Malaysian society and its associated study remain too complex to be consolidated into a "one-size-fits-all" paradigm, which the "rakyat" paradigm would be, if at all applied.

Keywords: British colonial epistemology, everyday-defined identity, Malaysian studies, "rakyat" paradigm

INTRODUCTION

Our paper aims to question the proposition put forth by Abdul Rahman Embong (2014) regarding the "rakyat" paradigm in Malaysia as an analytical tool for Malaysian society. The "rakyat" paradigm was introduced by Abdul Rahman Embong in response to Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (1996)'s paper on Ethnicity, Class, Culture or Identity as competing paradigms in Malaysian Studies. While Shamsul (1996) conceptualised these dimensions as parallel, if competing paradigms, Abdul Rahman claimed that "rakyat", a term roughly indicating "folk" or "the people" is yet another parallel paradigm. However, we wish to question if this is truly so, given that "folk" suggests an entire collective or lumpenproletariat.[1] The "rakyat" paradigm, we argue, would fall short of representing a significant social category as it ignores the existence of stratification, inequality, and yet assumes a utopian collectivity.

In responding to Shamsul AB (1996)'s conceptualisation of identity in Malaysia as having contradictions betweeen "static" and "fluid" aspects, Abdul Rahman proposes that the "rakyat" paradigm is an inclusive paradigm, having the potential to break through the dominant race-based societal paradigm in Malaysia. Thus, Abdul Rahman appears to be both wary of, and supportive of, a British-based epistemological understanding of the concept of folk. Thus, in this essay, we chronicle the evolution of Malaysian Studies to assess the suitability of a folk-based paradigm. Using a timeline-based approach, we chart the development of Malaysian Studies alongside significant milestones in Malaysian history, intertwining content and context. We argue that the development of Malaysian society and its associated study remain too complex to be consolidated into a "one-size-fits-all" paradigm, which the "rakyat" paradigm would be, if at all applied. Alongside this, we also discuss the etymology of the term "rakyat" to analyse its origins as a catch-all for "folk", and the evolution of its use over time.

Our paper is thus divided into several sections, beginning with a brief profile of Malaysian history, followed by research questions, a timeline of significant events in the formation of Malaysia as a nation-state, the evolution of Malaysian studies as a field, the etymology and evolution of the term "rakyat", and ends with a discussion of the "rakyat" paradigm in comparison to the "ethnicity, class, culture and/or identity" paradigm.

PROFILING MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a free nation with a parliamentary constitutional monarchy and a federal government system. It is a Southeast Asian country consisting of 13 states, and 3 Federal Territories (Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Labuan), which

covers the two pieces of land divided by the South China Sea, namely Peninsular Malaysia or also known as West Malaysia, as well as Borneo, or East Malaysia (Shamsul A.B. & Anis Y. Yusoff, 2011).

The demographics of Malaysia are as follows. During independence, Malaysian society comprised three major ethnic communities, namely, the indigenous community or bumiputera (lit. sons of the soil), who accounted for 50 per cent of the population, and two significantly large immigrant communities, one Chinese (37 per cent) and the other Indian (11 per cent). Since then, the censuses of 1970, 1980 and 1990 have demonstrated, in spite of the general increase in the population, from about 10 to 18 million, the ethnic composition has not veered significantly (Shamsul A.B., 1996). Population growth rates for the main ethnic groups have been markedly different since 1970. The main ethnic groups are Bumiputera (includes Malay, Orang Asli (the Aboriginal people) and the indigenous communities in Sabah and Sarawak), Chinese and Indian. The growth rate of the Bumiputera population has more than doubled that of the Chinese throughout 1980-2010. The proportion of Bumiputera within Malaysians went up from 56 percent (1970) to 66.1 percent (2010). After that, the proportion of Chinese and Indians decreased, with the Chinese population reduced from 34 percent to 25 percent, and the Indians from 9 percent to 7 percent (Shamsul A.B. & Anis Y. Yusoff, 2011, p.15). During Malaysia's Independence, there were three main ethnic groups, which were the indigenous Bumiputera (meaning "sons of the soil") totalling 50 percent of the population, the Chinese totalling 37 percent, and the Indians at 11 percent. Subsequently, the 1970, 1980, and 1990s censuses showed that despite the overall population growth from 10 million to 18 million, the ethnic composition pattern remains the same (Shamsul A.B., 1996). However, Malaysia's population for the third quarter of 2020 was estimated to be at 32.69 million, with an ethnic composition of Bumiputera (20 million), followed by Chinese (6.7 million), Indian (2 million), "others" (305 300), and non-Malaysian citizens (2.9 million); and 16.82 million male and 15.88 female citizens (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020; in Chan, forthcoming 2022).

