University of Leiden Master's Thesis

The Middle Class and Ethnic Identities in Malaysia: Transcending the Paradox of Malaysian-ness

Student Name: Sheza Afzal

Student Number: s1913808

Supervisor: Dr. H. Schulte Nordholt

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1. Introduction

On 28th March 2017, the Malaysian actress and celebrity Sarah Lian shared an Instagram post of a national school exam paper (https://www.facebook.com/imSarahLian/photos/a.180042060049.162621.399547200 49/10155066055665050/?type=3&theater). This test required primary pupils to match pictures of places of worship, such as a church, mosque, Buddhist temple and Hindu temple, to a corresponding list of first names. In the 'comments' section of her Facebook page, another citizen shared a photo of a page from a national textbook that similarly required students to match pictures of four named children with a religion. Sarah Lian was outraged by this, as she saw it as a state strategy to indoctrinate children into absorbing narrow stereotypical identities. She railed against the idea that Malaysian children are being "reminded what box they fit in". The post was shared multiple times, and a discussion ensued on whether such exam questions could be considered racist or not.

The outcry and debate over whether such stereotyping was accurate or even useful to teach to children sheds light on a shift in some Malaysians' perception of their identity. Ethnicity is a prominent marker of identity in Malaysia, with the population classified as those considered indigenous, (known as *bumiputeras*, which translates to "sons of the soil"), and of whom the Malays are the majority; and then the Chinese and Indians.[1] As evident from the test papers, religion too, is a significant marker of identity. In particular, there is an overlap between ethnicity and religion, where Malays are automatically conferred as Muslims and therefore assume an ethno-religious label, and as such the Malay ethnic identity has become synonymous with Islam.[2] However, in line with the ideology of such nation-building development programmes such as *Vision 2020* and *1Malaysia*[3] which propagate the notion of "universal citizenship as the primary marker of Malaysian identity" (Noor, 2013:90),

[1]Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010, 2011.

[2]This will be discussed in the chapter 2.

[3] *Vision 2020* was introduced by Prime Minister Mahathir in 1991 and aimed to make Malaysia a fully modernised country by 2020. One of the ways this was to be achieved was by overcoming ethnic divisions and establishing a united Malaysian nation. See http://www.isis.org.my/attachments/Vision%202020%20complete.pdf More recently, *1Malaysia* was introduced in 2010 by current Prime Minsiter Najib Razak, and seeks to make Malaysia a harmonious, economically prosperous nation with a national sense of identity. See http://www.1malaysia.com.my/

there seems to be desire to move away from such ethnic and religious classifications of citizens to embrace a more "nationalist, inclusive, non-sectarian identity" (Noor, 2013:26). This can be seen in recent national elections, where the traditionally rigid voting patterns along ethnic lines has seen a reduced ethnic bias, especially the 2008 election (Brown, 2005; Holst, 2012; Lian & Appudari, 2011; Maznah, 2005; Moten, 2009; Noor, 2013). Observers have cited this shift as evidence of a sea change in Malaysians' conception of their identity, as urban Malaysian citizens embrace a new, singular national identity.

However, the fact that these test papers were being used in national schools indicates incoherence in Malaysia's state ideology. How can it advocate a universal, singular, non-sectarian notion of citizenship, and yet simultaneously promote ethno-religious profiling for school children? These contradictions are evident within the government too, as the Deputy Prime Minister Muhyuddin Yasin claimed to feel "an ethnic Malay first, and a Malaysian second" (Noor, 2013:98), which is at odds with the national vision of Malaysia promoted by the current *1Malaysia* government programme.

Aim and Research Questions

My thesis aims to investigate these contradictory threads in the official state-sanctioned narrative by examining how identity is perceived and articulated by members of the Malaysian middle class. The middle class is often considered at the vanguard of social change (Hewison, Robison, all cited in Case, 2013:11; Huntington, cited in Case, 2013:13; Thompson, 2007), and the Bersih movement, which seeks to reform Malaysian politics, has inspired hundreds of Malaysians to take to the streets in protest.[4] Indeed, observers have credited the Bersih movement as contributing to the recent shifting voting patterns in elections away from ethnic allegiances (Tong, 2016; Weiss, 2009; Welsh, 2011), though a multi-ethnic party has yet to successfully win an election, which indicates such striving for change is limited or restrained. What the movement does symbolise, though, is the potential for

[4] *Bersih*, or the 'Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections', was formed in 2005 and describes itself as a civil society movement which seeks electoral change and good governance in Malaysia (Bersih 2.0, n.d). The middle class membership of Bersih will be discussed in chapter 3.

change, and a shift in discourse that moves beyond ethnicity to class (Rahman, 2007). I propose to examine the attitudes and impact of the Malaysian middle class in relation to transcending ethnic preoccupations and formulations of identity, by using the Bersih movement as a framework of analysis. However, I will not be investigating the Bersih movement per se, or evaluating how successful it has been in achieving its aims. Rather, I will investigate its symbolic meaning as an example of middle class political mobilisation, alongside attitudes from a sample of the Malay and Chinese Malaysian middle class, in an attempt to ascertain the processes at work and any potential shifts in perceptions of identity in Malaysia.

The Sarah Lian incident indicates that issues regarding race and ethnicity remain controversial and ever present in Malaysia, and in order to better understand any potential shifts in perceptions of identity, it is important firstly to understand the context and endurance of such ethnic categories of identity. This informs my first research question: ***Why does ethnic consciousness endure in Malaysia?*** The outcry and disgust generated by citizens in response to the questions in the national test papers indicates that there may be a change in attitudes towards ethnic identification, in a quest for a more universal, non-ethnically defined national identity, which leads to my second research question*:* ***Is the emergence of a new Middle Class fostering class solidarity that transcends ethnic consciousness?*** And if so, a third research question will be explored: ***What conceptions of a new national identity are formulated to replace ethnic categorisation?***

I hope to provide possible reasons why ethnic identification remains so stubborn in Malaysia, and to examine how the possibility of middle class affiliation offers an alternative way of imagining identity by transcending previous ethno-religious classifications, and moving to a sense of universal citizenship. This has implications on how Malaysian society will develop, either by compounding the existing distinction between groups based on ethnicity and influenced by Islam, or with a potential shift away from these previous ethno-religious categories towards a more fluid, encompassing ‘Malaysian’ identity.

This positions my thesis in the extensive research already conducted on identity politics. There have been calls to move away from ethnic analyses into Malaysian society, as the persistent focus on race can be seen to perpetuate a discourse

anchored in ethnic framings of identity, and therefore denies alternative possibilities of imagining citizenship and society (Holst, 2012; Mandal, 2003). However, as Rahman points out, Malaysia is the only country to have an official discourse based on 'race' (2009), and the outcry about the exam questions on ethno-religious stereotypes indicates that this cannot be dismissed from any analysis of Malaysian society or politics. In addition, the role of class and wealth inequality has not featured much in the socio-political literature of Malaysia (Khalid, 2014:22), and my research locates itself in the juncture between race and class. In formulating a new sense of national identity, my research is also positioned in the current debates and theories about forms of citizenship. In order to better orientate my research within these streams, I will elaborate on them below.

Identity as Belonging

An abundance of scholarly work has been produced on identity. Brubaker and Cooper claim the term is overemployed, and advocate abandoning the concept altogether due to its outwardly essential and knowable, but internally ambiguous and contradictory nature (2000). The convoluted and tired attempts to fix identity as a useful analytical category are raised by Stuart Hall in his essay "Who Needs Identity?" (1996). Hall concludes, however, that "the question, and the theorization, of identity is a matter of considerable political significance" (1996:16), and this means it cannot be dismissed or glossed over. Therefore, in attempting to formulate a useful definition of identity, current debates are increasingly specifying the concept of *belonging* as a useful framework of analysis (Jones & Kryzanowski, 2008:40). Croucher defines the 'politics of belonging' as referring to "the process of individuals, groups, societies and polities defining, negotiating, promoting, rejecting, violating and transcending the boundaries of identities and belonging" (2003:41), and I am interested in these processes in the Malaysian context. More specifically, belonging denotes an emotional attachment and the feeling of being at home (Yuval-Davis, 2011:10); it goes to the core of what is essentially meant by identity, and accommodates a range of attachments, subject feelings, preferences and memberships, including how the 'banal, mundane' ways of belonging are expressed (Billig, cited in Jones & Kryzanowski, 2008:42). This makes it a useful lens of

analysis for my research, which centres on individuals' personal attitudes and observations about their sense of belonging in Malaysian society, and how they position themselves and others in relation to existing collectives or communities (Jones & Kryzanowski, 2008:44). It is the conception of identity as relational, as conceived of by Malaysians at both a micro and macro-level, which is salient to my research.

The 'Blood' versus Social Constructivism Debate

Race and ethnicity are commonly ascribed features of identity, and there is a substantial literature devoted to analyzing these concepts (Holst, 2012:6), especially when discussing Malaysia. Scholars have traditionally distinguished between the meaning of 'race' and 'ethnicity' as the former being a biological concept with origins in colonial pseudo-science (Mandal, 2003:52), whilst ethnicity has tended to replace it as a modern term used to describe observable, potentially constructed differences between people (Hirschman, 2004:410). However, in Bahasa Malay, the word *bangsa* is used to denote both race and ethnicity (Holst, 2012:1),[5] and therefore I will use them flexibly for the purpose of my thesis. In addition, two key, albeit contentious notions of ethnic identification are germane to my research as they relate to how Malaysians potentially conceive of themselves: primordial and situationalist conceptions of ethnic identification. Primordial explanations conceive of ethnicity as a fixed, essential identity that is recognisable by physical and genetic attributes such as skin colour, blood ties, as well as cultural attributes such as language and religion (Chee, 2010:4), and this conception has its roots in early anthropological studies. This contrasts with post-structural, situationalist conceptions of ethnic identity, which are viewed as socially constructed and contingent, and are therefore flexible and shifting. More recent scholarship posits the compatibility of both conceptions (Brown, 2003:6; Ratcliffe, 2004:30, Shamsul, 1996), and I will argue that in the case of Malaysia, both conceptions have political currency.

[5] As well as nation, state, tribe, community or group (Leow, 2016:189)

Citizenship as the Everyday

The potential formulation of a new sense of belonging based on more universalistic norms instead of ethnic ones locates my research in the current debates on citizenship theory. Scholars have observed that the type of citizenship practiced in Southeast Asia varies to that in European societies and that there is a need for research to examine the specific context and conditions of the region in order to gain a better understanding of this (Berenschot et al., 2016; Embong, 2001). Indeed, many normative concepts such as 'citizenship' or 'democracy' have grounding in European scholarship, but this is not to say that they should exclusively be defined within such parametres, especially when applied to other regions with their own histories and political processes. An example of this can be seen in the arguments of the Malaysian scholar, Fadlulah Jamel, who argues that such supposedly 'Western' concepts such as 'citizenship' have a grounding in Islamic texts (Kloos & Berenschot, 2016:192). The point here is not to debate the legitimacy of his claims, but rather to acknowledge the possibility of new conceptions of citizenship that originate from different contexts. Rather than providing a definition of citizenship against which Malaysia's middle class can be measured, I advocate Berenschot et al.'s advice to "re-examine the normative connotations inherent in our conceptualization of the citizenship ideal…[by starting] from the everyday state-citizen interactions rather than abstract idealized forms" (2016:4). Indeed, Shotter claims that the "basis of citizenship must be located in the everyday, social life, as this is where feelings are" (1993:131), and this ties the notion of belonging as the essence of identity to the grander, formal notion of citizenship. In recognising that the postcolonial Malaysian state has developed along its own particular set of historical and social conditions, my research strives to make inferences based on citizens' experiences and observations, alongside historical contextualisation.

However, I will present a general observation regarding the nature of citizenship in Southeast Asia. Whilst European models of citizenship are centred on impersonal, neutral and supposedly equal interactions between citizens and the state, in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, there is a greater emphasis on personal, clientalistic relationships, which foregrounds identify as a key determinate of access to rights and benefits (Berenschot et al., 2016:18). This will be seen in my research

in the form of ‘differentiated citizenship’, which is the result of ethnically defined economic policies and political systems.

Outline

My thesis will firstly give the background to the construction of an ethnic system of organisation in Malaysia, with its roots in colonial categorisations and then as part of a post-independence nation-building strategy (chapter 2). Then, it will examine the construction of the middle class in Malaysia, particularly the ‘New Malay’ middle class, which is the product of affirmative action and differentiated citizenship. I will analyse this development within the framework of modernisation theory, which asserts that the rise of a middle class produces an increased drive for democracy, and with this, a shift away from ethnic or communal group structures towards an ideal, national sense of identity; an attitude that is embodied by the Bersih civil society movement (chapter 3). In analysing this development within the framework of modernisation theory, I do not mean to suggest a teleological view of development, which imposes a Eurocentric ideal of citizenship onto the Malaysian experience. Rather, in using modernisation theory as a starting point, I feel it is useful to compare and understand how, where and why the Malaysian experience might diverge from the course plotted by European development, and propose to do this by generating data based on citizen interactions and opinions. In chapter 4, I describe my approach to this research, where I use interviews with six Malaysians as well as survey results to gain an insight into middle class attitudes towards ethnicity, class and the potential for change in Malaysia. I present and discuss my findings in chapters 5, 6 and 7, where each chapter corresponds to a research question. Finally, in my conclusion, I address my research questions and discuss what implications, if any, this has on Malaysia’s future nature-building project.

2. Identity Formation in Malaysia

In order to evaluate potential shifts in grassroots attitudes towards the traditional ethno-religious organising principles of Malaysian society, we need first to understand the origin of the persistent emphasis on ethnic categorisation; to view it in its historical context, as this has had significant implications on identity-politics and nation-building in Malaysian society today.

Colonial Identity Formation: The Making of 'Race'

""Race…has been very much a state project".

(Mandal, 2003:54)

Substantial historical literature has already been devoted to locating Malaysia's current racial classifications in its colonial origins:

> "Almost every writer who addresses the "race problem" or the "plural society" of Peninsular Malaysia suggests the roots of contemporary ethnic divisions and antagonisms were formed during the colonial era" (Hirschman, 1986:331).

Although scholars disagree on the impact of colonial classifications, with some claiming these classifications were passively received and internalised by colonial subjects (Derichs cited in Haque, 2003:244; Pannu, 2011), whilst others resent this simplifying and the lack of agency it implies (Ashcroft, 1989; Cooper, 2005), there is consensus that the colonial regime officialised racial categories, and that this has a legacy in modern Malaysia: if it did not wholly create them, it at least "reinforced an ethnic-centred construction of identity" (Nah, 2003:516).

Prior to European colonialism, Southeast Asia was already heavily engaged in trade and commerce, as it was strategically located between India and China. Port cities like Melaka were well established by the seventeenth century, and as a result there was a thriving cosmopolitanism amongst the commercial class:

> "…foreign merchants were constantly being incorporated into local society through the medium of marriage and adoption of local language and dress norms" (Reid, 2015:92).

This is supported by Hirschman, who does not deny there was ethnic conflict and segregation in pre-colonial times, but claims there was more acculturation and acceptance of differences, and the potential for more cross-mingling (Hirschman, 1986:356; 1995:29).

European expansion and domination of the region brought about increased racial awareness and suspicion. In British Malaya in the nineteenth and twentieth century, large numbers of Chinese and Indians were brought in to build up a cheap labor force (Cheah, 2009:35; Hirschman 1986:356; Khoo, 2009:14). The British imported notions of 'race' and racial superiority based on Social Darwinism, which encouraged the measurement and classification of 'races' on a supposed scientific basis. Racial hierarchy was viewed as natural and measurable, and such ethnic labelling was further reified by the introduction of the first comprehensive census in 1891, which listed the various Asian categories of races as: 'Chinese', 'Malays & other', 'Tamils & other', and 'Other Nationalities' (Hirschman, 1987:571). However, the fluidity of the concept of 'race' is evident by the changing categories in subsequent censuses (Hirschman, 1987), which indicates the arbitrariness and constructed concept of 'race'.

Nevertheless, the colonial census persisted in attempting to quantify, classify and 'fix' identities (Anderson, 2004:166). Many scholars argue that such racial classifications were introduced as a deliberate means of controlling the population by the British:

> "The manner in which they sought to establish their control was to categorize this new social world in terms that would allow for the establishment for the effective establishment of their administration" (Pannu, 2011:44).

