



## Globalization and Postcolonial Nation in Malaysia: Theoretical Challenges and Historical Possibilities

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**ABSTRACT.** With the conclusion of the Cold War and the advent of a neoliberal stage of capitalist expansion, it has been argued that national identifications have been increasingly replaced by emergent global modes of consciousness. Disagreements, however, abound over the historical role of the global. For some, it is seen as a subject of deterritorializing capital flows while for others, it supersedes nationalism and plays a central role in fighting the hegemony of modernist states and the excesses of neoliberal capitalism. Given these theoretical dilemmas, and the fact that nation-states have yet to disappear, the paper argues for a reorientation from pitting globalization against nationalism to their mutual constitution and reconstitution instead. With Malaysia as a case study, it argues that there is something substantive about nationalism and nation-state processes that demands a reconceptualization of nationalism and globalization. While the modern nation-state may be a political institution universalized via colonization and its consequences, its normative content and the mechanisms of nation-state building and national subject-making are never shaped by a wholesale adoption of the Western model. Rather, it is premised upon improvisations in response to contextual and material particularities of different societies. The article explores how alternative definitions and histories of national integration in multiethnic postcolonial societies such as Malaysia can become a first step towards reconsidering the concepts of nation and nationalism.

**KEYWORDS.** nation-state · nationalism · globalization · pluralism · postcolonial states · Southeast Asia · Malaysia

### INTRODUCTION

With the conclusion of the Cold War and the advent of a neoliberal stage of capitalist expansion, it is often said that the contemporary world order has moved away from the trajectories of an earlier era of modernization. The transnational flows of cultural and religious symbols and the movement of people across national boundaries

within a neoliberal capitalist regime are seen to be breaking down territorial borders and the power of nation-states (Lukes 1995; Hardt and Negri 2000; Dallmayr 1996). Modes of nationalist identifications are argued to be in decline and increasingly replaced by emergent types of global modes of consciousness that construe the world as a singular place. Despite these claims, it is, however, never quite clear what the new global subjectivities mean as disagreements abound over the historical role of the global. For some, the global is seen as a subject of deterritorializing and dehumanizing capital flows. For others, the global is viewed positively as playing a central role in fighting the excesses of nation-state and neoliberal capitalism. Efforts to conceptualize the role of the global or transnational appear, therefore, to be equally preoccupied with the persistent influence of the nation or national in the current world.

Given current theoretical dilemmas, should we not step back from a preoccupation to pit globalization against nationalism? Instead, we should consider their mutual constitution and reconstitution. This question is inevitably prompted by my location as someone working on Southeast Asian societies. I find that neither of the current theoretical positions on globalization nor nationalism can adequately account for the simultaneous orientations to both the national and the global and the newer configurations of political pluralism, which have unfolded in Southeast Asian societies. As already pointed out by many scholars, Southeast Asia's integration into the global economy and mass consumer culture has not dismantled nationalistic identifications by both the state and its citizenry although nationalist expressions and political communities have dramatically changed over time (Shamsul 1996; Kahn 1998; Yao 2001; Wee 2001). Rather than reading the persistence of nationalistic sensibilities as some differentiated stage of globalization, false consciousness, or elitist ideology, this article argues that there is something substantial about the experience of nationalism and nation-state processes in many parts of Southeast Asia. This demands a rethinking of the meanings of nation, nationalism, and globalization. While the modern nation-state may be a political institution universalized via colonization in the Southeast Asian region, its formation and evolution are never shaped by a wholesale adoption of the Western model. Rather, it is premised upon improvisations in response to cultural, contextual, and material particularities of different societies. The transformation of nationalism amidst intense globalization in contemporary Southeast Asia has led

to newer configurations of political pluralism in many countries. This suggests the viability of nationalism in the region contrary to declarations of its current demise.<sup>1</sup> To the extent that the normative content, strategies, and mechanisms of nation-state building are specific to particular historical struggles, we can argue that there can be no deterministic predictions of nation-state models. The more important task is to explore how people make their own histories and meanings of nation and nationalism within the constraints of political and economic realities as well as the cultural imaginations that they put together.