Malaysia's development is expressed most succinctly in a three-level historical-structural conceptual framework, which is the Pre-Colonial (pre 16th century), Colonial (16th to mid 20th century), and Postcolonial (post 1957). Though Malaysia is sociopolitically defined by an ongoing system of administration, called "kerajaan" (a kingdom or a "raja"/royalty-based polity), the sociological foundations of these "kerajaan" in these separate three eras vary significantly. In the Pre-Colonial Era, prior to the fomation of the modern nation state, there was no concept of "Malaysia" is the present sense. The 'Malay world' existed, which physically consisted of the Malay-speaking archipelago, which comprised numerous small feudal polities, or kerajaan. A few were scattered around Mainland Southeast Asia, in countries known today as Burma, Siam and

Cambodia, but mostly in Island Southeast Asia, where Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia and The Philippines are today. Each kerajaan was run by a Raja with the governance system based on the combination of 'church and state,' regardless of whether they were indigenous, Hindu or/and Buddhist kingdoms. It was at this time, in between the 11th to the 12th or 13th century, that Islam entered the Malay world, including Malaysia (Shamsul A.B. & Anis Y. Yusoff, 2011). A definition of the Malay World could be taken from either an authority-defined or an everyday-defined approach. Tham (1992) for example, stated in his thesis that a Malay identity organically emerged out of the Nusantara region in Southeast Asia, with an "expanding ethnic admixture comprising Malay and others of the same racial stock, such as Minangkabau, Acheh, Bugis, Banjar, Mandailing, Orang Selat, Boyan, and Java". Tham (1992) also mentioned that the definition contains political and academic connotations. Tham (1992) thus states that "the concept 'Malay World' is an identity concept based on 'race' ", used also in geographical contexts, but that has yet to be clearly defined.

The onset of the European imperial-colonial era in the Malay world began in the 16th century, after the discovery of the New World and the major improvement of the navigational and ship-making technologies in the Iberian Peninsula. The European imperial/colonial actors came one after another over 500 years, from 16th to 20th century, led by Portuguese (16th century), Spanish (16th century), Dutch (17th century), British (early 19th century), French (late 19th century), and the USA (late 19th century) (Shamsul A.B. & Anis Y. Yusoff, 2011).

Malaysia is well-known as a plural society (see Furnivall, 1939). The two influential concepts that have been used often to describe Southeast Asia are 'plurality' and 'plural society', In historical terms, 'plurality' describes Southeast Asia prior to the Europeans' arrival and who, consequently, carved up the region into a collection of 'plural societies' (Shamsul A.B. 2005). From prior epochs, plural society had meant "force" as well as "difference", and indicated the introduction of social facts such as knowledge, social constructs, glossary, metaphors, and organizations previously undiscovered to the native population (including such devices as maps, museums, ethnic categories, and population censuses), a free market based economic system, and an organized polity. But, after colonial rule was founded and plural society was created in the area, succeeded by the development of nation-states, the conceptual model too diverged. As a result of the long period of colonial conquest, both in physical and epistemological terms, we commence the focusing of our conceptual model towards the nation-state, ethnic communities, international affairs, as well as nationalism among others (Shamsul A.B. 2005).

The concept of Unity in Malaysia, known as Perpaduan in Bahasa Melayu, has evolved from a basic unidimensional understanding to a nuanced and

multidimensional one. Initially, in the 1970s, the sole concept of Perpaduan (Unity) was "simplistic, mechanical, and literal", while since the formation of the National Unity Consulttive Council (NUCC) in 2013, the taskforce comprising the author (Shamsul) has refined the concept to include three major dimensions, namely: Perpaduan (Unity), Kesepaduan (Social Cohesion), and Penyatupaduan (Reconciliation). At the present, Malaysian society has achieved Kesepaduan (Social Cohesion), idealise Perpaduan (Unity), and have transcended Penyatupaduan (Reconciliation) since the events of May 13, 1969.

It has been noted that in the colonial and post-colonial period defining and categorising ethnic and racial groups (as well as other social categories) at the administrative level and its application on the ground can be a challenging task. Similar to many sociological problems, identity formation occurs within a duality of social realities, which are the "authority-defined" and the "everyday-defined" ones. The former is constructed by those in authority positions; while the latter is the daily lived experience of the common person. These realities exist parallel to each other (Shamsul A.B. & Athi S.M).

Thus, when talking about a collective social category, we must be reminded that complexity exists within it, and it may even contain a mercurial quality. For this reason, we intend to discuss the suitability of introducing a collective paradigm whose ontology is based on the assumption of similarity, as a social analytical tool.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Our paper discusses the following epistemological issues, using a timeline-based approach to provide evidence for or against the following assumptions.

1. Is Abdul Rahman Embong's proposition suggesting that "rakyat" is a social category equivalent to social class, race/ethnicity, gender, urban-rural divide, etc.?
2. Because in doing so, it is a valiant effort at overcoming such social stratification, but also possesses some ontological doubt, since it would imply that "rakyat" is one whole collective by itself, without any sub-divisions like social class, race/ethnicity, gender, etc.
3. What about embedded relationships of power within the lump sum category of "rakyat"?