As a result, ethnic-based legislation which dealt with each group separately was introduced (Nah, 2003:516), and communities that might have mingled and merged were now officially segregated along racial lines (Hirschman, 1986:353). This

fostered mutual suspicion between the groups, and could be seen to exemplify the renowned 'divide and rule' strategy of the British (Holst, 2012:84).

In fixing identity, characteristics and capacities of each race were ascribed. This is illustrated in Alatas' influential work *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, which draws on centuries of colonial sources to show the construction of these racial categories, and how they have a direct legacy on Malaysian society today (cited in Lian, 1997:62). The production of knowledge by the coloniser is evident from a colonial guidebook for British officers: *The Handbook of Malaya* (German, 1935:342).[6] The section entitled 'Population' describes the inhabitants, and it appears after the chapter on 'Flora and Fauna' and before "Geography and Minerals", indicating how people were classified in the same way as plants and wildlife, and illustrates the As well as focusing on origins, physical descriptions and habits, this source emphasises the character traits of the Malays as lazy: "…the Malay has doubtless much to learn in respect of the value of concentrated effort and firmness of purpose" yet also as possessing "innate cheerfulness" (1935:31). In contrast, colonial sources determine the Chinese characteristics as industrious, displaying "extraordinary determination and perseverance" (Hirschman, 1986:346), but greedy: "…wherever there is money to be made, you can be sure that the Chinaman is not far away" (Wright and Reid, cited in Hirschman, 1986:346). As many were brought to Malaya by the colonial administration, they were viewed as temporary residents (Hirschman, 1986:353), whilst the Malays were considered indigenous and therefore more 'legitimate' members. These colonial classifications in Malaysia formed stereotypes based on 'race' (Jesudason, 2001:67; Nair, 2009:86), as well as determining the level of legitimacy of each race within the state. This has left a residue in postcolonial Malaysia.

[6] Interestingly, Hirschman observes that there was a lack of such character descriptions in earlier colonial sources (Hirschman, 1986:342).

Postcolonial Identity Formation: Enduring Ethnic Consciousness

> *"Malaysia is a nation of ethnics rather than a nation of citizens"*
>
> *(Ong, 2009:476)*

Since independence, ethnicity has still been used as a marker of identity in Malaysia: socially, politically and economically. It is reified through the population census, which continues to reflect primordial classifications of 'race'. In the most recent census, the Chinese and Indians are each still classified as a homogenous, monolithic group, whilst the Malays have been subsumed under the broader banner of 'bumiputera' (Population Distribution, 2011). This merging of the previously labelled 'aboriginal' races with the Malays into one category on the basis of indigenity emphasises their legitimacy, whilst continuing to position the Chinese and Indians as non-natives.

Furthermore, the position of these groups has been administratively defined and officialised in the Malaysian Constitution, which privileges the bumiputeras, especially the Malays, whilst recognising 'peripherally' the rights and status of other ethnic groups (Balasubramaniam, 2007:37; Shamsul, 1996:483). Key tenets of being 'Malay' were sanctified as the normative national identity, so that Bahasa Malay was chosen as the official and national language (Malaysia: Federal Constitution, 1957:Article 152.1); Islam was adopted as the official state religion (Malaysia: Federal Constitution, 1957:Article 3.1); and the rights and special position of Malays and other bumiputeras were specified and protected:

> "it shall be the responsibility….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" (Malaysia: Federal Constitution 1957:Article 153.1).

All of these officially enshrined tenets cemented the ethnic differences between the groups, separating the indigenous or 'native' citizens from the 'non-native' ones, and furthermore, positioning them into a hierarchy of belonging based on indigenity.

An Ethnocratic State

However, the most significant way ethnic separation has been consolidated and reinforced in post-independence Malaysia is by its unique, racially defined political system, which underpins the entire society: “the formation of the state itself is largely founded upon ethnic politics and characterized as an “ethnocratic state” “ (Haque, 2003:240). On negotiating independence for Malaysia, the British initially proposed a constitution that integrated the Chinese and Indians into a single Malaysian polity (Omar, 2009:45), thereby not recognising the difference between Malay and non-Malay groups, and conferring equal citizenship rights to the non-Malays (Pietsch & Clark, 2014:307). However, this was rejected by the Malay nationalists, who feared Chinese and non-Malay domination, and sought to have their indigenity recognised (Cheah, 2002:2; Neo, 2006:96). The resulting political system since the 1950s has been a coalition between three ethnically defined parties (Neo, 2006:95): the *United Malays Organisation* (UMNO); the *Malaysian Chinese Association* (MCA) and the *Malaysia Indian Congress* (MIC), of which UMNO is the dominant (Balasubramaniam, 2007:37), and has shaped the postcolonial political landscape. This party, the *Barisan Nasional* (BN), has been in power continuously since independence, having won every election. This communal system is indicative of the notion that people are primarily defined and united by their ethnic background, and the BN mobilises its support along ethnic lines (Mandal, 2003:64), which serves to perpetually reinforce ethnicity in Malaysian society (Tan, 2012:6).

Religion and Ethnicity: Islam as Consolidating Malayness

Although a secular state, Islam has played an increasingly important role in identity-politics in Malaysia (Kortteinen, cited in Pietsch & Clarke, 2014:312). There is evidence that religion was a significant marker of identity in pre-colonial times (Anderson, 2004), but during British colonialisation religion lost its primacy as ‘race’ became the governing marker of identity. This was maintained after independence, as evidenced by the census and Constitution. However, religion, and specifically Islam, has become an increasingly significant marker of Malay and national identity:

> "Since the 1980s... religious identity appears to have replaced ethnicity as the central element of nation identity as the society has been systematically…Islamised" (Bar & Govindasamy, 2010:93).

This is visible by the rising popularity of Islamic dress, Islamic schools and universities, the establishment of Shari'ah judicial courts, and the introduction of Islamic banking (Abbott & Gregorios-Pippas, 2010; Noor, 2013), and the rise of Islamist parties such as *Parti al-Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS), which has compelled UMNO to adopt a more Islamic platform in order to secure the Malay vote (Noor, 2013:91), even resulting in Prime Minister Mahathir boldly declaring that Malaysia was an Islamic State in 2002.

This can be attributed to part of the wider global trend of Islamisation as a reaction to the neoliberal, capitalist, developmental model followed by many postcolonial states (Noor, 2013:91), but in the Malaysian context it is also tied into the notion of 'Malayness'. The original markers of 'Malayness' were language, religion and *adit* (local customs), as cited in the Constitution: "Malay" is defined as "a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom" (Malaysia: Federal Constitution, 1957:Article 160). However, language and customs have been eroded by urbanisation and globalisation and no longer uniquely serve to identify Malayness (Neo, 2014:766), therefore leaving Islam as the main marker of Malay identity.

This shift to religiosity has consolidated the Malay identity and made it synonymous with being a Muslim. Indeed, all Malays are born Muslims, and cannot change their religion (Neo, 2006:96; Pietsch & Clark, 2014:306). The synonymity of Malay ethnicity with Islam is evident in the Islamic conversion ceremony, which is referred to as '*Masuk Malay'*: literally to become a Muslim is to 'enter into becoming a Malay', and illustrates the interchangeability of ethnicity with religion (Tan, 2000:451; Holst, 2012:107). Converting to Islam, along with adoption of the Malay language and customs, is sufficient to qualify for the ethnic label of 'Malay' (Hirschman, 1987:555). Islam is therefore a vital, though not usually sufficient, ingredient to obtaining the Malay ethnic label. Whilst the increased prominence of Islam has complicated identity-politics in Malaysia, it serves to consolidate the Malay ethnic identity, rather than to supplant it. Ethnicity can still be seen to be a more prominent marker of

identity than religion in Malaysia, and continues to position other non-Muslim, non-Malay citizens as deviations from the essential national identity.

The New Economic Policy (NEP)

One of the most startling ways the postcolonial government has cemented ethnic consciousness is through the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). This policy, and its modified successor the New Development Plan (NDP), implements and endorses affirmative action for the Malays and other bumiputeras, to the exclusion of the Chinese and Indian Malaysian citizens. Initially conceived as a 30-year plan, it still endures today, and has had a huge impact on the socio-economic and cultural development of Malaysia and its citizens.

The rationale for such a policy was a reaction to the May 1969 race riots between ethnic Malays and Chinese, following the street celebrations of the success of the Chinese Alliance party in gaining a majority of seats in the recent elections. This led to the interpretation that economic disparity led to ethnic violence, and the NEP was conceived as a strategy to redress the economic inequality between the Chinese and the Malays. Specifically, its two goals were to restructure the economy to eliminate inequality and eradicate poverty (Ratuva, 2013:197; Torii, 1997:212), by introducing restrictions on non-bumiputeras in employment, education and corporate ownership, thereby lifting up

> "the economic positions of the bumiputera, and particularly the Malays at its core, whose economic positions were historically inferior, to bring them abreast of Chinese and other ethnic groups in Malaysia" (Torii, 1997:212).

This has led to it being labelled as the "Malay-first" policy by some analysts (Horii cited in Torii, 1997:210), and although it might not have eliminated inequality or completely eradicated poverty, it has been successful in reducing overall poverty (Khalid, 2014:2; Ratuva, 2013:217).[7]

[7] There have been debates about the reliability of data (see Jomo, 2004:19), but according to Khalid (2014:92) and Ratuva, (2013:200) the overall poverty level dropped from ~49.3% in 1970 to ~16% by 1990.

The programme was justified as a solution to inherited ethnic disparity, which had its origins in colonial capitalism (Torii, 1997:196). Under British colonialism, there was an ethnic division of labour whereby each ethnic group was designated a particular function:

> "The occupation of the Malay is…agricultural and…fishing…the Chinese form the bulk of the trading, shopkeeping and labouring classes… the Tamils, Telugus and Malayalis who migrate to Malay are of the labouring class" (German, 1935:32).

Therefore, the impact of colonial structuring according to race and occupation has endured in postcolonial Malaysia, as the NEP justifies the preferential treatment of indigenous groups in an attempt to engineer an equal society and ensure peace and stability, thereby producing differentiated citizenship. Additionally, the persistent focus on ethnicity as criteria for potential rights, allocations and economic advancements, ensures ethnicity remains a potent marker of identity in Malaysia, just as it was under British colonialism.

3. Modernisation Theory and The Middle Class

In this chapter, I outline modernisation theory which predicts that democracy and a sense of universal citizenship is cultivated by the middle class as a result of economic development. I then focus specifically on some general characteristics of the Malaysian middle class, and discuss two groups within this class: the New Malays and the Chinese, and the impact the NEP has had on their development and position in Malaysian society. Finally, I present the Bersih movement as an example of Malaysian middle class activism that is potentially pushing back against the constraints of authority-imposed ethnic identification.

Modernisation Theory

A significant American theory of the emergence of a middle class developed in the 1950s-60s, and asserts that with increased economic development and urbanisation, a middle class develops that will have universalistic concerns and seek democracy. This theory aligns modernisation alongside democracy, with a resulting focus on human rights and greater civic participation from the middle class (Case, 2013:12; Chong, 2005a:47, Embong, 2001:15). The reasons for this are due to globalisation and capitalist processes, whereby social relations are intensified globally due to the compression of time and space as a result of modernisation and technology (Giddens, in Salleh, 2000:146). As a result of economic development and increased wealth, people assume a more transnational identity (Gabriel, 2016) as they are exposed to the English language as a lingua franca, might have an overseas education or at least travel abroad, and increasingly share consumer habits and lifestyle aspirations (Chong, 2005b:578). As well as exhibiting capitalist concerns, it is assumed that the middle class in developing countries will also adopt an appetite for liberal democracy, and alongside this, an increased concern for universal citizenship and human rights, moving away from family or tribal allegiances.

This modernisation theory has its origins in the 1950's in the work of Lipset (1959), and Rostow (1960). However, it has had a recent revival moving away from its teleological, paternalistic, structural nature of analysis to a more agency-centred analysis that acknowledges that modernisation does not automatically guarantee

democracy, but results in 'social and cultural changes that make democracy increasingly probable' (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010:6). The civil protest movements in Southeast Asia, such as the 'People's Power' revolution in the Philippines in 1986, the 'Black May' protests in Thailand in 1992, the Fall of the New Order in Indonesia in 1998, and more recently the *Bersih* movement in Malaysia, can be seen as exemplify modernisation theory, and in all these cases, it was mainly the middle class citizens of these countries that pushed for democratic change.

However, many of these movements have not resulted in significant changes, resulting in 'pseudo-democracies' or 'semi-democracies' (Holst, 2012:62; Thompson, 2007:1), characterised by voting in parliamentary elections but with severe restrictions on media, gerrymandering, vote buying and the de-legitimisation of opposition parties. Observers and theorists have become somewhat disappointed with the lack of sustained effort by the middle class in insisting on durable change and genuine democracy in these movements (Kessler, 2001:36). Adherents to modernisation theory often view it as essential that the middle class, as well as being a consumer class engaged in capitalist processes, should simultaneously exemplify a thirst for democracy. However, the Southeast Asian middle class, including the Malaysian middle class, does not seem to adhere to both aspects of the theory, as envisioned by their common combination of traditionalism and modernisation. This is encapsulated by the 'Asian Values' theory, exemplified very successfully by Singapore and extolled by its late Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, which posits that a Confucian ethos prioritising collectivity and harmony is conducive to economic growth.

New Middle Class in Southeast Asia

The 'Middle Class' can be defined according to a number of criteria: income, occupation, education, lifestyle and consumer choices, accent, and aspirations depending on the analytical focus. What is generally understood is that they are in the middle: in-between the elites and the poor. For economic analysis, particularly for cross-country comparisons, class is measured in either absolute or relative terms related to average income (Who's in the Middle?, 2009). Although this might be the most concrete way to define class as it is quantifiable, other scholars grounded in the

social sciences reject this empiricist-objectivist approach, claiming such concreteness is a fallacy (Parsons, cited in Kessler, 2001:32), and in simplifying the concept obscures the true nature of it. Thompson's groundbreaking work adopted the view that class was not so much a structure, but a relationship, and focused on class-consciousness and individuals (Thompson, 1963). This makes class much more difficult to define or measure: Kessler points out the futility in trying to objectively 'fix' a definition of class as it is a dynamic social process that is 'contingent, emergent, fluctuating, and not historically given' (2001:33). As my research focuses on class as a social phenomenon, and in particular on individuals' class-consciousness as it pertains to their sense of identity, no single definition of class will be offered, as this would be unhelpful and limiting. Rather, what is germane to my research is the characteristic of class as a 'bounded phenomenon', which similarly to ethnicity, operates as a marker of identity (Stockwell, 1982), determining who is included and excluded, and what allegiances are forged.

There is a general acceptance that Malaysia has obtained a significant middle class through rapid economic development, whether this is measured by urbanization (Saravanamuttu, 2001), car and television ownership (Crouch, 1984), consumerist predilections and lifestyles (Saravanamuttu, 2009), employment categories (Embong, 1998) or income/consumption patterns (Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific, 2010). However, what is also recognised is that there is a persistent rural-urban gap (Khalid, 2014:xiv), and that the lowest economic groups tend to be the Malays and other bumiputeras (Rahman, 2009:429). This is despite more than 40 years of affirmative action through the NEP and NDP, and is generally attributed to corruption, cronyism and poor implementation (Khalid, 2013:147; Milne, 1986:1373; Ratuva, 2013:212).

The NEP as Differentiated Citizenship

> *"The fact of the matter is that inequality in Malaysia remains as much about race as it is about class".* (Khalid, 2013:xiv)

The New Malays

One of the aims of the NEP was to create a bumiputera middle class, specifically a Malay middle class, and this can be seen to have been achieved by the creation of the *Melayu Baru* class (New Malays [8]) (Chong, 2005a:50; Ratuva, 2013:201; Tan, 2012:7). Data indicates that this new class is a successful product of state engineering and the NEP, as bumiputera equity ownership increased from 1.5% in 1969 to 19.4% in 2006 (Gomez, 2009 cited in Ratuva, 2013), and bumiputeras working in white-collar professions increased from 4.9% in 1970 to 38.8% in 2005 (Gomez, 2009 and Lee et al., 2010, both cited in Ratuva, 2013). Indeed, most government and statutory positions are dominated by bumiputeras (Tan, 2012:7). The emergence of this group was a specific goal of Prime Minister Mahathir in his *Vision 2020* nation-building programme, and was seen to symbolise Malaysia's transformation into a modern nation, as well as progress towards equalising economic disparity between the Chinese and Malays.