As a first step to think through the conceptual challenges of globalization and nationalism, this article draws on the experience of Malaysian nationalism. Over the past three decades or so, Malaysian nationalism has been heavily implicated in both forces of capitalist globalization and transnational Islamism. This paper will make its arguments in two sections. First, it will discuss very briefly the series of shifts in Malaysian nationalism and tease out important issues arising from it. Second, it will conclude by posing some ideas on how we can learn from the Malaysian example in order to rethink some of the common assumptions about nationalism, nation, and globalization.

But this article wants to highlight first an important enduring characteristic of Malaysian history. That is, its history of openness to the movement of people, ideas, and trade in the various regions of West Asia, South Asia, China, Japan, Oceania, and Europe as a constituent of the maritime world of Southeast Asia (Reid 1993). These earlier international flows remind us that contemporary globalization has deeper historical antecedents. In fact, international relationships during the earlier maritime era were important in setting the terms within which a sense of collective localized identities was developed. This later turned into nationalist identities during the colonial era and led to the establishment of the modern Malaysian nation-state during decolonization. Hence, we should be cautious about easily accepting ideas that today's cross-border flows could easily destroy some of the shared experiences of political struggle as well as constructions of cultural distinctiveness. After all, as Benedict Anderson (1991) reminds us, there could be a "long-nationalism nationalism," which is independent of territory, and external factors have always been equally important in constituting a sense of national identity.

## NATION AND NATIONALISM IN MALAYSIA

Apart from history, it is also important for us to bear in mind that the concepts of nation and nationalism in Malaysia have, from their inception, been modified from the Western ideal of a unitary nation-state bound by one language, religion, and culture. The Malaysian nation-state model is more apt to be called a “multiethnic postcolonial nation-state”—a project to build a culturally integrated and territorially bounded community fraught by compromise as well as tensions arising from the deep structures of cultural pluralism (inherited from the maritime and colonial pasts) coupled with the imperatives for politico-economic survival since Independence. The newly established nation-state of Malaysia, while modeled after the Western ideal of equating nation with a racial or ethnic identity, was also one which drew a distinction between the nation-state and its cultural foundation. *Bangsa* (nation or race) was not used for nationality (Harper 1996, 241). Rather, there was to be a distinct cultural core for the nation-state, i.e., the *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) from amongst the indigenous peoples<sup>2</sup> and a legalistic definition of *warganegara* (citizenship) accorded to non-Malay and non-indigenous communities. Theoretically, the legalistic definition of citizenship enshrines the right of all communities to identify as citizens of the nation. Hence, we have a modified conception of the nation-state right from the start—one which operates on the basis of a cultural core along with the ideals of common citizenship, territory, political struggle and institutions, as well as language. In this modified nation-state model, equality does not necessarily mean sameness. Rather, nationhood operates on a precarious notion of cultural differentiation but with equal opportunity and treatment for all members of a national society. Inevitably, this arrangement came about from the imperative to overthrow the yoke of colonization as the forging of national unity and appeal of citizenship became powerful means for the first generation of political leaders to amass support and legitimize their rule. But citizenship appeal was not enough, the call for material development and a strong state to manage and engineer society was equally important for the nation-building enterprise. Malaysian nationalism and the foundation of its nation-state are, therefore, at once constituted by the processes of culturalization (i.e., using a language of specific cultural difference of cultural core and other ethnic identities) as well as difference-neutral discourses of equal social rights and economic opportunity for all Malaysians who share a

common political struggle for independence, capitalist development, and nation-building.

This modified and perhaps awkward nation-state model suffers serious tensions and contradictions—the most important of which are the issues of state hegemony and equal rights to economic and social opportunities between a cultural core and other ethnic groups. These tensions, which in the past had erupted into ethnic riots, the most severe of which was the 1969 race riots, resulted in a twenty-year policy (1970-1990) to reinforce positively the position of Malays in the form of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which evoked resentment amongst the non-Malay communities (Lim and Chee 1984; Kahn and Loh 1992). Such tensions, however, attest precisely to the fact that Malaysian nationalism and political culture have always been fundamentally constituted by a politics of pluralism.