This essay employs a method of which there is growing interest in the qualitative field, namely visual timeline methods (Kolar, Farah Ahmad, Chan, & Erickson, 2015). The creation of visual timelines has been used by scholars such as Kolar,

Farah Ahmad, Chan, & Erickson (2015) to inform their verbal semi structured interviewing. However, we are not using deeply technical automated software, but rather the concept of a timeline to act as a representation of the historical trajectory we wish to discuss and provide as evidence. Running parallel to each other would be three variables, namely Malaysian history throughout the pre-colonial (before 16th century), colonial (16th to mid-20thcentury) and post-colonial (after 1957) periods; as well as the evolution of Malaysian studies as a field; and the development of the concept of "rakyat" or "folk" universally. Thus we aim to analyse whether the use of the term "folk" or "rakyat" matches the other two variables as a contemporary paradigm.

Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (2010) presents a general, concise development of Malaysia's social and political trajectory, and in particular, its inter-ethnic relations post World War 2 (post 1945) to showcase Malaysia's example of unity in diversity.

The conflict-ridden epoch in Malaysia (1948-1960)

Examining Malaysia from the conflict perspective cannot be avoided. The first decade after the Second World War (SWW) was a turbulent period. This point of time was coloured by divergent patterns, which on one hand was an almost anarchic situation because of the war and its negative effects. On the other hand there were the efforts by the British colonial state in rebuilding the socio-economic framework through forceful methods. It was a challenge to seek a middle ground between anarchy and harmony. Some of the institutional structures that were founded to solve the major challenges during this period still survive. (Shamsul A. B., 2010; 2020).

Malaysia, a nation in 'stable tension' (1969-2008)

On May 13 of 1969, an open and violent ethnic conflict emerged in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. Ethnic violence also occurred in a few other locations but away from Kuala Lumpur. Although the conflict was localized and successfully controlled, the aftermath was felt throughout the country. This was the trial by fire for ethnic relations in a post-Independent Malaysia, becoming a landmark event in analyses of politics and sociology of Malaysia society, as well as the individual consciousness of Malaysians, due to its traumatic nature. It raised people's awareness and repackaged the image of Malaysia's ethnic relations, altering its mechanics (Shamsul A. B., 2010; 2020).

The average Malaysian was jolted awake to the reality that they could no longer bask in the earlier ethnic harmony that existed right after Independence. The government swiftly took action to utilise all resources to come up with short term

and long-term solutions in the economic and political spheres. A National Emergency was declared, suspending democracy. A National Consultative Council (NCC) or MAGERAN was formed to solve problems in a way that was acceptable to all the ethnic communities, especially the Malays. Malaysia was administered by a National Operations Council (NOC). A Department of National Unity was then founded in 1969 as an administrative tool to monitor the condition of ethnic relations in Malaysia, evolving into the Ministry of National Unity in 1972. (Shamsul A. B., 2010; 2020).

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was then created as a short-run and long-run solution to intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic socioeconomic disparities stemming from the melange of diversities in Malaysia, covering ethnic, cultural, regional, political orientation, and economic activity. The Rukunegara, or National Charter, was devised as an ideology to be practiced by all manner of Malaysians. But the ongoing fact is that ethnic diversity is affected by other types of diversities, such as those outlined above. Malaysia had since been in a state of 'stable tension,' which means that we have been living in a society dominated by many contradictions but we have managed to tentatively mitigate most of them through a ongoing cycle of consensus-seeking negotiations, occasionally the process itself became a solution (Shamsul A. B., 2010; 2020).

Social cohesion: The ideal option for Malaysia and Malaysians (2008 onwards)

Malaysian society, by and large, has enjoyed cross-cutting social ties and existed in a condition of social cohesion, including sharing norms and values over the decades. However, logical-minded Malaysians also noticed that despite experiencing a particular stage of social cohesion, not everything flows smoothly, but is coloured by dilemmas, contradictions, and many types of conflict, though it is glued together by a readiness to consistently bargain on the terms of consensus, peace, and stability. It is known that Malaysian have many complaints, be it ethnic, class, religious, or others, and are not shy of expressing them. This reflects an impression of constant conflict to outsiders. But when we circulate throughout the country at any given time, day and year in the past 40 years, we cannot avoid noticing that conflict is absent, because everyone proceeds to conduct their daily affairs, even in times of heated competition, in a socially-cohesive manner, without being challenged by open ethnic conflict. Malaysians hence "talk conflict, walk cohesion." (Shamsul A. B., 2010; 2020).