Chong discusses the complexities of offering a rigid, precise definition of the New Malays (2005b) and summarises the various interpretations by scholars. Under conventional class theory analysis, the New Malays can be viewed as a capitalist class, embedded in the global capitalist system, in conjunction with Robison and Goodman's definition of Asia's 'new rich' (cited in Chong, 2005b:578). They are considered to be cosmopolitan, possessing English language skills, able to study and travel overseas, and therefore possess increasingly global cultural and consumption tastes (Chong, 2005b:578). [9] In terms of occupation, they are "professionals, managers, executives, skilled technicians… [and] corporate elites"

[8] They are considered to be a 'new' class as they emerged from the rapid industrialisation and economic transformation of postcolonial Malaysia, and specifically from the benefits of the NEP. This contrasts with the pre-NEP Malay elite as described by Shamsul, as these were the Malay feudal and aristocratic class (Shamsul, 1999).

[9] However, the Malays and bumiputeras also make up the majority of poor Malaysians (Khalid, 2014).

(Chong, 2005b:580), with Shamsul arguing that political elites should also be included (1999:92). All of these characteristics imply a shift towards the global and transnational and therefore, a potential shift away from an ethnic, communal identity.

The notion that the New Malays are not bound by ethnicity is promoted by Saravanamuttu, who claims that the new class-consciousness "carves out a discursive space that goes well beyond ethnic and communal issues" (2001:116). Other observers echo this sentiment: "[the New Malay] is not hung up on parochial, provincial issues like race and entitlements and finds his place in the world" (Asiaweek, cited in Chong, 2005b:573). In no longer being bound by ethnicity and seeking a more cosmopolitan, universal identity, and additionally being secure in having attained a middle class status, there is an implication that the New Malays potentially reject ethnically assigned entitlements and state benefits as epitomised by the NEP.

Mahathir's description of the New Malays as "modern, educated, disciplined, hard-working, competitive" (Lian, 1997:74) locates them as an urban group, in contrast to rural Malays. This signifies a departure from the stereotype of the 'lazy Malay'; a colonial determination that continues to have currency as exemplified in Mathathir's book *The Malay Dilemma* (1970), where he criticises the passive, lazy characteristics of the Malays and seeks to create an entrepreneurial, dynamic Malay class. Whether the New Malays can be seen to be entrepreneurial or competitive is debatable, having been nurtured by state benefits and quotas. However, what is significant is that despite being the product of such benefits, there is evidence that the New Malays are seeking an alternative, non-ethnic based system of rights and benefits based on an idea of non-differentiated citizenship.

The Non-Malays: Chinese Malaysians

As the NEP was established in reaction to the perceived threat of Chinese economic and political domination, the impact of the policy on this segment of Malaysian society is important. In terms of economic gain, Chinese Malaysians have not completely lost their dominance despite the NEP restrictions (Crouch, 2001:241; Khalid, 2014:92; Ratuva, 2013:216). This is generally accounted for by the rapid growth and development of Malaysia (Crouch, 2001:239), though a culturalist argument is sometimes still cited, whereby the natural business acumen,

industriousness and strong familial ties of the Chinese has ensured their continued economic success, especially in diaspora communities (Harrell, 1985; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Redding, 1990). In addition, some Chinese Malaysians have developed 'by-pass' strategies to the NEP, such as the Malay-Chinese 'Ali-Baba' business arrangement whereby a Chinese Malaysian, unable to obtain a license for a business, runs the business and pays a Malay who has the license. These agreements are perceived to benefit both parties, but result in the Malay earning money from running a business without acquiring any business acumen, feeding into the 'lazy Malay' and 'industrious Chinese' ethnic stereotypes. Another strategy employed by the Chinese is pointed out by Khalid, who claims the Chinese impose discriminatory hiring practices such as insisting on Mandarin language skills to ensure Chinese Malaysian employment (2014:144). Indeed, some scholars have argued that the NEP has greatly benefitted the Chinese Malaysians (Ye, 2003), or at the very least, has not harmed their economic prospects (Hwang and Sadiq, 2010). Therefore, it cannot be claimed that the NEP has lowered their socio-economic status significantly, although the rise of the New Malay middle class has meant they have to contend with an economically powerful group that is also politically dominant.

In terms of political representation and citizenship, there is evidence that Chinese Malaysians feel like second-class citizens. This is characterised by mistrust in the government, as well as inadequate political representation (Sin, 2015; Pietsch & Clark, 2014; Tan, 2001). In terms of personal identification, research conducted by Sin and Lindstrand with Chinese Malaysian interviewees reveals that they feel a sense of national identity with Malaysia, but that their ethnic identity is imposed onto them by the state and serves to exclude them from being accepted as a full citizen in the way that the Malays and other bumiputeras are (Lindstrand, 2016:38; Sin, 2015). The centrality of Muslim-Malay indigenity in Malaysia's nationalist narrative positions the Malays as 'organically Malaysian' (Gabriel, 2014:1215), whilst excluding the Chinese Malaysians who have limited or 'constrained' citizenship (Esman, cited in Tan, 2001:958). Therefore, there is both an actual and perceived differentiation of citizenship in Malaysia, with the Malays and other bumiputeras enjoying full citizenship and access to rights, and the Chinese, Indians and other supposed 'non-indigenous' groups only possessing some of their citizenship rights (Tan, 2012:6).

***Bersih*: the Emergence of a Middle Class Movement**

> *"Social movements such as Bersih rallies play an important part in engaging the Malaysian public in political issues, which in turn has an effect on the construction of national identity."* *(Lindstrand, 2016:33).*

Bersih, or the 'Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections' describes itself as a civil society movement which seeks electoral change and good governance in Malaysia. The Malay word means 'clean', and the organisation is comprised of various non-governmental organisations (94 according to the latest update on their website), who are united in their goals for democratic reform, seeking to improve transparency and accountability in politics, eliminate corruption, improve the electoral process and allow a free media (http://www.bersih.org/about/8demands/). It was initially conceived of as the *Joint Action Committee for Electoral Reform* in 2005, but was officially launched in November 2006 as a coalition of civil society organisations, NGOs and opposition political leaders, and issued a communiqé in Parliament that demanded electoral change. This culminated in its first rally in November 2007 ahead of the 2008 elections, where an estimated 30 – 40,000 protesters took to the streets in Kuala Lumpar (What you need to know about Malaysia's Bersih movement, 2015), all wearing the distinctive yellow t-shirts that have come to symbolise the movement: "the colour for citizen actions and people's power worldwide" (Bersih 2.0, n.d.). After this rally, the official name of the movement was changed to Bersih 2.0, and it declared itself a non-partisan movement: not affiliated to any political party.

Since that first rally, there have been four more rallies over the course of nine years: the second was the march 'Walk for Democracy' in July 2011; the third 'Sit In' rally in April 2012 ahead of the 2013 general elections; the fourth 'Bersih 4' in August 2015 in response to the billion dollar corruption scandal involving the Prime Minister Najib Razak (1MDB); and the fifth 'Bersih 5' in November 2016. Many of these rallies were characterised by police violence such as the use of tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds, and citizen arrests, and there has been an increasing

authoritarian clamp-down by the government, resulting in increasing difficulties to obtain the right to peaceful protest, and the arrest of key people such as the chairperson, Maria Chin Abdullah, in the last Bersih 5 protest.

A unifying characteristic of the Berish protesters seems to be class affiliation, and it has been categorised as a largely middle class affair (Yeoh, 2015; Höller-Fam, 2015). This is seen in the organisation's use of English in its communication: during Bersih 3.0 press statements were first given in English instead of Bahasa Malay (Höller-Fam, 2015). In addition, the extensive and effective use of social media by Berish and its supporters[10] also locates it as a middle class movement. The middle class component of the Bersih movement is also highlighted when compared to the opposition anti-Bersih red-shirt protest group, which materialised in explicit opposition to the Bersih 4.0 rally.[11] Unlike Bersih, its members are a much more homogenous group made up of the Malay rural class. The red-shirt protesters have been dismissed as being Malay chauvinists employed by the UMNO party as part of its strategy to maintain power by heightening ethnic divisions (Azlee, 2016; Lourdesamy, 2015; Miller, 2017), and the evidence that they are poorer Malays serves to highlight the wealth and middle class origins of the Malays who joined Bersih.

The participation of these New Malays, alongside Chinese and Indians Malaysians in the Bersih movement, can be seen to be evidence of a burgeoning civic-mindedness amongst Malaysians, as not only did they exercise their democratic rights to peaceful protest, but Bersih's demands are for better governance and genuine democracy. However, the failure to translate these ideals into a victory for an opposition multi-ethnic party in recent elections indicates that such middle class solidarity is a limited force. Nevertheless, Bersih can be seen as both a manifestation of new middle class values and ideals in Malaysian society, as well as the site for such articulations to be negotiated.

[10] For more information on the role social media played in mobilising Bersih participation and activism, see Lim, 2016.

[11] The red and yellow colour scheme of protesters marks out which camp they belong to, with red-shirts being associated with the rural poor, and yellow-shirts worn by the educated middle class. This similarly applies to the two protest movements orientated around the Shinawatra family in Thailand between 2006-2014.

4. Methodology

Research Design

My research aims to investigate whether the new middle class in Malaysia, especially the New Malay middle class, is demonstrating a shift in perceptions of identity away from an ethno-centric focus. In particular, I am examining if the possibility of class affiliation is transcending previous ethnic affiliations, in line with modernisation theory which predicts a shift away from ethnic, tribal and kinship attachments towards a more universal, singular sense of identity which prioritises a sense of equal citizenship.

My thesis is an attempt to understand not only the extent of change in Malaysian society, but also interpret the reasons for such changes, and any potential limitations. Therefore, it employs an interpretivist approach, which acknowledges that the results cannot be generalised as it is contingent on subjective viewpoints and attitudes, as well as my interpretation of this in the role of researcher. As I am interested in the phenomenon of identity categorisation and people's attitudes towards it, I gathered qualitative data based on both primary and secondary data: I conducted six semi-structured interviews which forms the original research basis of my investigation, and also compared it with three survey results conducted by the Merdeka Centre: *Public Opinion on Ethnic Relations* (2006); *Malaysian Political Values Survey* (2010); and *Perceptions Towards Bersih 4 Rally* (2015).

Whilst surveys allow access to a broader sample of data, I chose to use interviews as the primary tool of investigation in order to gain more detailed responses. This was particularly necessary considering the dense, thorny nature of my research, and allowed the space for nuance and clarification. In then combining these interviews with data from official survey results, I used a triangulation method of data collection to analyse my research questions, which allowed me to gain a fuller, richer and more comprehensive account of the processes at work (Cohen et al., 2000). It also improves the validity of my research, as I was able to compare information and attitudes expressed by my small sample of respondents with earlier attitudes of Malaysians as expressed in the surveys. This allowed me to gain a level of both

depth and breadth, as I was able to establish how my respondents' attitudes fit into the wider context of Malaysian attitudes.

Primary Data: Interviews

Much of the data collected for this thesis was based on telephone interviews with six Malaysians conducted between September – December 2017. I conducted semi-structured interviews, as this allowed some freedom for participants to discuss the topics that were most important and relevant for them, whilst ensuring a minimal level of consistency in the topics discussed, as well as avoiding tangential information. The questions were theme-based as follows: Background and Biography; Ethno-Religious groups; Class and NEP; Political Engagement and Identity and Belonging.[12] Rather than exclusively focusing on class and ethnicity, my questions also explored the political situation in Malaysia, as well as perceptions of Bersih, as these issues are all inter-connected, and allowed participants to discuss the issues in the wider context of identity and politics in Malaysia.

The interviews were conducted at times suggested by the participants when they were at home, and were conducted on the telephone using *whatsapp*, as this was their preferred method of communication. I spent approximately 90-120 minutes speaking with each participant, as this allowed me to establish a rapport with the participants and check they were comfortable before discussing the questions in depth. I needed to follow-up again with three participants to get fuller responses or clarification on certain points.

Sampling

As I sought to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of the middle class in Malaysia, and in particular the New Malays, the participants were selected using purposive sampling. This ensured that I was engaging with a representative sample of the demographic under investigation. I found the participants via established contacts in Malaysia, and all the participants fit the criteria of being middle class Malaysians: university educated, white-collar professionals, and except for one, they had all travelled or studied abroad. They were aged mostly in their mid-30's, except for one older respondent. They were all male, and either Malay, Chinese Malaysian or

[12] See *Interview Guide*, appendices.

mixed-race (Chinese and bumiputera) who were from, or had lived in, urban centres in West Malaysia. More detailed information on the participants is presented below.

The Interviewees

Below is an overview of the six interviewees, focusing on biographical details.[13]

Name	**1. Chuck**	**2. Alan**	**3. Freddie**
Age	32	56	33
From	KL	Selangor, West Malaysia	Melaka; studied in the UK
Ethnicity	Chinese	Malay	Malay
Religion	n/a	Muslim	Muslim
Job	Quantity Surveyor for Singaporean firm	Deputy Head and Chemistry Secondary School Teacher in Sabah	Contractor in civil construction
Languages	English, Malay, Mandarin	English, Malay	Malay, English, Mandarin
Extra	Has been living in Singapore for 7 years	Born in Singapore, moved to Selangor when 12 years old	Has a Chinese wife who converted to Islam; their children are Malay Muslims.

Name	**4. Alex**	**5. Dan**	**6. Frank**
Age	36	33	33
From	Sabah, went to school in KL and studied and worked in the UK	Born in Sabah, studied, lived and worked in Johor Bahru since 2005	Sabah, spent 5 years living and studying in West Malaysia (Penang and KL) and studied in the UK
Ethnicity	Sino -Kadazahn	Javanese	Sino-Dusun
Religion		Muslim	n/a
Job	Travel Agent, has own business	Associate trainer for off-shore oil rigs	Project Manager in own construction company
Languages	English, Malay, Mandarin, Cantonese	Malay; English; Bajua; Javanese; Mandarin	Malay, English
Extra	Father is Chinese Malaysian, from Johor Bahru	Parents from Indonesia (Java)	Grandfather on father's side came from China

[13] See *Interview Grid*, appendices.

Secondary Data: Merdeka Center Reports

My interviews were suppported by research from three survey reports conducted by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research between 2006 - 2015 (available at http://www.merdeka.org/pages/02_research.html). This organisation conducts telephone surveys with randomly selected Malaysian citizens in order to gauge public opinion on pertinent issues, with the aim of supplying policy makers and leaders with this information. These reports gathered data from a wide sample of the population (1000-3000 participants), all of whom were over the age of 20 years old and came from a range of backgrounds and states in Western Malaysia. In all three surveys, respondents were found through a stratified sampling method along ethnic, gender and age. In two surveys (*Perceptions Towards Bersih 4 Rally* and *Malaysian Political Values Survey)*, a complete respondent profile breakdown is provided, which shows that the Malays were the most interviewed ethnic group (over 50%), followed by the Chinese. There is an even split between male and female respondent participation, and the income ranged from less than 1,500 MR to more than 5,000 MR per month.

- *Public Opinion on Ethnic Relations* (2006)

This is the earliest survey, and focuses on establishing attitudes towards and perceptions on ethnic relations in Malaysia, as well as gauging future expectations on the development of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

- *Malaysian Political Values Survey* (2010)

This survey focused on determining which issues united and divided Malaysians, such as the state of the economy, the government, affirmative action, ethnic relations and a sense of national unity. Some questions were directed only at Malay and bumiputera participants (e.g. affirmative action and national integrity), whilst one question was only for non-Malays/non-Muslims (belief in the *1Malaysia* programme).

- *Perceptions Towards Bersih 4 Rally* (2015)

This survey focussed exclusively on ascertaining citizens' perceptions of the fourth Bersih rally in 2015.