### A NEW “*BANGSA MALAYSIA*” AND A NEW ISLAMISM

The watershed years of early 1990s saw at least two important developments marking newer relations of power and imaginative horizons in Malaysian society wrought by global and local forces. The first of which is the articulations of a vision of a new “*bangsa Malaysia*” (Malaysian nation). The second is the rise of a new stage of Islamism in Malaysia. Political Islam expanded into questions of the implementation of Islamic law and Islamic state.<sup>3</sup> This led to a public controversy over constitutional provisions for a separation of civil and Islamic legislation and the guarantee of citizenship rights within a multiethnic body politic.

Let us begin with the now infamous Vision 2020 launched in 1991, which saw two important shifts. First, its objective to push Malaysia into the ranks of the newly industrialized countries by year 2020, and secondly, its explicit commitment to the forging of a “Malaysian Nation” signifying a move to include non-Malay ethnic groups within the cultural foundations of the Malaysian nation-state. Vision 2020 clearly marks Malaysia’s aspiration of becoming a player in global capitalism. Globalization, a project of deepening international economic connections, quickly became a nationalist project. This spate of economic globalization was accompanied by projects of re-imagining national subjectivities that drew upon traditional and Islamic values as means to thwart an expansionist Western modernity. The state became engaged in a long and passionate rhetoric on new

expressions of national identity, highlighting new national sensibilities that were responsive to market instrumentalities. Elements of “tradition” were valorized and re-scripted into new mindsets, ethnic identifications, and grandiose urban projects.

A series of propaganda exercises to reorganize national subjectivities in line with the aspirations of Vision 2020 followed after its launch. This included: quickening the tempo of the national anthem in 1993 that was revised to a more solemn tempo in 2003 after a bout of financial recession (*The Straits Times*, August 20, 2003); the popularization of the nationalist slogan of *Malaysia Boleh* (Malaysia can); and the revamp of collective ethnic identifications such as *Melayu Baru* (New Malay), *Bangsa Malaysia*, and “New Malaysian” that straddle uneasily between universalizing outlooks of progressivism and local outlooks on Malay and Islamic values (Muhammad 1993; Said 1996; Goh 2002).

The opening up of boundaries between the cultural-core (Malays) and citizens under the new conception of a “Malaysian nation” saw active, popular debates on what it meant to be a full member and rights-bearing citizen of the Malaysian nation-state. These renegotiations of nationality did not see the unfolding of a civic discourse on citizenship, that is, the notion of society as the partnership of free citizens, presuming an ability and willingness on the part of individuals to transcend their particular self- and ethnic-interests in the formation of a universal “public.” Rather, in continuation with the earlier structure of coexistence between cultural difference and difference-neutral conceptions of nationality, there was a persistence of ethnicity and religion as paradigmatic vehicles through which demands of equal rights and opportunities were negotiated at various intersections of ethnicity, class, and gender, as well as the constructions of collective and individual selves. Perhaps, one of the fiercest demands for full national membership rights within traditional ethnic political framework was from the Chinese pressure group, *Suqiu*,—a loose coalition comprising thirteen organizations which include the *Dong Zong* (Chinese School Boards Association) and *Jiao Zong* (Chinese School Teachers Assoc), known together as the *Dong Jia Zong*—which petitioned the government for equal opportunities for the Chinese in fields of education, training, scholarship, and job opportunities. They sought to press the government to do away with Malay privilege and adopt a policy of meritocracy. In addition, the wider professional and middle-classes were equally enthusiastic about a more inclusionary

nationalism. They were actively constructing their own national imaginaries through the mediums of ethnicity, urban architecture, consumer lifestyles, and even Internet chat-rooms and websites (Embong 2001; Harper 1996; Kahn 1998, 1992; Lim 1987; Shamsul 1996; Mee 1998, 1999). Although these newer national imaginaries that employed a combination of ethnic and civic discourses were not without self- or group-interests, they do suggest that nationalism can never be narrowly understood as a state enterprise alone. These can also express a shared sense of belonging to a defined political boundary amongst inhabitants. Globalization, as we see, appears to only heighten a new commitment to nationalism at both the state and below-the-state levels in Malaysia (Shamsul 1996).