This is juxtaposed against a timeline on Malaysian nationalism provided by Helen Ting (2013) and a timeline on nation-state formation conflicts by Francis Loh Kok Wah (2009):

Table 1: Malayan Nationalist Movements (Ting 2013)

Year	Malayan Nationalist Movements
1874	Direct British intervention begins in sultanates on Malayan Peninsula
1895	Britain establishes Federated Malay States
1928	Formation of Nanyang Communist Party, renamed Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1930
1945	Formation of Malayan Nationalist Party (MNP)
1946	March: Formation of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)
	April: Malayan Union formed
	July: Tripartite (sultans, UMNO representatives and British offi cials) secret negotiation begins on alternative to Malayan Union
	December: Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action (PMCJA) formed
1947	January: MNP resigns from PMCJA and forms PUTERA, before rejoining PMCJA to form AMCJA-PUTERA
	May: Publication of draft Anglo-Malay Federation Agreement
	July/August: AMCJA-PUTERA fi nalises the People's Constitutional Proposals for Malaya
	October: All-Malaya strike against the Federation of Malaya Agreement
1948	February: Federation of Malaya formed
	June: Declaration of state of Emergency throughout Malaya
1955	Federal Legislative Councillors elected
1957	Independence of Federation of Malaya
1963	Formation of Federation of Malaysia
1989	Peace treaty signed between Malaysian government and MCP

Table 2: Nation-state formation conflicts (Loh 2009)

Year	Nation-state Formation Conflicts
1945	The Bintang Tiga Malay-Chinese clashes lasting a month in 1945 during the interregnum after the surrender of the Japanese and before the arrival of the British.
1948-60	The Emergency 1948-60 when the CPM was engaged in an anti-colonial guerrilla war against the British
1960/1961	Nov 1960 to Feb 1961: The use of violence and coercive laws including the ISA to break up the activities and to detain leaders of the Socialist Front (SF, made up of the Labour Party and the Parti Rakyat) who were suspected of ties with the banned CPM.
1962	An armed uprising beginning from 1962 led by the North Kalimantan Communist Party which opposed the formation of Malaysia.
1969	May 1969: The most severe of these Sino-Malay clashes was the 'May 13 1969 racial riots'.
1969	Transition: Significantly, no major horizontal Sino-Malay clash resulting in

1980	large numbers of deaths has occurred since 1969.
1987	October: A mass crackdown on dissent codenamed 'Operation Lalang'. In one fell swoop, 106 Malaysians – representatives of NGOs, unionists, opposition party leaders, educationists, church social activists, and even ordinary villagers – were detained under the ISA.
1997/98	The regional financial crisis of 1997 and the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim as deputy prime minister in 1998 - struck. This was followed by a second round of political ferment
2008	Financial scandals, abuses of power, manipulations of racial and religious sentiments, etc came to the fore, and coincided with yet another financial crisis in the run-up to the 2008 polls.

To clarify, the concept of Malaysian Studies is a field of studies as well as a form of knowledge, instead of a form of "reality". It may or may not capture the total reality as total reality is always in flux. In the following section we elaborate on its longitudinal development. This table is thus provided as a timeline in which important watershed events occurred, which have directly significant effects upon Malaysia's history and development of Malaysian studies. It is an anchor to the discussion which ensues.

THE EVOLUTION OF MALAYSIAN STUDIES AS A FIELD

Using the above timelines as a contextual reference, we now chart the development of Malaysian Studies as a field. Longitudinally, academic observers from Southeast Asia did not learn directly about the region from each other, but through a proxy, namely experts from Centers of Southeast Asian Studies in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The reason for this is that due to historicity, the region was controlled by separate influences from different European colonial powers, such as the British, Dutch, Americans, and the French. All these separated colonised partitions became modern nation-states post-Independence. These nations continue to maintain strong economic ties with their former colonisers, particularly in the educational sphere (Shamsul A. B., 2001).

Therefore, there are different educational frameworks extant in Southeast Asia, and even more significantly, varying systems or traditions of obtaining and producing knowledge, which are affected by the unique demands of nation-building in every one of these recently independent nation-states. This led to the creation of what Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (2001) calls 'methodological nationalism' a process of knowledge making fostered mostly by the 'territoriality of the nation-state instead of the assumption that social life is generalisable and

transcendental. Hence the formation of 'Indonesian studies', 'Philippine studies', 'Malaysian studies', and its ilk (Shamsul A. B., 2001a).

This affected the creation of knowledge in each new nation-state in Southeast Asia. It was formed by the colonial epistemology, or knowledge frame. This influences the way citizens of these nation-states consider and choose what constitutes "good education", "who the experts are", and "where to go" to pursue further education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. (Shamsul A. B., 2001a).

One cannot separate the growth and creation of social scientific information of Southeast Asia, from knowledge within Southeast Asia. The British pioneered the formation of Malay studies, Chinese studies, Indian studies, and Islamic studies departments in Malaysia as well as in Singapore. This was done in the orientalist mould, fashioned after the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Hence, one can make the case that the domestication of social science is a piece of colonial inheritance and its orientalist projects, as much as it is driven by more contemporary ethnicised national interests (Shamsul A. B., 2001b).