Sources

I have chosen to restrict my research to English sources only, as despite Malay being the official language, English "is the dominant second language and is used for a variety of functions in professional and social transactions not only with the international community but also within the society" (Lindsay & Tan, 2003:93). Furthermore, the developments discussed in this thesis deal with identity-formation amongst different ethno-linguistic groups (Malays and Chinese), and English serves as a neutral mode of communication for these groups. This is evident by the Merdeka Center reports being published in English, and the interviews were also conducted in English as this was a language that all participants felt comfortable using.

Other sources used in my research underpin the background and theoretical framework (chapters 2 and 3). These rely on government documents such as the *Population Census* (Population Distribution, 2011) and the *Malaysian Constitution* (Malaysia: Federal Constitution, 1957), as well as the historical source: *Handbook to British Malaya* (German, 1935), to locate current events in a wider historical context. In addition, as I am examining a contemporary phenomenon, I draw on international and local online newspapers and websites such as *Malaysiakini, The Sun Daily, New Mandala, The Straits Times, The Economist* and *Asian Correspondent,* as well as the Bersih website.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topics to be discussed, an information sheet[14] was supplied to the interviewees before participating, which explained the goal and nature of my research. In this way, they were given sufficient information before deciding whether to participate or not. Only one candidate refused to participate after reading this. To ensure consent from them, I also provided a consent form,[15] which they each read and signed. On this form, the option to remain anonymous was given, and whilst some of them chose to waive this right, I decided

[14] See appendices.
[15] See appendices.

to change all their names to ensure confidentiality. I also made it clear to them that they could stop the interview at any time, or refuse to answer a question.

Research Limitations

Due to the interpretivist nature of my research, my findings are not applicable to the entire population, or even the entire middle class. Only a small sample of people were interviewed, and even though this was supplemented with survey data that sampled a much larger sector of the population, all the data generated is not conclusive. Rather, it gives an insight into the processes, attitudes and beliefs at work.

As my research is focusing on ethnic identity in West Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak are not addressed, as these semi-autonomous states have a different context. However, three interviewees are originally from Sabah, yet they have all spent considerable time living, studying or working in West Malaysia, which means they have first-hand experience and insight into the nature of relationships and structures there. In addition, I have not interviewed any Indian Malaysians, but have rather focused on Malays (as the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia) and the Chinese Malaysians (as the dominant economic business group), as it is between these two groups that historically ethnic tensions and resentment have arisen on the basis of economic inequality (Khalid, 2014:7). I acknowledge, however, that the Indian demographic is generally neglected in research into Malaysia, and there is a need for their voices to be represented more. Similarly, whilst I tried to recruit women to interview, none were willing to participate, and therefore all the interviewees are male.

5. Enduring Ethnic Consciousness

There seems to be a prevailing ethnic consciousness in Malaysia that has been internalised by its citizens, even the more cosmopolitan, well-travelled middle class. This has implications both on their perception of their position in society and sense of belonging, and also in the way they behave and treat each other.

The Inviolability of Race

Malaysians still seem to adhere to racial stereotypes: that Malays are lazy and the Chinese are greedy. This is reflected in the survey results of the *Ethnic Relations* Merdeka Center report, where over 50% of Chinese and Malays agreed with these stereotypes, even when it applied to their own ethnic group (2006:20). The interviewees also articulated these stereotypes, though most of them assigned the causes as to the mechanisms of the NEP rather than to any primordial racial characteristics: *"It has made the Malays complacent because they know they always have a portion for themselves, and don't appreciate the opportunity."* (Freddie), and:

> *"Malays are quite lazy, even with the bumiputera advantage. They sell their licence to the Chinese, so they get money without working. This is really common. It's bad for them, as they are not helping their own race. The reason it worries me is that it encourages laziness which is bad for the economy."* (Dan)

One interviewee even described the division of labour between ethnic groups, which harks back to the colonial ethnic division of labour: *"Most billionaires are Chinese Malaysians (from raw materials: sugar, paper industry). Indian billionaires are in telecommunications. All the races don't do the same to be rich."* (Freddie)

Therefore, it can be seen that racial stereotypes that were formed under colonial conditions have been maintained, and are reproduced by the NEP which encourages the Malays and bumipiteras to be less competitive, thereby producing group characteristics based on race. It is striking how the conceptions or ethnicity articulated by my interviewees echo colonial constructions of race in British Malaya: that the Malays are lazy and the Chinese are greedy, which Holst explains as the result of the postcolonial government borrowing and maintaining oversimplified

colonial categorisations of race (2012), and the example of racial profiling in government textbooks highlighted by Sarah Lian indicates that the state is actively involved in disseminating such notions of race. This can be seen as a continued form of indigenous colonialism by the postcolonial government (Fanon, 1963). Whilst not necessarily being the result of elite machinations to maintain their power, it is evident that these markers of identity have been internalised, in line with Alatas' theory of the 'captive mind' (cited in Rahman, 2009:433), where colonial assumptions and knowledge have been absorbed by the postcolonial subject, keeping them trapped in rigid colonial structures of control and dominance.

All the interviewees identified the three main ethnic groups in West Malaysia as: Malays, Chinese and Indians. When asked how to identity them, they all indicated that it was easy due to physical characteristics, language and cultural aspects such as dress and food: *"Different cultures such as clothes: the Indians wear saris, the Chinese the cheongsam. Also the way they eat: Malays with their hands, the Chinese with chopsticks"* (Alan). Most emphasised physical appearance as being the most prominent marker: *"Can differentiate by face first – appearance. That is the main thing and easy to recognise from this"* (Dan), and *"It is obvious by their skin colour, by their look. This is the most obvious way to notice…*.[also] *food, they eat different traditional food. The way you dress up, Malay Muslims women wear a hijab"* (Freddie).

They all felt these markers of difference were tangible and identifiable, though Frank acknowledged the ambiguity of these markers of identity: *"If they are mixed it's harder to know. For example a Chinese-Indian baby (Chindian) looks a lot like a Malay so it's hard to tell"* (Frank). Freddie, having insisted that religion can be changed but ethnicity cannot, went on to describe how his mother, an ethnic Chinese, has a Malay identity:

> *"My Dad is a Malay, my mum is ethnically Chinese but was adopted by a Malay family at birth….My mum was registered as a Malay, but she looks totally Chinese. But her language, culture, that's all Malay…she has Chinese blood but all the rest are Malay."*

In addition, his wife is Chinese, but his children are categorised as Malays, despite being of mixed Malay and Chinese descent, as is the case for Frank's sister's

children. Frank and Alex point out how Indonesians and Filipinos are offered citizenship and a Malay identity: *"Our deputy PM is originally from Indonesia and can even still speak Javanese, but he is identified as a Malay"* (Frank), and: *"In Sabah, Filipinos were given citizenship and a Malay identity to bolster the Malay vote…it's the same with Indonesians"* (Alex). This shows the fluidity of racial categorisations, and in particular the expansion of the dominant Malay-Muslim identity.[16]

Despite evidence of the arbitrariness of these ethnic categorisations, overall all interviewees seemed to conceive of ethnicity as tangible and inviolable, rather than as constructed and fluid: they are attached to a primordial concept of race, even when observing situations where supposedly rigid markers of ethnicity have been shown to be flexible or arbitrary amongst peers or family members. They refuse to adopt a situationalist concept of identity which would account for this flexibility, thereby also rejecting the notion that identity is constructed and shaped by external factors. Instead, they tend to be committed to an idea of ethnicity as a fixed and quantifiable entity. Scott points out that so long as ethnicity is conceived of and *felt* in these terms, then it will continue to have a significant impact on social relations and society (cited in Chee, 2010:6). Making a comparison with Anderson's notion of a nation being an imagined community: just because race and ethnic categorisations are imagined, does not mean they do not exist or have a tangible impact on society: being constructed and arbitrary does not make them inconsequential. Therefore, instead of nullifying the effects of ethnicity in Malaysian society, such primordial perceptions reify and preserve ethnicity as a significant marker of identity.

Ethnic Segregation

Malaysians tend to socialise and mix only in formal environments, and otherwise remain ethnically segregated. All interviewees stated that different ethnic groups only tend to mix in formal or professional contexts: *"…At work they are forced to mix and work together, but socially they can choose and they tend to stick to their own."* (Chuck); *"They only meet in formal environments, and after go back home to practice their own culture."* (Alan); and *"During working time they mix together with no problem. But the social part - having a tea, coffee, it is rare"* (Dan). Interestingly, three participants indicated that there used to be more social mixing between ethnic

[16] For more details on this process, see Afzal, 2017.

groups in the 1960s and 1970s: *"In my school days, everyone mingled and there was no polarisation. During festivals everyone celebrated and paid a visit to each other's homes"* (Alan), and:

> *"My father said back in the 1970s, people mixed more and race relations were better. All races could sit at the same table, but now that's really rare to see. The Chinese and Malays would only do that if it were for business, not as friends."* (Frank)

This observation was also noted in research conducted by Tan (2012:9).

Therefore, there seems to have been a shift since the 1970s towards more segregated ethnically-orientated socialising, and it is interesting to note that interviewees indicated that this shift occurred after the introduction of the NEP, which implies it has had a divisive impact on ethnic relations.

Ethnic Suspiciousness

The NEP and the dominance of Islam have contributed to enduring mistrust between citizens based on their ethnicity. This is confirmed by the interviewees: *"Different races and religions are more suspicious of each other"* (Alan), and: *"people identify as an ethnic group. This identity is based on friction and competition between races….the Malays dominant over other groups and there is suspicion between groups"* (Freddie). Freddie goes on to explain how, as a Malay, he has felt discriminated against by the Chinese when doing business: *"They give a better price to their own race…the Chinese when speak to each other, they give a special treatment. It's not really open or fair for other people".* Frank too, describes how his business partner, who is from Papua but speaks Mandarin, got a cheaper quote from a Chinese shop compared to Frank who asked for a quote in English and Bahasa Malay, showing ethnic affiliation over and above a sense of neutral citizenship.

Much of this suspicion seems to be based on perceived economic inequality, with the Chinese generally perceived as the richest ethnic group and the Malays (and other bumiputeras) as the poorest. Only Alex claimed that the Chinese were the poorest group, positioning them alongside the bumiputeras in contrast to the Malays, whom he saw as the wealthiest. All interviewees acknowledged that the rich Malays

had earned their money illegally through government connections, and is an example of a failing of the NEP.

Ethnic suspiciousness was also evident by the analysis of Bersih via the framework of ethnicity, where the dominant participation of Chinese Malaysians was debated and discussed in the media, especially after the Bersih 4 and 5 rallies (Wong, 2015). This observation is supported by my interviewees, who qualify that there were fewer Malays and a majority of Chinese: *"It was also mostly Chinese due to the urban setting….but there were also some Malays"* (Alan), and Alex specifies that the Malays who did join were the New Malays: *"It was not really Malays who joined, generally Chinese and Indians. And 10% of Modern Malays, who are younger or the professionals. Between 20-40 years old".* This is also supported by the *Perceptions towards Bersih 4.0* report, where a 'favourable' perception towards Bersih was highest amongst the Chinese surveyed (81% compared to only 23% of Malays) (2015: 5), though journalists report that the last Bersih 5 rally showed greater ethnic diversity (Hew, 2016).

The accusations of Bersih as a mostly Chinese movement is significant, in that it insists on ethnicity as a frame of reference for the movement. Several analyses of the Bersih rallies focused on assessing their ethnic composition and in particular strove to determine whether a substantial number of Malays participated, or if it was dominated by Chinese Malaysians (Hew, 2016; Wong, 2015). If it were mostly a Chinese movement, it would indicate that the push for change was coming from a non-indigenous group, thereby invalidating its aims and de-legitimising the movement. What is relevant here is not whether the rallies were attended by a majority of Chinese Malaysians or not, but rather, how the discourse in the media still focused on ethnicity, illustrating how it remains a powerful and legitimising force in Malaysia, even in a movement that sought to dismiss ethnic orientation.

The interviewees also express concern about the dominant influence of Islam and the Malays, which is causing divisions, even those who were Muslims themselves: *"Muslim people have negative thinking, and this is a critical problem for Malaysia. They want to universalise the rules and norms they follow" (*Freddie), and:

> *"If a female non-Muslim marries a Muslim, she has to convert, and her children would be Malay. This is not fair, as they are not given a choice. As it*

is now, the Malays never have to give up anything and the onus is always on the other to convert" (Frank).

Therefore, there remains strong suspicion between ethnic groups, based on perceived economic benefits and the predominance of Islam, which gives preference to the majority Malay group. This colours discussions even in supposedly neutral organisations such as Bersih, that attempt to move beyond ethnicity.

My research confirms the potency of authority-enforced structures such as the political system and the NEP on ethnic identity. They breed suspicion and competition between different ethnic groups, as they compel Malaysians to submit to ethnic identification and grouping, thereby ensuring ethnicity remains a key marker of identity. The political structuring along ethnic lines is evident in the Barisan Nasional government, which promotes itself as a coalition amongst the three main ethnic groups whereby each party serves the interests of their ethnic group, and seeks support and votes from an ethnically defined base. Many scholars (Holst, 2012:84; Rahman, 2009:429) have argued that this is a deliberate move to maintain power: "politicians play the race card because their survival is dependent on ensuring their power base…[and therefore] the division of races remains intact" (Khoo, cited in Lee, 2017). Others argue that it is a logical, fairly successful way to govern a plural society, which manages to preserve the identity and interests of each ethnic and cultural group (Hwang and Sadiq, 2010:193; Tan, 2001:953). Whilst it may not be the case that it is a deliberate 'divide and rule' strategy to maintain power, the persistent reduction to ethnicity in Malaysian politics means that there cannot be a shift away from ethnic concerns and identification.

In addition, the benefits derived for the bumiputeras from the NEP ensure that citizens are embedded in ethnically differentiated levels of citizenship, with different access to rights (Pietsch and Clark, 2016:309). The practices of the NEP and the Malaysian state were deemed to be racist and discriminatory at a structural level in a 2013 report by the Human Rights Foundation Malaysia (Bowling, 2013:1) which posits that the channelling of funds, permits and licenses to one race for the purpose of economic development is discriminatory. However, Young argues that affirmative action is sometimes necessary to ensure equality, as not all citizens are positioned equally in society (1989). This can be seen to be the case with the Malays and

bumiputeras after independence, as they tended to occupy an economically lower position than the Chinese due to the colonial division of labour. Therefore, it can be seen that differentiated citizenship and the bestowing of certain rights to a disadvantaged group can contribute towards ensuring a fairer, more equal society. Yet in the case of Malaysia, as Lindstrand points out, it is questionable whether the Malays can be considered a disadvantaged group, as they are the majority population whose interests are most catered to by the government through the dominance of UMNO, and they have an undisputed claim to indigenity, with essential features of their identity such as religion and language safeguarded in the constitution (2016:37).

Considering the structural conditions of equality in Malaysia are ethnically defined, and that citizens are compelled to submit to ethnic identification to access rights and participate politically, it is unsurprising that my findings show how citizens are embedded in such notions of race and ethnicity, both conceptually and in their daily lived realities.

6. Transcending Ethnicity

There is evidence that many Malaysian middle class members recognise their confinement within an ethnic grid of identification and citizenship, and are seeking to move beyond this. This is manifested in expressions of a new sense of unity and middle class solidarity, as well as calls for political and economic change.

Belonging as Unity

The Bersih movement seems to have unleashed a palpable sense of unity amongst members of the Malaysian middle class, and this feeling can be viewed as a sense of belonging. Many of the interviewees stressed the tangible sense of unity felt by the participants in the Bersih movement: *"All people were united and tried to create a sense of unity from all sides"* (Dan), and: *"Many of my friends put on yellow on their Facebook wall…there was no separation in this kind of thing…all were united"* (Freddie). This was also reported by journalists who were present at the rallies:

> "Two days ahead of Merdeka day (independence day) this Bersih rally was awash with Malaysian flags and people singing the national anthem." (Hoffstaedter, August 2015).

This sense of unity and belonging seemed to transcend ethnic divisions, as many news reports and journals observed that the ethnic make up of participants in all the Bersih protests included Malays, Chinese as well as Indians: "…its support cuts across the country's diverse ethnic, racial and religious demographics" (Smeltzer and Pare, 2015:121), and:

> "Another important feature of the Bersih movement has been its multi-ethnicity, which has gone in the face of efforts in the past three years of racial politics, as Malaysians have shown solidarity across communities" (Welsh, 2011:2).