As the Malaysian economy becomes ever more integrated into the global economy, the country's location at the lower end of global political economy may in part help consolidate Malaysian nationalism. From the perspective of a former colony like Malaysia, capitalist globalization is seen to be in control of Western countries. For countries like Malaysia, capitalist modernization is at once a simultaneous experience of liberation and domination. It is understood as both an opportunity to overcome the colonial past and to imagine an autonomous future distinct from the West, on the one hand, and being caught in an unending and unwinnable race to catch up with the West, on the other. It is not surprising that the interlocking sense of opportunity and disempowerment experienced in capitalist modernization has been deployed by the Malaysian state to garner support for its nationalist projects. As this ideology is also a product of unequal historical and economic structures, it often resonates with ordinary Malaysians who easily understand that globalization does not necessarily offer an equal playing field to people from developing societies. This in part explains why Malaysia's new nationalist aspiration in becoming a fully developed economy has not received wide public endorsement. A shared sense of nationalist sentiment is perhaps most notably displayed in the country's shared sensitivity to "foreign" criticisms that unfolded in many political fiascos during the Mahathir era. Indeed, when Dr. Mahathir Mohamad retired in 2003, despite contrasting opinions over the legacy of his rule, there appears to be a consensus among both supporters and critics in hailing his anti-West politics (Aeria 2003, 15).

To further explicate the imbrications of Malaysian nationalism and globalization, let us now turn to the increasing enmeshment between Malay(sian) nationalism and global political Islam. Although the force of Islamism is not new (Muzaffar 1987; Mutalib 1990; Peletz

1993; Othman 1994; Mohamad 2001), the new millennium has ushered in a new stage of Islamic orthodoxy with significant impacts on ethnic, religious, and civil rights within the multiracial body politic of Malaysian society. This controversy has been discussed in detail in a range of studies (Noor 2003; Othman 2003; Martinez 2001). Public concerns over the incursion of Islam into citizenship rights began in the early 2000s in the face of three new developments. First, the arrests of Muslims for acts of “insulting Islam,” such as taking part in beauty contests and working in pubs, by the *Jabatan Agama Islam* (Religious Council) of the Selangor state. Second, the September 29, 2001, pronouncement by the Mahathir government that Malaysia was already a “model Islamic country”—arguably a part of the state’s response to quell Islamic conservatism. And third, after winning in the Trengganu state in 1999 by the Islamic opposition party, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party or *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) moved to enact a number of new Islamic laws such as the *kharaj* (land) tax, the application of Islamic dress code on non-Muslims, the adoption of the *Hudud* and *Qisas* Enactment<sup>4</sup> by the Trengganu state assembly in July 2002, and the drawing of a blue print for an Islamic state in Malaysia (*The Star*, November 13, 2003). Although PAS had introduced the *Hudud* law in Kelantan<sup>5</sup> through the adoption of the Kelantan Shari’a Criminal Code in 1993, this effort was thwarted by the federal government, invoking the Malaysian Constitution to stop the implementation of this law that governs criminal offenses. The *Hudud* law was deemed unconstitutional due to the provision of a Civil Penal Code in the country. Its second attempt to implement Islamic criminal laws in Trengganu in 2002 was met with refusal by the police force to assist in the implementation of the *Hudud* and *Qisas* Enactment (Faridah 2002).<sup>6</sup>

The rise of a new Islamic orthodoxy in the new millennium was initially met with criticisms from Malay-Muslim public intellectuals such as writers, newspaper columnists, academics, and NGO activists on the grounds of human rights. Public protests, however, provoked a response from Islamist groups that resulted in the submission of a memorandum by the Malaysian Ulama Association or the *Persatuan Ulama Malaysia*, an independent body of Muslim religious scholars, to the Chairman of Council of Rulers demanding for the persecution of five individuals (all except one are Muslims) of whom they claimed had denigrated and insulted Islam and the institution of the ulama.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Islamic NGOs, including the Muslim Youth Movement



of Malaysia or *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* and other NGOs, such as Just World; political leaders represented by then Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and opposition leader Syed Hussin Ali, came in support of these individuals.