In the colonial period, social science most importantly addressed the requests of colonial administrative science. Malaysian colonial administrator-scholars greatly helped to form the path in which we view, comprehend, and analyse our societies. Social science scholars such as Firth (1948), Leach (1951), and Freeman (1950) were crucial in completing a collection of reports for the British colonial government in its post War second advance movement. The formation of tertiary educational institutions, and thus the way social science was taught in Malaysia, could be viewed as having reached colonial goals. For instance, the University of Malaya had been founded to stream the local Chinese populace into the English-medium education system with the goal of thinning the influence of the Chinese-medium education system in Malaya that was viewed as the facilitator of communist ideology (Ong 1982). The building of academic departments such as Malay studies, Indian studies and Chinese studies was very much in tune with the needs of colonial science fashioned by a set of heuristic devices that begets the `colonial knowledge' (Shamsul A. B., 2001b).

The writings that rose out of social scientific research on Malaysia during the colonial period centred on the relationship between three popular themes: culture, economics and political action. Another popular area of social science inquiry is about multi-ethnic Malaysia that continues to attract the attention of social scientists, locally and abroad. Its main focus has been on the study of the notion of identity, particularly ethnic identity and ethnic group relations. Yet another mountingly important topic that has piqued Malaysianists from outside and within these countries is related to religion, in particular religious revivalism.

Later still, many remarkable works on Malaysia, mainly by anthropologists, have posed the questioning of persisting theories about gender identity (Shamsul A. B., 2001b).

For context, regarding the development of Malaysia Studies as a subset of social science in Malaysia, it is worth mentioning that social science in Malaysia had been viewed with suspicion by the government, especially in the 1960s to mid-1970s for a litany of reasons. This was because social science students at that time were the most active lobbyists against the government's local and foreign policies. Social science students were often student leaders, and were supported strongly by their lecturers. Both social science lecturers and students doubled up as social activists. The government responded by imposing the University and the University College Act 1974 (UUCA), a law intended to reduce the university students and lecturers to subordinate citizens in Malaysia, banning them from becoming committee members of associations, societies, and trade unions beyond the university grounds. The act also required that every academic paper written by academic faculty had to be reviewed by their department heads, which thankfully has not been implemented (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, 2001b).

In December 1974, when the biggest student demonstration in Malaysian history happened, about 1500 students were temporarily detained and a further 100 student leaders and lecturers were detained without trial, some for up to six years. Since then there has been an concerted effort by the government to `purify' university social science. But this effort has had limited success (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, 2001b).

Malaysian social sciences has an institutional history of about five decades in this country, since the 1970s with the setting up of several new universities, and the introduction of new faculties and departments that offer various social science disciplines (Abdul Rahman Embong, 2007). The 1970s was the significant turning point for the development of Malaysian social sciences, with the establishment of several new universities, including UKM (The National University of Malaysia - Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) (Rahimah Abdul Aziz, 2005), and also the Malaysian Economic Association, based at the Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, 2001b). Other universities included Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in 1969, Universiti Putra Malaysia (formerly Universiti Pertanian Malaysia) (UPM) in 1971, and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) which also contributed to the development of new disciplines in social sciences (Hairi Abdullah, 1995; Zainal Kling, 1995).

In 1977, as a result of the effort of a collective of concerned university lecturers, a collective committee was set up to organize the establishment of a Malaysian

Social Science Association (MSSA). This was the direct outcome of the first-ever Conference on the `State of Social Science in Malaysia' organized by the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, UKM, in 1974. MSSA managed to attract some 300 members, academics and non-academics (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, 2001).

THE ETYMOLOGY AND EVOLUTION OF THE TERM "RAKYAT"

Thus, to compare and contrast the differing dominant perspectives in Malaysian Studies, we need to provide the explanation of Abdul Rahman Embong's discourse on the concept of "rakyat". For Embong (2018), who has written extensively and longitudinally on this topic, the gist of "rakyat" is an idea which has the potential to replace the overarchingly used concepts of ethnicity and social class, which he terms as social constructs. For him, "rakyat" is a "non-ethnic, inclusive, and class-based paradigm that is sensitive to the complexity of the mediation between ethnic consciousness and cross-ethnic class solidarity" (Embong, 2018). He derives this "rakyat" ontologically from a historical and retrospective based analysis, which he notes consist of four main events, namely:

1. postwar agenda of crafting the state and envisioning the nation, 1946–48;
2. social engineering under the New Economic Policy and nation building, 1969–71;
3. envisioning a multiethnic developed nation through Vision 2020 and Bangsa Malaysia; and
4. post-2008 transition trap: reining in ethno-nationalist resurgence and moving toward a new Malaysia. (Embong, 2018).