The interviewers also acknowledged the multi-ethnic make up of Bersih protesters, where Malaysians of all ethnicities came together. It provided an alternative space outside of the formal work environment to mix in: *"…it had people from different categories. Different professions, age, the middle class mostly….the ethnicity I saw*

was balanced….Bersih has different varieties" (Freddie), and: *"The first Bersih you could see there was a variety of people. Chinese and Malays and Indians"* (Frank).

The interviewees expressed a desire for further mixing between ethnic groups: *"We need to mix more if we want to be the same nation, share culture and mingle. We need to be like one village"* (Alan*),* and this is specified as being a key feature of the New Malays: *"These new Malays are vocal and don't care about these divisions, they come as united….Modern Malays think we are one"* (Alex). This is supported by the results of the *Ethnic Relations* survey, which shows most Malaysians are optimistic about mixing more in the future and consider it beneficial (2006:11-12). The main reasons given why this is considered a positive trend is to ensure peace and avoid conflict (2006:13), and this has implications on how Malaysians conceive of a national identity, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the previous chapter, the interviewees all described the limited scope to mingle and socialise across ethnic groups outside of a formal context. The Bersih movement provided a new space for the middle class to assemble and operate outside of a professional work environment. The sociable aspect of popular protest is pertinent here, as my findings indicate that the various groups do not normally socialise or mix informally. It allowed various ethnic groups to occupy the same social space in their leisure time, which is not the typical way they interact, and indicates the scope for realising more mixing. Bersih rallies were described as having a festive atmosphere (Holmes, 2015), with music, food and drink, alongside the more typical ritualistic aspects to protests movements such as flag waving, chanting and singing:

> "The mood among those gathered was festive, with drums and vuvuzelas heard along with speeches, songs and chants by participants calling for a "clean Malaysia" and "people power". (Thousands march in 'Bersih' protests, 2016).

The sense of solidarity evident in a social movement such as Bersih can be explained by a Durkheimian notion of 'collective effervescence', whereby the collective gathering of people in a physical space, united in a shared, specific focus, allows them to share an intense, unifying collective experience (Durkheim, 1912). Therefore, in practising their civic rights to protest, the Malaysian middle class is also

engaging in a ritualistic exercise of solidarity that transcends ethnic divisions, as the perceived common enemy is the government rather than members of another ethnic group. This collective consciousness and dedication to the nation can also be seen to comply with modernisation theory, as Anderson describes the nation state as having replaced religion in being able to summon devotion and loyalty from its subjects (2004).

Dissolve Ethnic Labels

As well as desiring to mix more between ethnic groups, some interviewees conceived of transcending ethnicity as involving the dissolution of ethnic categories of identification entirely: *"We need to do away with ethnic categories…when it should just be Malaysians"* (Alan), and: *"Most things involve races, we always have to label our race when we fill in forms or register for absolutely anything. It's all about labelling your race. Maybe we should put these labels aside and so they cease to be important"* (Freddie).

A suggestion of how this could be achieved was via marriage, as indicated by Freddie, who has an inter-ethnic marriage, and Frank:

> *"There was a funny article that suggested forcing people to only marry people from another race, and forbid someone from marrying their own race. In this way, there would be no more Indian, no more Chinese, no more Malays - these categories would dissolve. It would be nice."* (Frank)

My findings seem to confirm that members of the middle class in Malaysia, including the new Malay middle class, are keen to embody a universal national identity and discard ethnically-orientated demarcations. Although some scholars have observed that the specific nature of citizenship in Malaysia is still bound by allegiances to family and clans which override those with the state (Kessler, 2001:42), my research offers a glimpse of a more universal, undifferentiated conception of citizenship. This fits generally with modernisation theory, which claims the formation of a stable middle class will push for greater civic rights and democratic processes. The extension of modernisation theory by Parson, which focuses on the breakdown of previous organising structures of identification, such as tribal loyalty, is also evidenced by my research. This is observed as occurring in Malaysia by

Saravanamuttu, who claims that the middle class and civil society groups are increasingly engaged in "universalistic concerns and issues…that goes well beyond ethnic and communal issues" (2001:116), as middle class Malaysians seem to identify increasingly less with their ethnic kinship groups, and instead feel a kinship that transcends ethnicity, uniting them in a sense of shared citizenship.

Transcendence as State-led

The interviewees tended to argue for state-led, top-down changes, especially abolishing race-based parties and the NEP, as a way of ridding Malaysian society from its ethnic obsession:

> *"The political landscape has to change to achieve real harmony and get rid of race based segregation. There would have to be no race based parties; it would have to be possible for an Indian or Chinese to be PM"* (Frank).

The increased support of a multi-ethnic opposition party indicates that Malaysians are willing to abandon racially aligned political allegiances for a multi-ethnic party. Support for an opposition party, including a multi-ethnic one, has been building over the past decade (Brown, 2005; Lian & Appudari, 2011; Maznah, 2005; Moten, 2009; Noor, 2013). The interviewees echoed the desire for political change, and the potential support for a multi-ethnic opposition by the middle class: *"In the city, perhaps, people would vote for the opposition regardless of their race"* (Chuck), and*: "Modern Malays, Chinese and Indians want regime change"* (Alex).

Some interviewees also advocate terminating the NEP, which assigns rights and benefits according to ethnicity:

> *It's total bullshit. It reduces everything down to if you are a Malay or not. The other races see it and feel it, as loans and subsidies are all for Malays and Muslims.*…[but] *the Modern Malays are willing to forgo their privileges, even though they are Malays"* (Alex).

Whilst some interviewees feel the NEP and its affirmative action was necessary at the beginning, most felt it should be ended, as it is unfair or has now become obsolete: *"Bumiputeras no longer need 100% support and many can stand in their own. Most Malays (the educated ones) feel it is obsolete and unsustainable"* (Alan).

Here, the New Malays are cited as being potential agents of change in abolishing a policy that allocates rights based on ethnicity. Some interviewee have benefitted personally from the NEP, and yet still feel it is an unfair policy, demonstrating the perception of the New Malays and other middle class bumiputeras. Other interviewees who also enjoy bumiputera rights felt it was still necessary to ensure the economic success of the Malays and bumiputeras (though they acknowledge it has been mismanaged). It is significant that these members of the Malay and bumiputera middle class, having gained their status from such discriminatory policies such as the NEP and through the political system, and who continue to benefit from these structures, are advocating scrapping them. This indicates the adoption of a universalistic ideology of equal citizenship that transcends communal organisation, as middle class allegiance provides a sense of solidarity amongst citizens that seems to transcend ethnic divisions.

However, the abolishment of race-based parties or the NEP does not seem to be advocated by the majority of bumiputeras and Malays. The *Ethnic Relations* report shows there is very little support (4-5%) for abolishing race-based parties (2006:45), and this attitude is recognised by the interviewees, even if it is not their personal view. They cite ingrained racial divisions and a lack of unity by the opposition parties as a reason for the maintenance of the status quo: *“But the government is still supported by the majority Malays”* (Alex), and: *“The opposition might come together for the election, but it is too weak and the government will stay. The racial divisions are too strong and people are not united”* (Dan).

Enduring support for the Barisan Nasional government and its policies is deemed to come from the less educated, rural Malay group, which is embodied by the counter red-shirt protests. The interviewees echo this assessment: *“Red-shirts were funded by politicians, not volunteers. They are young and jobless, blinded by their leaders. All pure Malay, unlike Bersih which has different varieties”* (Freddie), and: *”The red-shirts opposition were monkeys hired by the government. They were only one race - all Malays, driven by "Malaysia for Malays" ideology. They don't care much about the economy, only about race and Malay supremacy”* (Dan). In addition, the *Political Values* survey shows that most bumiputeras are unwilling to forgo their privileges (2010:12, 20), whilst the *Ethnic Relations* report shows that whilst the vast majority of Chinese expect for all cultures and religions to be given equal rights in the future,

this contrasts with only 38% of Malays (2006:38), indicating that the majority of Malays do not want to give up their economic or status privileges. Therefore, despite the leanings of the Chinese and Malay middle class to advocate support for a multi-ethnic political party and the termination of the NEP, there is still a majority of support for maintaining the status quo in Malaysia.

My interviewees' articulations of how transcending ethnic categories can be achieved show an absence of consideration for making micro-level, bottom-up changes, which would involve adapting individual actions or habits to foster more cross-ethnic solidarity, such as socialising together. Instead, nearly all their articulations of transcending an ethnically orientated identity focused on changing the structural conditions, which is the remit of the government. This explains the support for a group such as Bersih, which has a very clear, precise mandate for the legal changes they want to be made, as specified by their '8 demands' (Bersih 2.0, n.d.). The potency of such structural conditions on values, perceptions and attitudes cannot be underestimated, as socialisation into " an ethnic identity…cannot be understood apart from the political processed in which government actions and the ideologies fostered by the state play a role" (Tan, 2000:441). Therefore merely advocating making top-down, structural changes is an understandable and legitimate response.

7. Articulating Malaysian-ness: The Paradox of the Middle Class

An idealised sense of Malaysian identity posits unity, harmony and peace amongst cultural pluralism: “a bubbling, bustling melting-pot of races and religions where Malays, Indians, Chinese and many other ethnic groups live together in peace and harmony” (About Malaysia, n.d.), as well as a striving for development as envisioned in the nation-building programmes. Four interviewees claimed to identity with a Malaysian national identity (the other two identified with Sabah rather than Malaysia, as they were raised there), and described this in terms similar to the official state narrative: *“Malaysians know how to get along and respect other cultures and different races”* (Dan), and:

> *“To be Malaysian is to feel like you are one country, one nation, to feel progressive and to strive to be world class. To be proud to live in one country with different ethnic groups, and this unity in diversity makes Malaysia unique as they have remained peaceful”* (Alan).

This is supported by the *Ethnic Relations* report, where 90% of respondents were proud to be Malaysian, and of those 54% gave the main reason for this as peace, stability and having multicultural national unity (2006:31), with only 6% resenting having to be tolerant of a multi-ethnic society (2006:37). The report also specified that educated and higher earning respondents tend to identify as Malaysian rather than with their ethnic group (2006:8).

However, Alex notes that the national conception of Malaysia-ness as described by the interviewees is not the reality, but rather the result of state-fed ideology: *“Malaysian identity is...where there is no friction between religions and races, and focus on progress and the future. At least that’s what school teaches us, but the reality is different as there is competition between the races and rampant corruption”.* This cynicism towards the ideal of a national identity is evident in the interviewees’ attitudes towards such nation-building programmes as *Vision 2020* and *1Malaysia*, which seem to be met with hostility and suspicion, as despite their aim to unite citizens, it is perceived to create divisions: *“It’s a white elephant. It does not really unite people, just pays lip service to this and actually it is used to siphon off money to enrich certain groups. It divides the three groups more.”* (Chuck), and:

> *"It is a political gimmick, used to satisfy people and say nice things. It's only lip service: marketing but there is no substance. Some patriotic people might think it works, and the government is trying to appease these minorities."* (Alex)

Three interviewees express consent with the intention and concept of the programmes, but feel they fail due to poor implementation:

> *"There is a good intention, but I'm not sure about the results. It is a good concept and the beginning of bringing people together. It's a baby step…"* (Frank)

> *"It's a sound philosophy and well-intentioned, but the implementation is not good so we don't see a difference. So Malaysians support the concept and idea of the programme, but lose faith in it when they see how poorly it is implemented."* (Alan)

Therefore, there is shared ambivalence and even cynicism directed at such nation-building programmes as *Vision 2020* and *1Malaysia*, though the ideology encapsulated by such ideologies are generally approved of.

In transcending ethnicity, the interviewees offered a definition of a national identity which chimed with the official, state sanctioned ideal as offered by such nation-building programmes as the *Vision 2020* and *1Malaysia* programmes, which all emphasise unity amongst diversity. Indeed, their formulations of an ideal national identity were remarkably similar, and are aligned with the image Malaysia presents of itself internationally. This is explained by Alex as due to it being transmitted through school education, and Anderson emphasises the significance and success education has on forming national identity (2004). Therefore my research indicates that the articulation of a national identity is limited to the official state narrative, which is part of authority-imposed identity rather than drawn from everyday lived reality, and there is a paradox in that citizens seem to adopt such a national ideology from a state they highly distrust. Furthermore, the rhetoric of equality in these nation-building programmes seem incoherent in a system that utilises the NEP to prefer a dominant ethnic group (Kessler, 2001; Tan, 2001). When viewed in light of the ethnic

divisions and fault-lines in Malaysia, the national, universal ideal of citizenship appears untenable and superficial.

The possible reasons for this are due to the formulation of national identity based on peace and development, as well as the conditions of the formation of the Malay middle class. In offering up their definitions of an ideal national identity, all the interviewees asserted a sense of unity and harmony amongst diversity. The common motivation for adhering to this formulation of national identity was the need to maintain peace and stability, and to avoid violence. This tenet of peace and harmony is woven into the very definition of what it is to be Malaysian, and along with the memory and trauma of the 1969 race riots, which serve as a 'continual ethnopolitical narrative' in Malaysia (Sin, 2015:536), act as a deterrent for any sort of forceful, potentially violent protest in advocating change. This is understandable when viewing the violence and bloodshed that have erupted in neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, which has also had to manage huge ethnic diversity in formulating a united national identity. After the 1997 financial crisis, which saw a flare up of ethnic violence directed at Chinese Indonesians, Crouch cites the lack of ethnic violence in Malaysia as an indication of the success of its ethnic and political organisational structures (2001:225). Indeed, in the 1950s the advent of Malaysian independence was met with some scepticism as to whether it was possible to manage such ethnic diversity peaceably (Cheah, 2002:xvi), and Malaysians might rightly feel relieved and proud that they have not succumbed to similar violence, and therefore cling to their relative history of peace and stability as an essential, sacrosanct part of their national identity.

This seems to contradict modernisation theory, as it indicates that Malaysians are unwilling to push for change in a revolutionary way, unlike Eurocentric models of development towards democracy where the middle class "shattered and blasted away the shackles of feudal society" and created a new socio-economic order (Kessler, 2001:38). The Malaysian middle class does not exhibit the same uncompromising revolutionary fervour, and this is due to cultural and contingent factors (Embong, 2001:15). The creation of a middle class in Malaysia, unlike the emergence of the middle class in Europe, "did not emerge from any locally autonomous process of internal social development" (Kessler, 2001:39). Rather, it was a state-sponsored project that was considered vital for the success of nation-

building. The New Malays, in particular, were nurtured by the state through the NEP, and owe their existence to the structural conditions of the UMNO dominant BN government. Therefore, for them to oppose or challenge the state is problematic, and Yao and Kessler both assert that it makes this class 'infantile' and 'docile' as it was born out of political servility, rather than in opposition to the political status quo (Yao, cited in Chong, 2005a; Kessler, 2001), and this might explain the lack of sustained, dramatic resistance. Rather, my research implies that the middle class seeks to bring about change only through the existing political and social framework, rather than opposing or trying to dismantle it, and this is evidenced by the expectation of top-down state-led changes by my participants.

Another common thread in the articulation of national identity, both from the Malaysian state and echoed by my interviewees, is the emphasis on development and economic progress. Freddie cites a comfortable quality of life as an essential ingredient of being Malaysian: *"Malaysians are happy go lucky. Not so competitive or stressed out. You can have a good, decent, simple life and everyone is committed to make the country better"*. This was viewed as an essential strand of being Malaysian, and scholars have argued that it is this striving for continual economic growth that is the motivating factor for members of the Southeast Asian middle class to come together in protest against the government (Berenschot et al., 2016:20; Case, 2002; Thompson, 2007). The key objective of the Bersih movement is to eradicate corruption in the electoral process, and the last Bersih 5 rally was specifically aimed at voicing discontent at Prime Minster's Najib Razik involvement in a multi-billion dollar corruption scandal (1MDB scandal). Therefore, it can be viewed that the middle class was united and mobilised against corruption and bad governance:

> "They are focusing their political engagement more on problems of corruption and governance, and less on strengthening the rule of law or the advancement of citizen rights." (Berenschot et al., 2016:20).

The motivation for this is because it threatened the economic conditions for their future growth and progress, rather than due to any commitment to the ideals of democracy and citizenship (Thompson, 2007:3). Case argues that there is little

evidence that the Malaysian middle class has any real desire for democracy or the restructuring of society to bring about more equality (2002; 2013).