Hence, this is also why we use the timeline-based approach in the table above, to coincide with the events mentioned by Embong in his analysis.

Embong (2018) further elaborates that in the pre-colonial period in Malaya, "the rakyat [were] the people who were subjects of the ruler". He emphasises that historically, during the "Kerajaan" period, the rakyat was an egalitarian concept, because "the term rakyat—although the latter were relegated as the subject class—did not have racial or communal overtones because the rakyat, irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, were subjects of a ruler" (Embong, 2014; Embong, 2018). And, he adds, the term then evolved, performing as a class for itself, wherein "at the height of the anticolonial struggle for independence after World War II, the term rakyat became a principal organizing concept" (Embong, 2018). For him, this was thus more promising than the bidimensional or multidimensional variant of social stratification analysis, such as the twin

constructs of ethnicity and class analysis, which he claims are omnipresent conceptual tools and paradigms in Malaysian studies among Malaysian scholars and Malaysianists (Embong, 2018), a view not without supporters, such as Hoffstaedter (2011) who observed that in Malaysia, identities retain a foundation of a primordial and essentialist origin.

In discussing the origins of the word here, "Rakyat", we have to digress. The term "Rakyat" (تيعر) is defined by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka as "seluruh penduduk sesebuah negara (sbg syarat mendirikan sesuatu pemerintahan)", or "all the citizens of a nation-state (as a requirement to establish a rule)" (Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat). It is a noun synonymous with "citizen" (warganergara), "employee" (pekerja), "public" (orang kebanyakan), and "army" (bala tentera) (Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat).

In the English version of *Kamus Dewan*, namely Kamus Inggeris-Melayu Dewan, the term "rakyat" is used in the context of:

1. a noun, "government", where the example given is "the act of governing, rule, kerajaan";
2. a noun, "people", where the example given is " the voice of the ~, suara rakyat";
3. a noun, "Malaysian", where the example given is "/orang, rakyat";
4. a noun, "country", where the example given is "the population of a country, rakyat /negeri, negara/";
5. as an adjective, "folk", where the example given is " culture, kebudayaan rakyat";
6. as an adjective "public", where the example given is "concerning people in general, awam, rakyat, (orang) ramai"; and
7. as an adjective "national", where the example given is "warganegara, rakyat"

(Kamus Inggeris-Melayu Dewan).

We can observe from here that the usage of "rakyat" has its roots in a collective of individuals, although this collective could extend from an organic one to an officially-defined one. Organic interpretations would include "people", "folk", and "public"; while official ones would include "government", "Malaysian", "national", and "country", though in some circumstances these too could be subjective.

According to Wiktionary.org, the plural of "rakyat" is "rakyats". The singular form refers to "an ordinary citizen"; while the plural form refers to "the people or citizens of a country, as a collective". Alternative forms of "rakyat" include

"ra'jat" and "rakjat". The etymology of the term originates from "ra'yat" in Classical Malay, which means "people", and from "raʿiyya" (رَعِيَّة) in Arabic. As a noun, the term is used in the following ways:

> Rakyat (first-person possessive rakyatku, second-person possessive rakyatmu, third-person possessive rakyatnya). (https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rakyat)

It is used in the following contexts:

1. citizen, subject
2. people, populace
3. (archaic) troop (Synonym: pasukan)
4. (archaic) subordinate (Synonyms: anak buah, bawahan)

(https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rakyat)

These examples of usage too, imply the possibility of both individualistic/subjective usage as well as authority-defined usage, especially in the case of "troop" and "subordinate", and these are in fact its more archaic variants.

Drawing from these, perhaps, Abdul Rahman Embong (2014) has decided to introduce the "rakyat" paradigm from the "bottom-up", as a means of realising Malaysia's dream of social cohesion. He also commits to discussing its viability as a paradigm for the present and the future. In the next section we outline several of Abdul Rahman Embong's key points, from a critical reading of his book chapter, "Knowledge Construction, The Rakyat Paradigm, and Malaysia's Social Cohesion", and we debate the suitability of these arguments using our own, especially from the collected and curated works of Shamsul Amri Baharuddin.

COMPARING THE "RAKYAT" PARADIGM TO THE "ETHNICITY, CLASS, CULTURE AND/OR IDENTITY" PARADIGM

Abdul Rahman Embong (2014) made the following arguments in his book chapter "Knowledge Construction, The Rakyat Paradigm, and Malaysia's Social Cohesion", in "Transforming Malaysia: Dominant and Competing Paradigms", edited by Anthony Milner, Abdul Rahman Embong, and Tham Siew Yean. We counter these arguments with the following observations in Table 1.