This seems to undermine modernisation theory:

> "…modernization theory is stumped, with recession, rather than steady growth, fueling new middle-class interest in a more competitive party system. Further, with economic recovery, this interest in accountability dissipates rapidly, revealing it to have progressed little beyond a longing for boom times." (Case, 2002:125).

Rather, both the Malay and Chinese Malaysian business and middle class "valorizes economic progress" (Hwang and Sadiq, 2010:210), and therefore any action calling for democracy is based on the frustration of this capitalist class seeking more access to the global marketplace in their desire to ensure continued prosperity. Indeed, the fall of Suharto's New Order and subsequent transition to democracy in neighbouring Indonesia was prompted by the 1997 economic crisis, where citizens grew frustrated when promises of development were no longer being met. Therefore, it seems the middle class is motivated to fight for change only when their lifestyles and social mobility is threatened, and whilst they are benefitting from the system, they do not seek to change it.

The contingent nature of the Malaysian middle class could once again explain their lukewarm drive for democracy and equal citizenship. The Malaysian middle class can be viewed as a capitalist class (Chong, 2005b:575), not only located in the global capitalist system, but also formed by such processes. They are therefore inherently bound to and aligned with capitalist processes, which explains their main concern being stability and economic growth. As Embong states, they seek political and societal change, yet also seek comfort and safety, and the New Malays in particular are "security and consumption-oriented, and appreciative of …[the state's]…benefits" (2001:20). Therefore, their drive for radical change from both middle class bumiputeras and Chinese Malaysians is limited, and they are caught paradoxically between dependence on and opposition to the state. The national narrative prioritises stability and economic development as key tenets of being Malaysian. However, in upholding this, citizens' efforts to realise another tenet of the

national identity: that of an equal and harmonious sense of citizenship, are hampered.

8. Conclusion

I have sought to investigate the factors that have kept Malaysian citizens' sense of identity grounded in ethnicity, and the potential for a reimagining of identity that moves beyond ethnicity towards a universal, national sense of citizenship. In focusing on the opinions and perceptions of members of the middle class, who can be considered a cosmopolitan, broadminded and influential sector of Malaysian society that is often at the forefront for pushing for change, I hoped to gain an insight into how far this ethnic consciousness is being transcended, and explore the viability of an alternative, national sense of belonging. However, I am aware that my research is drawn from a small sample, and therefore no firm generalisations can be made. Nevertheless, I hope it has provided a glimpse of the processes at work, and allowed me to infer the potential for change, which I will do in this chapter.

My research has shown that members of this class of citizens carry deeply ingrained racialised perceptions which they identify with, and this 'reinforces boundaries between 'us' and 'them' that crosscut citizenship, nationality and ethnicity' (Sin,2015:546). This is unsurprising considering how ethnicity permeates and determines all facets of life. Colonial categories of race are maintained and continually reproduced by the postcolonial state, and the NEP in particular, is evidence of structural inequality where access to rights is ethnically defined and based on perceptions of indigenity. This results in differentiated citizenship that breeds suspicion and competition between ethnic groups. My interviewees did express a desire to move beyond such ethnic consciousness, but they were unable to articulate how this could be achieved, beyond looking to the state to dismantle the structures that produce them. Having been nurtured by the postcolonial state, groups within the middle class are reluctant to defy it, and are accustomed to adapting to and working within its framework, regardless of how displeased or disillusioned they are with it. This undermines modernisation theory, which assumes the middle class will forcefully push for change with little regard for their own comfort or security, as was evident in many European contexts. The specific capitalist conditions that produced the middle class in Malaysia, especially the New Malays, restrains them from forceful action. Additionally, in relating to a conception of national identity which prioritises peace and stability, they are further constrained.

However, what might be occurring is a slower, gradual transition towards a more equitable imagining of society and citizenship (Ufen, 2009; Subramanian, 2011). The fact that Sarah Lian used her platform as a celebrity to voice her disagreement with the state's formulation and imposition of identity, as well as the participation of citizens in the Bersih rallies, indicates that the desire for change is present and underlying. I feel it is unlikely that such leanings will retreat or disappear, though the momentum to achieve them may fluctuate. The mechanism for realising this might be slow and follow a more restrained, evolutionary path, achieving change in the space within the existing political system rather than through revolution.

A potential obstacle for achieving change, however, is a possible emerging class division. Historically, it has been observed that the middle class tends not to enter into coalitions with the lower classes (Case, 2013:15; Fanon, 1963), and this is seen in my research where the desires and opinions of the red-shirts are dismissed as being ignorant and unfounded. The Malaysian journalist Tricia Yeoh even claims that the middle class is best authorised to determine what is best for society, including what is best for the lower classes. She claims that in seeking a fairer, non-discriminatory society that does not grant rights based on ethnicity, the middle class is also advocating what is best for the lower classes (Yeoh, 2015). However, this seems presumptuous and unqualified. The New Malays have benefited from and been nurtured by the NEP, and having now secured themselves economically, they can afford to advocate abolishing these rights on the grounds that it is discriminatory and racist, assured that there security and status will be maintained. This is not the case for the rural Malays, who remain statistically the poorest group in Malaysia (despite receiving benefits from the NEP), and who therefore feel hugely attached to state benefits (Rahman, 2009:429). This locates future potential fault-lines for tension not on ethnicity, but rather on class and perceived economic need. However, it also has the potential to move the dialogue towards pro-poor policies that are not ethnically weighted, but rather, are based on a class or needs-based criteria.

It remains to be seen what direction Malaysia will take in its transition towards a national sense of identity. I feel that the state's articulation of national identity is not a particularly workable conception as it is riddled with paradoxes, and this suggests that perhaps the onus lies on its citizens to imagine and negotiate a more coherent ideology. In addition, the state's attempts at realising its conception of a Malaysian

identity seem to be limited to its nation-building programmes, which citizens seem to simultaneously identify with, and yet are also cynical about. Chomsky describes this sort of duality as exemplifying “Orwell’s problem”, which is:

> “the ability of totalitarian systems to instill beliefs that are firmly held and widely accepted although they are completely without foundation and often plainly at variance with obvious facts about the world around us.” (1986:xxvii)

Chomsky suggests that the solution to dismantling such structures - a way to transcend the paradox, lies in discovering and understanding the factors that create and sustain them. This thesis is an attempt to do that.

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9. Appendices

❖ Participation Information Sheet

26-08-2017

Title of Research Project: Identity in West Malaysia

Researcher: Sheza Afzal, Master's student of Leiden University

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You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

You are welcome to discuss this project with others if you wish before you make your decision. Please ask me if you would like more information (sheza.afzal@gmail.com / +31 615177383).

What is the purpose of the study?

To understand the experiences of West Malaysians' sense of identity and citizenship based on ethnicity, religion, culture and economic situation. This is in relation to the Malaysian state's vision of development and national harmony, represented by ongoing national development projects such as the National Economic Policies (NEPs), *Vision 2020* and *1Malaysia*. This research combines interviews with 6-8 Malaysians with literature from news sources and existing academic research.

Do I have to take part?

No, you don't. It is your choice whether or not to take part.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in one interview over the telephone in English. You will be asked several questions. Some of them will be about your personal experiences of school, family and

work. Others will be about your opinion on policies and the future of Malaysia.

How much time will it take?

The interview will take approximately 1 hour.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This is a chance for you to share your experience of being a Malaysian citizen at a critical point in Malaysia's development, and to discuss any changes you observe in the way the society is organised (ethnically, religiously, economically).

What are the possible risks of taking part?

No risks are foreseen.

Will the information be confidential?

All your responses to the interview questions will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will not be published or revealed, unless you give permission for this.

Can I withdraw from the research?

Yes, you can withdraw. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can stop at any time, or skip questions you do not want to answer.

What should I do if I want to participate?

Let the researcher (Sheza Afzal) know that you are willing to participate. Then, a suitable time will be arranged for the telephone interview, and you will sign a consent form beforehand (attached).

Thank you for your time.

❖ Interview Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Identity in West Malaysia

Researcher: Sheza Afzal, Master's student of Leiden University

sheza.afzal@gmail.com / +31 615177383

Research Participant: ……..

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part		
I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated 26/08/2017.		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio).		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.		
Use of the information I provide for this project only		
I understand my personal details such as phone number and email address will not be given to people outside the project.		
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.		
Please choose one ***of the following two options:***		
I would like my real name used in the above		
I would **not** like my real name to be used in the above (anonymous).		
Use of the information I provide beyond this project		
I understand that other academic researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form..		
I understand that other genuine researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
So we can use the information you provide legally		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to Sheza Afzal.		

Name of participant……Signature ……Date ……

Researcher ……..…**Sheza Afzal**…… Signature …….. Date ……

❖ **Interview Guide**

Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. This chat will last about 40 minutes/1 hour. I'm going to ask you some questions about yourself first, then about topics of race, religion, class, economics and politics in West Malaysia, which I would like your opinion on. But you can skip any questions you don't want to answer and you can stop the interview at any time. Do you understand?

Do you have any questions so far?

Ok, good. So let's start.

1. Background and biography

- What is your full name?
- How old are you?
- Where did you grow up?
- Do you come from a big family? Do you have siblings?
- What do your parents work with?
- What type of school did you go to? Did you like it? Why/ why not?
- Did you attend university? Where? What course?
- What kind of work do you do?
- Where do you live now?

2. Ethno-Religious Groups in West Malaysia

- What are the different ethnic groups in West Malaysia?
- How are they different?
- (If religion not already mentioned) What about the different religions?
- Does each ethnic group also have a particular religion?
- Do these groups mix much?
- Do you think this is overall a positive thing?
- Do you think it overall works to make a harmonious society?
- Do you think there have been, or will be, any changes to the way these groups are interact?
- Does that worry you?
- What is more important in Malaysia: race or religion?

3. Class and NEP

- Since independence, do you think Malaysia's economy has been developing well?
- Do you think all the groups in Malaysian society are equal economically?
- Who are the rich citizens in Malaysia?
- Who are the poorest citizens?
- Do you think Malaysia has different classes (people with different economic levels)?
- Who are the 'New Malays'?
- What do you think of the NEP policies?
- Has it been successful so far?
- Do you think Malaysia should keep the NEP in the future? For how long?

4. Political Engagement

- If talking about politics, what is an important issue for you?
- Has this always been an important issue for you?
- Are there any recent issues concerning politics that have in particular caught your attention?
- Are politics in Malaysia the same as always or have there been changes?
- Is Malaysia a democracy?
- What do you think of the Bersih movement?
- Which kinds of people do you think joined it?
- Do you think the people who joined were from the same ethnic group?
- Do you think the people who joined were from the same class?
- Do you think it has been successful?
- Do you think it could be successful in the future?
- What about the anti-Berish movement (red-shirts?)
- Why did they disagree?
- Do you think the Berish movement changed anything in Malaysian society or politics?

4. Identity and belonging

- Do you feel Malaysian?
- What is it to be a Malaysian?
- Do you think other Malaysians accept or see you as a Malaysian?
- What do you think of the *Bangsa Malaysia* and *1 Malaysia* government programmes?
- Do you think they help people feel more national harmony?
- Are they necessary to feel united in Malaysia?