Table 3: Abdul Rahman Embong's arguments about the "rakyat" paradigm, and our responses

Abdul Rahman Embong (2014)	Our Counter-Arguments
1. Rakyat concept did not have racial/communal overtones	1. Was the "rakyat" a whole collective (lumpenproletariat), or just a dimension?
2. During the feudal era, "rakyat" was always the subject class, subservient to the ruler, occupying lowest rung in the hierarchy	2. So, the "rakyat" was once "emancipated"?
3. The imagined nation had to be located within a people	3. Would this class consciousness also be a product of epistemological colonisation?
4. Daulat also underwent a transformation from raja to "rakyat" (sovereignty of the people)	4. Many nation-states without a monarchy also contain social stratification. What about innate differences within individuals?
5. The issue of "kerajaan" was settled by having a constitutional monarchy	5. If we are following the British system, then we are epistemologically colonised.
6. Cites the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy	6. If we are following the British system, then we are epistemologically colonised.
7. Offers the "rakyat" paradigm as a discourse and as an analytical framework	7. We have now evolved to industrial society, and though the knowledge of feudal social structure through folklore is useful, it may be incompatible today.

Shamsul AB (1996) declared that the analysis of identity as he has come to embrace and apply, both in breadth and depth, poses four critical challenges. In his own words, he explains the following:

1. The premiere challenge is a 'conceptual challenge' of perceiving identity, either in a 'static' manner, meaning identity is perceived as something 'given', 'ready-made' hence 'taken-for-granted', or in a 'dynamic' manner, meaning 'identity' is viewed as an flexible phenomenon, that is, being redefined, reconstructed, reconstituted and altered hence problematised (Shamsul AB, 1996, p.476).
2. The second most pressing challenge is about the hugely complex and time consuming task of 'describing and explaining' the emergence, consolidation and change of identity or identities over time (Shamsul AB, 1996, p.476).
3. Thirdly, is the 'analytical' challenge posed by the continuous re-thinking in 'social theory' within which academic analysis and intellectual discourse on themes such as 'identity' are located thus engendering a

kind of 'theoretical identity' problem -- functionalist, structuralist, post-structuralist? (Shamsul AB, 1996, p.476).

4. Lastly, the fourth challenge would be the 'authorial' challenge, one that the author-scholar author-politician's 'writing' or 'talking identity' has to confront usually in the form of 'objectivity vs. subjectivity' struggle, especially if she/he is part of the object of study or is in sympathy with any party involved politically in an 'identity struggle' (Shamsul AB, 1996, p.476).

Shamsul AB (1996, p.477-478) further explains that, like most social phenomenon, identity formation occurs within what he would call a 'double social reality' context:

1. Firstly the 'authority-defined' social reality, one which is authoritatively defined by people who are part of the dominant power structure; and,
2. Secondly the 'everyday-defined' social reality, one which is the daily lived experience of the people.

Woven and embedded in the intertwining of these two social phenomena is social power, expressed in many shapes like a majority-minority discourse, and state-society contestation. The conversation in the authority-defined situation is not the same, but has always been coloured by aggressive and aggravating dialogues on a wide spectrum of themes and issues, both large and small including several social groups each indicating a unique hold in the stake. In an everyday-defined situation, the dialogue is usually individualised, disjointed, and strongly personal, held mostly verbally.

From this explanation, there are two levels of categorisation occurring simultaneously. Hence this is also where we intend to raise some queries regarding Abdul Rahman Embong's suggestion of introducing and implementing a "rakyat" paradigm. For at which level should the concept of "rakyat", as we have discussed above, fit in? We have clearly articulated the existence of the two levels at which social phenomenon operate, that is, briefly, at the official and unofficial levels, thus, at which of these levels would the "rakyat" paradigm originate to unite the minds and the actions of the general public? In so doing, are we not running the risk of enforcing assimilation upon individuals, and further so, who sets the parameters of what is exemplary? According to Lopez (2001), even then, the British and the Melayu traditions in colonial Malaya had different worldviews, largely unconscious paradigmatic assumptions causing them to view and value the same phenomena in radically different ways.

In addition, it is clear that Abdul Rahman Embong acknowledges the effects of British colonisation upon the Malaysian worldview (on top of its material and

human resources). Yet, in introducing an "emancipatory" outlook on how the "rakyat" was once dominated by authority figures and thus needing to free themselves from this yoke, in tandem with nationalism, Abdul Rahman Embong is essentially hearkening back to an ideology introduced by none other than Western powers such as the British themselves. Once this "rakyat" utopia is achieved (if it does hypothetically), however, who and how will society be organised and administered? Will there not be yet another authority who will arise to dominate, in the interests of the many, and will the same situation not occur (in the way Abdul Rahman Embong views it as an issue)?