Interview Grid: Summary of Interview Notes

	1. Cheong Man Jin	2. Mr Ashmir Bin Raul	3. Ismail Effendy Bin Ahmad Nordin Endy	4. Alvin Quek Chawkee	5. Dwi Endi	6. Franky Lim
Background **• Age** **• Grew up** **• Parents from** **• Ethnicity** **• Religion** **• Job**	• 32 years old • born and grew up in KL, now living in Singapore (7 yrs) • Mother: KL Father: Perak state • Ethnicity: Chinese • Religion: officially Buddhist, but identifies as Taoist • Job: Quantity Surveyor for Singaporean local firm	• 56 years old • Born in Singapore, moved to Selangor, Malaysia when 12 yrs old • Mother: Singaporean Father: From Selangor • Ethnicity: Malay • Religion: Muslim • Job: Deputy Head and Chemistry Secondary School Teacher in Sabah (since 1986)	• 33 years old • Born and grew up in Melaka (Penang and UK for Studies) • Parents and grandparents from Melaka. Dad is a Malay, mum is ethnically Chinese by adopted by a Malay family at birth. Her mother died in childbirth and then when her grandfather couldn't look after her he gave her to his best friend who was a Malay. She was brought up as Malay and registered as Malay, despite being ethnically Chinese. • Ethnicity: Malay • Religion: Muslim • Job: Contractor in Civil Construction, small-scale entrepreneur Has a Chinese wife who converted to Islam, and their kids are Malay and Muslim.	• 36 years old • Born and grew up in Sabah/ Umpang, KL school, lived in Penang for 7 yrs; studied and worked in the UK (Thomas Cook) • Father: Johor Baru (Chinese), moved to Sabah at 18 Mother: Sabah (Kadazahn) • Ethnicity: Chinese -Kadazahn mix • Religion: Roman Catholic • Job: Travel Agent, own business, small-scale entrepreneur.	• 33 years old • Born and grew up in Sabah till 18, then moved to Johor Baru • Parents from Indonesia (Java), work as hawkers in night market (bbq chicken) • Ethnicity: Javanese • Religion: Muslim • Job: Associate trainer for off-shore oil rigs	• 33 years old • Born and grew up in Sabah, spent 5 years living and studying in West Malaysia (Penang and KL) • Parents from Sabah (Dusun), grandfather on father's side came from China. Father is a businessman originally in construction, now in food products • Ethnicity: Sino-Dusun • Religion: n/a (Christian) • Job: Project Manager in own construction company
Language	English, Mandarin, Malay	Malay; English	Mandarin, English, Malay	English, Malay, Mandarin, Hakka, Kadazan, Cantonese	Malay; English; Bajua; Javanese; Chinese	Malay, English
School Experience	KL government school, majority Chinese (due to location), Malays, Indians, some East Malaysians. Malay medium. Spoke Mandarin to other Chinese students, and Malay to Malays and Indians. Language changed depending on who speaking to.	English medium government school (last batch to be educated in English). All Malaysians at school, of different ethnic background. Urban so Chinese majority, and Indians. Some Malays. All spoke English (only Bahasa and Islamic studies taught in Malay). Each group spoke own langue within groups and English between groups. Language: better if government had stuck to English as it is the international language, whilst Malay is just for Malaysia. Would have been like Brunei or Singapore and progressed. Too many politicians interfering in education rather than educationists. Politicians believe Malay language is very important, and yet they send their children overseas. They misunderstand patriotism as it is not about languages, but about progressing the country. Bahasa is important only in Malaysia, locally, but globally English is more important. This change has lowered education standards and meant Malaysia has fallen behind (compared to Singapore). Now the government recognises this and is trying to redress this with dual language programmes. Step in the right direction, but not sufficient. Importance of Civic studies (how to be a good citizen).	Local, government school (all boys) 7-12 yrs old. Malay-medium. Multi-racial, but Indian minority. Spole Malay with friends, and English to others or those raised speaking English.	Sabah government Anglican school, dominant Malay (60%), Chinese (20%), mixed bumiputras (15%) and Indians. Umpang area of KL, was mostly Chinese and spoke Cantonese so blended in well. Non-Cantonese speakers were Mandarin speakers or other dialects - was harder to blend in. Malay minority in college, but out of college, the Malays were dominant and visible majority group. English language medium. In school, don't explicitly learn about the racial hierarchy, but it is understood and everyone knows their place. Due to the attitude of the leaders.	Chinese primary school (as close by): 1. Chinese majority, 2. mixed, 3. Dusun, 4. Muslims (Malays, Baju) and government secondary school (mixed): 1. Muslims (Malays), 2. Mixed, 3. minorities like myself (Javanese, Indian) but never felt like a minority as Sabah is very mixed. In JB, there are Chinese and Indian school, but few. It is positive that people can choose which school based on race/language.	National (Malay medium) primary and secondary school. Most students were bumiputeras, with many of mixed parentage, and also mixed local with Chinese. Only 10% were Chinese and no Indians. All students spoke Malay, and with their own ethnic group they might also speak their own language. Went to TAR college - an initiative set up by the MCA Chinese political parties to help poor Chinese-ethnic students obtain cheap/free university education, as they were restricted by the government quotas for national universities, and private universities and overseas education was too expensive. College funded by MCA and private investment. Doesn't think the Indians have an equivalent system. Also spent 3 months studying in the UK in Sheffield.
Opinions on Ethnicity (West Malaysia)	3 main ethnic groups - of course different. Languages, physical appearance, culture and way of living.	3 main races. Have different religions, cultures, festivals, schooling and come from different villages. Culture: clothes, Indians wear saris and Chinese the choengsam, Malays the headscarf. Also the way they eat: Malays use their hands, the Chinese use chopsticks. These are little, petty things but they mark out differences. Malays are suspicious of the Chinese, who are suspicious of the Indians due to competition. Overrides competition. Race more important than religion has everyone has the right to practice their religion. Need to do away with ethnic categories. Malaysians pay much more attention to this, identify with ethnicity over religion, when it should just be Malaysians.	3 main ethnic groups: Malay, Chinese, Indian, and some foreigners. Diversity within categories, even Malay race has branches, and Chinese. (e.g. Melaka - Portuguese heritage, Bangow, Shin, Baba-Nonya). Different: skin colour, by their look. Most obvious way to observe difference. But for me, we are all Malaysians. Also different way of doing business, or culture maybe. e.g. different traditional food, dress (hijab for Malay Muslim women).	West Malaysia: 1. Malays (majority), 2. Chinese, 3. Indians. If you don't involve politics, and think of just Malaysian, then people identify as an ethnic group. This identity is based on friction and competition between races. Before people felt more united (1990's KL, all celebrated Independence Day), but now in 2017 the Malays dominant over other groups and there is suspicion between groups. Due to poorer economy. Bumiputra also has classes/hierarchy: 1. Born Malay 2. Malay convert (West Malaysians) 3. Malay convert (from indigenous bumiputra East Malaysia) . For Chinese who convert, it depends on their skin colour if accepted as class two or three (rather than West or East)???? as some blend in more due to physical appearance. Doesn't know if the government instils these differences, or if it is just the mind-set of the people.	Ethnic group: JB: majority is Malay, 2nd is Chinese, 3rd Indian (big group of Indians in JB). Remaining are outsiders: Kelantan, Sabahhans. Now in JB living in a city, so it is very mixed as well. No feeling of minority. Can differentiate by face first (appearance). This is the main thing and easy to recognise from this. When the current government is losing it plays the race card (Malays for Malays) which upsets the Chinese and Indians. When politics gets to that stage it will worry me. But not before that point.	Main groups: Chinese, Malays and Indians, with some different groups such as Baba Nonya and 'Jakun' indigenous native people. But they are a minority. Can tell the differences by the ay they talk mostly, the slang they use and their accent when speaking Malay or English. But also by their face. If they are mixed it's harder to know. For example a Chinse-Indian bab y(Ch-indian) looks a lot like a Malay so it's hard to tell. In this context the parents and child would speak English rather than Malay, so that would be one way of knowing. LANG: Urban Malaysians speak better English than rural Malaysians, and generally the Indian and Chinese population speak better English than the Malays. It is considered important for getting a good job. In Sabah, thinks there has been a shift in ethnic categorisations and they no longer accept mixed ethnicity, so the options for babies to be registered are: Chinese / Dusun (or other ethnic group) / Malay. No Sino-Dusun choice like he had.
Opinions on Religion	Religion separates people more than race Malays = Islam (no choice, given at birth) impression of religiosity and strict followers of religion; Indians = Hindu, Christian, not so religious, can choose Chinese = Christian, Buddhist, Taoist.	Malays = all Muslims. Constitution deems this. Chinese = Buddhist, Christian. Indians = Hindus mainly, some Christian converts.	Religion - majority Muslims. There are Chinese and Indian Muslims in Melaka. Also Buddhists and Hindus. Very few atheists. More important than race, as very sensitive topic. Majority are Muslims, who are very sensitive about everything. They are not really open and give bad impression or the religion, and this reflects badly on the race. Muslim people have negative thinking, and this is a critical problem for Malaysia. They want to universalise the rules and norms they follow (e.g. banning October fest in case Muslims attend: you cannot force other races to follow what you re prohibited from. You should mind your own business and it is not fair).	Each race identifies with its own religion. Malays are worried about Malay - 'putwah en Melayu = pride to be a Malay'. 'Born a Malay, die a Malay'. Malay = Muslim, and they can't legally change their religion. Some Malays are worried that there people might want to change to other religion (Christian, Hindu, Pagan) in village. In Sabah, Philippines were given citizenship and a Malay ethnicity to bolster the Malay vote. Buying votes for legal status and ID. Same with Indonesians (but don't cause trouble like the Filipinos). Race and Religion equally important.	Religion: Muslims are the biggest in number, 2nd are Chinese and 3rd is Hindu. Chinese: Buddha, the one with the temples. Malays focus increasingly on religion, Indians focus on both race and religion, and for the Chinese I'm not sure. Every shop has its own shrine so it might be religion. Now we have a new society of non-believers who don't care about religion. There are only a few and from every race. But on the ID card it still states a religion, and Muslims have their own courts, laws, Sharia.	The majority are Muslims, then Christian, Buddhist and Hindus (if you consider that a religion). But for the Abrahamic religions it is Islam and Christianity. The Muslims are mostly Malays, and if you are a Malay you are a Muslim for sure as there is no choice in this. It's like the Jewish identity, it is both a race and religion and you are born into it. Race and Religion are the same thing. It doesn't apply for other ethnic groups. The government of Malaysia claims there is freedom of religion and that religions can be practised freely, but you can't covert if you are a Muslim. You can't leave Islam, whilst you can for the other religions. There was one example of a Malay who tried to convert to Christianity (Lina Joy) when she married a Brit. It was highly controversial and there was a media frenzy. I think she left the country in the end.
Groups mix?	Depends on region, but at work they are forced to mix and work together, but socially they can choose and tend to stick to own. Language plays a role as need to be able to speak each other's language to mix more. There is a barrier, but not necessarily a negative thing, as situation still ok and people communicate quite well. Harmonious and peaceful.	In school days, everyone mingled and there was no polarisation. No different background. During festivals everyone celebrated and paid a visit to each other's homes (Hari Raya, Chinese New Year)???? Indians too? Less mixing now due to politics which polarises. Different races and suspicious of each other and less open-minded. Mingle less and kept apart. Only meet in formal environments, and after go back home to practice their own culture.	Yes, overall. Language: felt discrimated by Chinese when they speak their own language in order to give each other special treatment/better price. This is not transparent or fair, as cannot understand what they are saying. Is excluded. Language separates people who can't be in an equal situation with someone of a different language.	Do mix overall, generally united for the sake of progress, but small % of hooligans feel responsible for the fate of the Muslim religion. The Chinese therefore do not seek a very visible profile, and tend to take care of themselves rather than look for government support. Indians too, look after themselves. Muslim/Malay = power, money and politics. Overall harmonious, but will change. Malays have a certain ideology - want to be clean, covered. e.g. Laundry only for Malays (so Chinese and Indians excluded). Experience in the UK - didn't feel judged by race/religion or name. Didn't depend on any of these things but on performance. Felt good.	They mix at some point, during working time they mix together with no problem. But the social part - having a tea, coffee it is rare. Even I don't have any Indian friends. For football though, everyone comes together. But socially, they prefer to hang out with their own race. I sometimes see Chinese and Indians together, but in those cases the Indian can speak Chinese (as probably went to a majority Chinese school), but the Chinese never speaks Indian. If people don't mix much it is not healthy. A multi-national culture is a good thing, and now the social element is missing. Until now it worries us sometimes, but not unduly. It is a small issue, and down to small misunderstandings. When some Chinese and Indians bring the peace down by not respecting the Muslims and then the Muslims fight back. Maybe they don't get the real understanding of the Muslim religion. Based on what is represented by the media. So far there haven't been any riots. Language: often Chinese and Indians prefer to use English rather than Malays, and even some Malays are teaching their children English over Malay, so we are losing the national language due to English language hegemony.	The groups don't really mix. In his college it was mostly Chinses with a Malay minority, so the Malays did mix with the Chinese and have Chinese friends as they were forced to, but if there had been more Malays I'm not sure there would have been as much mixing. It is difficult though, as when you go out to eat you have to consider the other culture (e.g. Muslims can only eat halal food). They have a different culture. Of course it is possible to be friends but it is not common. The cultural differences keep people apart, and the government too divides us. The 3 political parties are race-based (UMNO = Malays, MCA = Chinese, MIC = Indians). Doubtful another country in the world has this system. The ruling party made up of these three groups plays the race card every time there is an election and appeals to voters based on ethnicity. Uses the threat of the 'other 'to control people -e.g. if you don't vote for us the Chinese will get more seats. Learnt this from the British - divide and rule. It is easier for them to control the population this way. Also education keeps people apart too, as each race has its own school. Why not have a single stream school? The Chinese prefer to send their kids to a Chinese medium school if possible, and they get better results too. Why not take the best bits of all the schools and combine them into one? A minister suggested this in 2016 but it was shot down. The Chinese were resistant to the idea mostly, as they have been promised their own education system since the 1960's. However, people do mix and feel united when watching sport.

Future: mix more?	Yes, surely. And this is a good thing (couldn't explain why).	Need to mix more if want to be the same nation, share cultures and mingle. Need to be like one village, and urbanisation is good as forced to live together. Will change in the future due to urbanisation and growing population. Villages will become fewer and everyone will live together.	Getting more mixed. Has Chinese wife. Now government schools are not segregated along ethnic lines (private schools are). Good for general society as need to work together, as segregating and differences causes discrimination.	These new Malays are vocal and don't care about these divisions, come as united. Modern Malays think we are one. Willing to forgo privileges for Malays, even though they are Malays.	Hopefully yes. Older people do respect each other's religions, but the youngsters don't. They want to prove they are right and the other is wrong. People mix less when it comes to politics.	Will mix more in the future due to the internet and the world changing it is not as easy to control the population and what they think. Now everyone can have their opinion and this helps people mix. Father said back in the 1970's people mixed more and race relations were better. All races could sit at the same table, but now that's really rare to see. The Chinese and Malays would only do that if it were for business, not as friends. Would be nice to go back to that.
Comments on Economy	Developing but not doing as well in recent years (compared with Thailand, Indonesia) Malaysia is already behind, due to mismanagement of funds and unstable political situation.	Overall since independence has made good progress and reduced poverty among the rural population Now urban poverty.	During Mahathir's time the economy did really well. Leaped forward and was competitive in SEA. Set great example to other SEA countries. The economy was good then, but Malaysia is dependent on other bigger countries, and world problems affect Malaysia's economy too.	Economy has gotten worse, prices of oil and food has gone up and living standards have decreased. Property prices also gone up.	Economy is going well overall. People have 2 cars, 1 motorcycle for one household. There are lots of job opportunities, and the economy is picking up again.	No difference to normal I feel. Most Malaysians complain because the current government implements GST, most of my friends said it's not right to impose tax on the poor but I think it's ok to have this as most other countries do. We have many investors coming in now, though mostly from China and not Western countries anymore.
Views on NEP	Only benefitted Malay elite, and didn't help poorer Malays who are still poor, so hasn't really worked. Nonsensical that 1 policy can last for so long, and government needs to review from time to time (it has though!) Sensitive issue and politicians use it to harness support from poor Malays, and Malays still dominant group (60%) so will not be dismantled anytime soon. No dramatic change with this policy, for at least 5-10 years.	Overall successful as reduced poverty, but created a gap between haves and have nots. The rich got richer and poor got poorer. Not managed to reduce this gap due to the way it has been implemented, as benefits business people only. Doesn't benefit rural people. Vision 2020 replaced NEP, and there is also TN50 = national transformation by 2050. All these new policies are about development. NEP is no longer relevant, many parts of it are no longer relevant and have been done away with e.g. university quotas for Malays, now it is down to meritocracy. Bumiputera's no longer need 100% support and many can stand on their own. Most Malays (educated ones) feel it is obsolete and unsustainable. Need to focus on education and cultivate self-reliance.	I don't know what the situation is right now, what phase it is in. I've hard about it in the news, in school. It involves mostly building more schools, public places. The founding principle was the only way to help our race (Malay). Even though we are the majority, not all are opportunists or hard workers. There is hard, tough competition from other races. Overall this policy is both good and bad. It has made the Malays complacent because they know they always have a portion for themselves, and don't appreciate the opportunity. Mostly my race misuses it, as Chinese want to own a licence or get a contract, and uses a Malay proxy to get it. But it is needed to maintain a balance in the economy. This policy in the future depends on how the leaders manage it. (top down change).	Total bullshit. Reduces everything down to if you are Malay or not. The other races see it and feel it, as loans and subsidies all for Malays and Muslims. Chicken feet and wings left for the other races. Malays were weak at that time and needed help, so Mahathir introduced NEP. But never made sense to have this. Malays were the smallest business minority, but the majority group. Whilst Chinese and Indians were excelling, they were just lazing around and getting spoon-fed, whilst Chinese and Indians have to graft. Malays need to be proactive, not complacent. It should be stopped, but will be a challenge and if Modern Malays take over, it is conceivable. Personally made use of bumuputra status to get 5% discount, but felt injustice of this - what about for my Chinese or Indian friends? How is this fair?	Not so aware of what the NEP is. Unsure if we still have this, or in what form. Not healthy policy to try to bring majority of Malays to conquer the economy, as Chinese still dominate, so the policy has failed. Malays are quite lazy, even with the bumiputera advantage. They sell their licence to the Chinese, so they get money without working. This is really common. Bad for them, as not helping own race. The reason it worries me is that it encourages laziness which is bad for the economy, which will suffer in the future. NEP has been misused most of the time, abused by their own people. We should keep it, as we need to keep a balance and otherwise the Chinese will takeover and it will be like Singapore, so we still need it. If it weren't for the NEP, even though Malaysia is majority of Malays, it would have become like Singapore. Need to give advantage to local people to keep it Malaysian.	Used to be against the NEP as believed there had to be a meritocracy, and it shouldn't be based on ethnicity. That is racism and discrimination. Aspired to a system more like Singapore based on merit. But no, feels it was selfish to think like this (as a partial Chinese Malaysian). Feels the rights of the bumiputeras do need to be protected as they are still very backward, and if the government didn't help them then they would really be suffering. There needs to be restrictions for what the Chinese and other non-bumiputra groups can buy or own, for land for example, as otherwise they would own everything. After independence the Chinese and Indians were the wealthiest and best educated groups, and were therefore best positioned to guarantee their social mobility at the expense of the Malays and other bumiputeras. So the NEP has been necessary to safeguard the rights of Malays. Hopes eventually won't need it, but not sure how long it will take. It was supposed to be abolished after 30 years but was extended as hadn't achieved enough. Why not? Due to poor implementation and corruption, and the allowance of Ali-Baba alliances. The problem is not with the idea of the NEP but with the implementation, as people will always use it to benefit themselves even if they disagree with it in principal. They will still use it.
Rich / Poor Malaysians	Disparity getting worse. Rich Malaysians= good government connections. Mostly Chinese (more than 50% of richest Malaysians are Chinese) who are business-orientated, but now some Malays are very rich due to good government contracts. Some will be rich illegally so will not appear on any rich list. Corruption. Poor Malaysians = Politicians claim it is Malays, who clearly haven't benefitted by NEP. Poorly educated, manipulated by leaders.	The richest Malaysians are the Chinese, Malay and even Indian billionaires. Not really ethnically defined, though if we count by numbers, Chinese are the dominantly more. People who live in urban poverty are the poor. All races.	There are Chinese/Malay and Indian billionaires, so they are equal economically. Quite balanced overall if talking about the richest Malaysians, but most billionaires are Chinese Malaysians (from raw materials: sugar, paper industry). Indian billionaires are in telecommunications. All the races don't do the same to be rich. Division of labour - colonial trend. Poorest citizens are also represented across the races, as each race has its poor people, and each race has their society that helps these kinds. So poor Malays, Chinese and Indians are mostly the same.	Richest = Malay Muslims. Poorest = Chinese and native people, others, Indians. 10 richest Malaysians are often Chinese businessmen (e.g. sugarcane king), and Indian from telecommunications. Rich on paper, but Malays are richer due to corruption and illegal wealth.	Richest = Chinese, then second are Malays and some Indians. Even in workplace the top management is always Chinese. Poorest are Malays.	There is economic inequality in Malaysia and it is race based. The Malays are very far behind the Chinese and Indians. The richest citizens are Chinese, as you can see all the businesses are owned or run by Chinese. The poorest are the Malays and some Indians. There are one or two very rich Malays who are well connected to the government. This shows how the NEP has failed due to corruption. It's the government's responsibility rather than the people's.
Rural / Urban divide	Urban areas = mix more easily and without problem Suburban/rural areas = some problems as don't mix and kept apart. Stay within their group as not forced to mix through work.	Villages are organised along racial lines. The Chinese live in urban areas, whilst Malays and Indians come from their own villages so seldom see other races. They only meet in schools and offices. This will change with urbanisation. But now there is urban poverty which affects all ethnic groups. Worse than absolute poverty. Reduced rural poverty which affected people in the 1970's all races, but mostly Malays as they stayed in their villages and didn't tend to move to cities as much.	I really like the village people who can live in harmony. In rural villages they are more mixed and united e.g. Chinese can speak Malay fluently. In cities there is a lot of separation between the races. People go back to their own race kind of mentality. The Muslims are more conservative, so there is less community. Separated by communities.			The rural folks speak English less well than the city folk.
New Malays	Young and doing well	Melaya Bauru: More educated, open-minded, not orthodox, have a global world view are young, and are economically stable, often entrepreneurs. It is a political term, and only used in the past 10 years. Open to change and seek it.	I don't know who they are! I heard term 'Melaya Bahru'from our PM. They created this term, and I wonder what their mission is in doing so. They say they are the young, urban, educated Malays, but that mentality is behind. There are Malays who live in villages or the jungle, but who have thinking more mature (beyond) in terms of racial thinking.	Modern Malays "young, professionals and well educated. 20-40 years old. Old Malays stick to roots and ideology, modern Malays have evolved, which is crucial for progress and growth. These new Malays are vocal and don't care about these divisions, come as united. Modern Malays think we are one. Willing to forgo privileges for Malays, even though they are Malays????? INTERVIEW THIS FRIEND? Same class - middle class.	I don't know. Haven't heard about them.	The New Malays are the more progressive and liberal ones, but can't be that liberal as they wouldn't accept Malay marriage, or the removal of Islam as the official religion, or the idea that their son or daughter could convert to Christianity. So in reality are not that liberal. There is also an increased focus on new political parties which are supposedly not race based . However, in reality they tend to still attract a dominant ethnic majority, so TAP mostly has Chinese, and Party A mostly has Malays. In contrast, Sabah and Sarawak have never had race based parties.
Political Topics	Upcoming election. Would like to see a 2-party system so that there are checks and balances. At the moment the government has no competition and runs unchecked. Vote for opposition party regardless. Others might not vote against their ethnic lines, as often perhaps they have a sense of solidarity with that candidate, see something common.	Politics and misguided sense of nationalism has hindered Malaysia's progress (language policy). Politics dictates everything and has caused polarisation. Education is the most important tool to unite the nation, and make people mix. Being taught the same syllabus, textbooks, sharing the same space, doing the same exams.	When asked about class, responded with: There are only 2 classes: politicians and non-politicians. People who contribute more to the government get more business as get government projects. At least 70% people are chatting about the upcoming election (before June 2018).	Discuss hot topic: can a Chinese or Indian ever become PM? Not now, but maybe in 20+ years. Optimistic about change due to New Malays.	Some people feel apathetical, condemn all sides (government and opposition) over the past 2-3 years as the ruling party is still the ruling party. Most city people hate them, but the opposition isn't united and have their own conflict, fractured into 3 parts. DAP = play on Chinese sentiments, intent to bring economy up and create another Singapore. Don't care about the Sultan or religion. PAS = main weapon is Islam and they want to create an Islamic country like Saudi. PKR = just want to win and motivated by revenge for Anwar's imprisonment. No clear policies. This fracture and conflict benefits the ruling party.	Politics - Sabahan autonomy is key issue. Do not want national political parties (recently UMNO), as don't want to be stepson of West Malaysia. Malaysia is a democracy of sorts, a 'guided 'democracy, as the races, population and media is all controlled and corruption is rampant and getting worse and allows UMNO to keep power. For example, it grants Filipino immigrants who are Muslim or convert to Islam citizenship in return for the guarantee that they vote for UMNO, thereby ensuring they win. In this way it is still a democracy as still have elections.
Last election(s): 2013, 2008		2013 protests showed people are looking for change, but the voting pattern didn't essentially change. They talk about change, and urban voters did vote for change but rural stick to the status quo. Rigged? Maybe, but no proof.				Doesn't believe the opposition party/parties would mean any big changes in the way Malaysia is run. The system would still be the same and just the actors are different. There would still be corruption. Angry that Mahathir has now joined the opposition as this has discredited it, and showed it to be opportunistic and about gaining power rather than standing for any principles, anti-corruption or wanting to change and better Malaysia.
Opinion on Bersih	Not really neutral NGO but supported opposition (Anwar's party: PKR). Almost synonymous for this.	Good that it wasn't a revolution and protest is allowed in a democracy and was useful to show government people's discontent. Claims neutrality but of course is aligned with opposition party. Handicapped somewhat as to protest you need a permit and to follow procedures, which is difficult to obtain (but not for red-shirts).	Got a lot of media attention but didn't result in regime change. Bound by law and can't take down government. But had symbolic success as made the discontent and cause known, drew attention to it and that's good.	Big fan of Bersih and what it stands for. Clean electoral system. Vital to have fair elections to move forward and progress. Look at history - Philippines to get rid of Marcos, walkabout. Inspired by this. When will it be our turn? Will join when that happens and join protests in KL.	It's a good thing as long as they don't overdo it. Puts pressure on the government so keeps them on their toes and shows that people are stronger than the government. But like a child asking for attention. It doesn't involve any government parties, it is not neutral, the only agenda it has it to condemn the government. A bit effective, but government still controls the media.	Was a good thing but now I know it is not neutral, but a proxy for the opposition parties. It had an agenda and the chairperson, Ambiga, awas closely aligned with the opposition. This was disheartening and changed opinion of the movement and organisation. They are not genuine and they will benefit if the opposition wins. Overall still a good thing though, as it did manage to bring Malaysian together under one banner, and all united in opposition to the government.

Who joined & why?	Didn't personally join as was in Singapore. People who wanted a change in government joined. PKR opposition party brought people from all ethnic groups and class together for the 1st time in the history of Malaysia! As well as East Malaysians. Even poor Malays supported him.	Main common feature was all were educated. Mostly Chinese due to urban setting but also some Malays (relatives joined in KL). Wanted to voice out dissatisfaction through peaceful demonstration. Red shirts: anti-Bersih. Mostly youth from government parties and mostly Malays (UMNO youth party).	Many of his friends put yellow on FB wall and actively supported and went into the streets during the elections. They would be prepared to do so again. People from different categories : professions, age, ethnicities, middle class mostly. All were united, no separation, and in other cities too (London, Hong Kong). All had same mission. Red shirts = funded by politicians, not volunteers. Young and jobless, blinded by their leaders. All pure Malay, unlike Bersih which has different varieties.	Not really Malays who joined, generally Chinese and Indians. And 10% of 'Modern Malays'.	Mainly Chinese and Indians, those that feel they don't get enough attention, desperate people. From various ethnicities, from everyone. All people were united and tried to create a sense of unity from all sides. This was achieved during the moment of the rally but after each went back to their own agenda. From mixed economic background (rich and poor). They came together for political purposes rather than business. Small, low-income people supported Bersih too as they feel like the government is cruel and unjust. Angry about price hikes. Red-shirts opposition: monkeys hired by the government. Only 1 race - all Malays, driven by "Malaysia for Malays" ideology. Don't care much about the economy, only about race and Malay supremacy. Gangsters who are brainwashed and follow their politicians, like the KKK. Paid by big people.	The 1st Bersih you could see there was a variety of people. Chinese and Malays and Indians. But the last one there was a small turnout and this is due to PAS no longer being part of it, so it lost a lot of support. Now it was mostly Chinese and Indians rather than Malays. This shows that it wasn't really from the people but rather about the political parties. Not a people's movement. Opposition red shirts were members of UMNO, all Malays and probably paid.
Future prospects of Bersih?	Initial motivation and support has dropped as government remained in power. People are disillusioned and apathetic, and now Bersih is finished as there is no strong opposition. Not convinced by it.	Useful as despite not bringing change in government, it allowed people to voice their discontent, and make government aware of this which is enough. Now we need to see the voting pattern in the next election. Anticipates more protests and Bersih activity. But Malaysians are unpredictable! A mixed lot and you cannot predict the outcome	Now the mood for protest has waned, but Bersih is doing a lot of campaigning, and is active and keeping pressure on government this way.	Too much corruption. Degrading your own people. There is harmony, but not clean, fair system. Not even close to fair! This will change because of Bersih. When is our turn? I will join when it is our turn.	Doubt there will be Bersih for this next election. Though like an episode 1/2/3/4 etc. and waiting for next one. Might be active before the election as want to bring the government down.	It's finished, as it's been proven to be a fraud, and not neutral. You can see this in the low turnout.
Future prospects of Malaysia government?	People want a change in government, but the opposition is fractured (PAS). Needs to unite to stand a chance of defeating Najib's party. Potential unification possible by Mahathir's endorsement of opposition (though he has a personal agenda, he can bring people together and knows how to do politics). In the city perhaps people would vote for the opposition regardless of their race.	Corruption and nepotism are big issues and the government has difficulty in combatting this. Most people want change and are looking forward to change in the next election. But very difficult to topple the government as Malaysians are conservative and are afraid of radical change. They seek to maintain the status quo. Malaysia is not a 100% democracy, more a guided democracy, but this has proven to work as country has made progress and developed, so there might not be any need to change it. But if the country isn't growing anymore then there is a need to change. Why not try something else? If that doesn't work we can change back. Need to give change a chance. Once we achieve change though, it is very difficult to go back. Need NGO and youth to help win. Opposition is not is united so difficult to change. Needs a leader (Anwar - in prison, Mahathir - too old).Current government worse than previous ones as economically poor performance. 1md scandal, nepotism, corruption. Many people are hopeful for change	Been no changes in the political system. People are dying for changes, people are going mad for change and will be quite tough for the government to maintain its position. All people want is to live comfortably, but this isn't possible under current government. Stagnating. Hard to say if there will be any change. Last election the government didn't have the popular vote, but the government always knows how to manipulate the votes. Not optimistic.	There needs to be, and will be changes as Malays are getting more greedy and living costs have gone up. Political situation very important now, and need for real change. It comes down to the people . Changes = Bersih. Malays continue to support the government (red-shirts, as want to be spoon-fed and to maintain dominant position), but other races do not as they are fed up. Bersih isn't political though, just want clean elections. 2018 election - Modern Malays, Chinese and Indians want regime change, but government still supported by majority Malays. Majority. Najib will still be there, but perhaps with fewer seats,. No big change yet.	The opposition might come together for the election, but it is too weak and the government will stay. The racial divisions are too strong and people are not united.	Current government will remain because opposition parties are not united and have Mahathir who is corrupt leading them now, which doesn't bode well.
Opinion on 1Malaysia programme?	White Elephant. Do not really unite people, just pay lip service to this and actually used to siphon off money to enrich certain groups. Divides 3 groups more, as the dominant narrative still champions Malays. Acknowledges this is the Chinese perspective, and Malays might not, depending on their education level.	Trying to rectify the suspicion between races. In the past we didn't need such a policy as people mixed organically. Everybody was united. Sound philosophy and well-intentioned, but the implementation is not good so we don't see a difference. So Malaysians support the concept and idea of the programme, but lose faith in it when they see how poorly it is implemented.	All these nation building programmes - their ultimate goal is to make money. Just a label, which is supposed to benefit all people, but doesn't really mean anything. Maybe if they were implemented properly they could work better.	Political gimmick, used to satisfy people and say nice things. Lip service. Marketing but no substance. Some patriotic people might think it works, and government is trying to appease these minorities.	Works for those who watch and believe the mainstream media, and for formal occasions. Good initiatives but are not working. Lip service as they keep pushing people apart as they don't care about people.	There is a good intention but unsure about the results. It is a good concept and the beginning of bringing people together. It's a baby step, but still have UMNO/MIC/MCA which keep everything apart.
Define: Malaysian nationality	Of course I feel Malaysian! More so since living in Singapore, as more connected to Malaysian Indians and Malays than Singaporeans. Can't say what that is based on apart from commonality. Within Malaysia people see the divisions more. Feels like a 2nd class citizen (Chinese) in Malaysia though. Not as equally valued, and must rely on themselves and work harder to succeed as minimal support.	Of course I feel Malaysian, as grew up and mostly educated in Malaysia. To be Malaysian is to feel like you are one country, one nation, to feel progressive and to strive to be world class. Proud to live in one country with different ethnic groups, and this unity in diversity makes Malaysia unique as they have remained peaceful. Should feel proud!	Yes I am. I feel it. What does that mean? Not sure. Malaysians are happy go lucky. Not so competitive or stressed out. Can have a good, decent simple life and everyone committed to make the country better. Can say 'hi' to everyone.	I feel Sabahan, not Malaysian. We are always on our own. Growing up I felt part of Malaysia as it was taught in school, and that East Malaysia belongs to West Malaysia. Malaysian identity is happy to live in the country you were born and raised in, where there is no friction between religions and races, and focus on progress and the future. That's what school teaches us, but the reality is different as there is competition between the races and rampant corruption.	Malaysians know how to get along and respects others cultures and different races. Harmony.	Feels more Sabahan than Malaysian. Less racist, more tolerant and free there than in West Malaysia. E.g.okctoberfest banned in Peninsular, should bring to Sabah. I felt Malaysia when in the UK I guess. No, still Sabahan more than Malaysian, and really felt this when living in KL. It is much more mixed and segregated West Malaysia.
How to transcend racial categories?	With a different ruling party, Malaysia can grow and then other aspects can change too, such as the issue of non-Malays being treated like 2nd class citizens. The new government would know people are not happy and will have to do something about this.	Need unifying policies, as once introduced they have to be followed. TOP DOWN. Education is the key to bring about correct change. Change through revolution is not appropriate, no radical change. Rather through evolution and in a peaceful manner.	Not sure what would need to happen to achieve this. It's all about feelings, and you can't force people to mix. Maybe by appealing to common humanity and understanding we are all the same. People are intermarrying more than before, so that's one way. We need to create fairness for all the races so that they are equal and there is no hierarchy or feelings of being superior. This could encourage more unity. And also most things involve races, we always have to label our race when we fill in forms or register for absolutely anything. It's all about labelling your race. Maybe we should put these labels aside and so they cease to be important. Stop asking for it.	These new Malays are vocal and don't care about these divisions, come as united. Modern Malays think we are one. Willing to forgo privileges for Malays, even though they are Malays as have same vision of the future and don't want the Malays to be the dominant group. They are the minority of Malays and are all of the same class - middle class. If (when) Modern Malays take over, then NEP can be stopped		The political landscape has to change to achieve real harmony and get rid of race based segregation. There would have to be no race based parties, it would have to be possible for an Indian or Chinese to be PM. There was a funny article that suggested forcing people to only marry people from another race, and forbid someone from marrying their own race. In this way, there would be no more Indian, no more Chinese, no more Malays - this categories would dissolve. It would be nice. But there are race relations all over the world, and people always want to keep their own identity. Another factor that would have to change is the dominance of Islam. If a female non-Muslim marries a Muslim, she has to convert, and her children would be Malay. This is not fair, as they are not given a choice (and neither is she). Would be fairer if everyone could choose their religion, and those kids could choose. As it is now, the Malays never have to give up anything and the onus is always on the other to convert, and this deters Chinese and Indians from marrying Malays. (example: sister married a Muslim and then got divorced. She converted because she had to but doesn't want to keep the religion now that she's divorced. She has to though. Her kids are Muslim too and labelled as 'Malay' rather than Sino-Dusun). A lot is to do with skin colour too though, as if a Japanese converted to Muslim they wouldn't get the 'Malay' label. Got to look the part and speak the language too, and share same eating habits. The appearance has to fit Malay. Hence why the Indonesians get identified as Malay. E.g. our deputy PM is originally from Indonesia and can even still speak Javanese, but he is identified as a Malay.