To interrogate this particular point, one needs to delve into the definitions of race and ethnicity employed by Abdul Rahman Embong, which he appears to have derived from Anthony Milner. In turn, Milner recreates the understanding of concepts of race and ethnicity in the colonial sense, as introduced by the British administrator-scholars who served as officers during the colonial period in Malaya. These would include definitions and categorisations by the British merchant-scholar Stamford Raffles, and administrator-scholars Richard James Wilkinson and Richard Olaf Winstedt. Raffles is well-known for his ontological contribution to developing "Malay colonial knowledge", by having introduced the concepts of the "Malay race", the "Malay world", and "the Malay language". Raffles thus set up an epistemology for Malay colonial knowledge (after Cohn, 1996) based upon European classificatory schema, as well as Enlightenment and Romanticist social theory.

To elaborate further, there are two social constructs which we are dealing with here, namely the paradigm of colonial knowledge, and the narrative of colonial discourse. Couched within the former is the latter. Colonial knowledge is the epistemological basis of the classificatory schema, introduced by the British and inspired by Enlightenment and Romanticist thought. Nestled within this is the narrative of colonial discourse, which is a form of discourse combining writings literary and academic, and other forms of popular culture. Race and ethnicity categories in Malaysia are hence shaped by the colonial knowledge paradigm mentioned above (think "Malay", "Chinese", "Indian" and "others"); while its corresponding narratives are seen in mass media such as television programmes, movies, literary and academic books, as well as cultural platforms such as music, which fall under the aegis of colonial discourse. In time, these social constructs, especially its literary component, become naturalised and embedded within decolonised societies. These observations had been made already by Shamsul AB (1999) in his paper, Colonial Knowledge and the Construction of Malay and Malayness: Exploring the Literary Component.

Finally, the application of a concept in its archaic sense, would likely not be compatible with the social changes industrialisation and post-industrialisation has

brought us. Given the division of labour and specialisation in society, the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (or mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity), could the common public still see themselves as one single unit? Thus a concept which worked fully well in a pre-industrial era might have well been suitable for its epoch, but not for the present day. In an era where the Internet of Things and the metaverse is binding human activity and phenomenology together in the cloud, could all individuals be expected to aim for the same goals and live the same lives? As a social experiment, such a project has historically seen failure universally, whenever such attempts to impose regimental behaviour on an entire citizenship has been attempted.

We reiterate again some of the points made by Shamsul Amri Baharuddin in his previous works. In his original writing on "Ethnicity, Class, Culture, and Identity" in 1998. In charting the forms of social stratification within the corpus of Malaysian Studies, he outlines four major dimensions, namely the titular categories. In his review of the literature, he notes that as a paradigm, social class is framed within an ethnic approach, and often ignores social construction. This paradigm is also ironically made possible by the epistemological colonisation by the British.

Next, the identity paradigm is coloured by an understanding of Bangsa Malaysia as a nation-of-intent. This perspective takes an everyday-defined realities approach, which examined the colonial social construction, particularly of categories like "Malayness" and "Chineseness", and deconstructed these categories.

The cultural paradigm meanwhile, featured a breakaway from ethnic and social class paradigms. Its main debate was over the National Cultural Policy. It revolved around a deconstruction of the ethnicity, culture and politics perspective, as well as the globalisation and culture perspective.

Simultaneously, there were other paradigms co-existing, such as gender, where the pertinent issues included public advocacy on women's' rights, and the broader issue of gender identity such as questions of femininity/masculinity. This perspective also elucidated cultural and political processes in the constitution.

This reiteration demonstrates some of the pressing issues capable of dividing people, even if they were to be given the opportunity to embrace a "rakyat" paradigm, which implies greater individual freedom and egalitarianism. But there is a worry that doing this would be akin to the trust-based sandwich retail model, where an unknown individual leaves sandwiches in a basket in an office/university building, and potential customers are trusted to leave the accurate payment in the basket after consuming the deserving amount he/she has

paid for. It also assumes no one else (or nothing else) decides to pickpocket the money left behind, nor would the sandwiches get contaminated (or 'tapau'-ed *en masse*). In an office or university near a preserved jungle, there are even more variables to consider, as its community may also consist of wildlife and more ethereal entities. And experience reveals that even vending machines and rental bikes get vandalised. But we digress.

NOTE

1. We note that the use of the term lumpenproletariat has a long and convoluted history from the time of Marx and Engels, and that it was originally taken to refer to the abject precariat who held no political agency nor ambition, including but not limited to societal rejects, however it has since been redefined to suggest people who may be socially excluded against their will. Barrow (2020) explains that in their earlier writings, Marx and Engels heralded the proletariat as a revolutionary class, in disagreeing with two other writers, Stirnin and Bakunin, who considered the lumpenproletariat as such too. Marx and Engels however doubted the sincerity of the lumpenproletariat's struggle, assigning to them a more self-interested motive than the supposedly utilitarianist morality of the proletariat's struggle. However, the point made by Barrow (2020) is that despite arguments that relegate the lumpenproletariat to the "dustbin of history", they show up again and again as a sociological and political reality that had to be confronted multiple times in the historical timeline, e.g. in France between 1848-1871.

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