As contestations over Islamic orthodoxy spread into the implementation of Islamic criminal law and Islamic state in the country, other ethnic and civil groups, in particular feminists and human rights groups, joined in this debate. This created an emerging civil society, often said to be missing in Malaysian society, as these groups reclaimed their rights as Malaysian citizens in countering Islamic dominance in Malaysian society. It is important to note that these oppositions to Islamic conservatism evoked a language of citizenship, religious, and cultural rights protected by the Malaysian Constitution. For Malay groups, such as various Islamic groups, feminists, scholars, and youth groups, their contestations of PAS's religious aspirations were made on the grounds of civil and legal liberties and protection. Besides the Malays, other ethnic and civil groups formed alliances to protect their collective and individual interests vis-à-vis rising Islamic orthodoxy, which led to instances where different ethnic, feminist, and social groups joined forces to fight against PAS's plans. For instance, NGOs, women's groups, and various civil society groups banded together to denounce the PAS move to implement Islamic criminal law in Trengganu with some even seeking audience with PAS leadership to voice their protests and concerns (*The Star*, June 28, 2002, June 29, 2002). Non-Muslim concerns led to the formation of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS), a multireligious organization across various ethnic and religious groups that monitors and documents Islamic policies and legislations and their impacts on non-Muslims. Christian groups also made known their concerns through the Malaysian Catholic Bishop Rev. Soter Fernandez who called for respect of human rights and religious freedom in the Catholic Bishop's conference in August 2002 (*The Star*, August 3, 2002).

There is a need for caution not to overcelebrate the emergence of civil society because this critical space happened to coincide with the interests of the state.<sup>8</sup> The contest with Islamic orthodoxy is an example of how a combination of ethnoreligious and civil institutions and interests form the basis of inclusionary as well as exclusionary politics of national belonging in Malaysia. Quite clearly, the conflation of Islam, ethnicity, social class, and gender differentiations in the

redefinitions of national belonging in Malaysia provides for both progressive political mobilization as well as exclusionary politics. PAS leaders see it as their right to promote a more Islamic Malaysia. For other Malay Muslims and ethnic groups, the rise of Islamic orthodoxy threatens their civil liberties. It is on this ground that their overarching interests converge in opposing PAS. While these public contests may have benefited the Malaysian state in many ways, they demonstrate how the institutional bases of nation and nationalism in Malaysia are capable of producing a myriad of ethnic, religious, cultural as well as civic (difference-neutral) subjectivities that are formed and redefined by concrete historical forces, material relations, and discursive connections between different groups.

More recently, the struggles between Islamic nationalism and citizenship rights have escalated with a series of controversial legal tussles over burial rites, rehabilitation, and forced separation of spouses and of parents from their children involving cases of Muslim converts and apostates. These have created an ideological deadlock between Islamic and secularist positions on citizenship rights, again illustrating the imbrications of global and local factors in shaping the contours of nationalism and the Malaysian nation-state (Ahmad 2005; Othman 1998).

## **CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL RECONSIDERATION**

The links between capitalist globalization and political Islam in constituting Malaysian nationalism illustrate that globalization and nationalism can be mutually constitutive processes and do not necessarily have contradictory pulls. Far from disappearing, the desirability of nationalist identifications has only intensified in Malaysian society in the context of contemporary global realities. The institutional bases of Malaysian political integration anchored on a co-existence of ethnic, religious, and cultural differences and difference-neutral subjectivities, ethnicity and religion continue to be paradigmatic vehicles through which national belonging, citizenship rights, and the future of the nation are contested at the various intersections of class, gender, individual, and collective interests.

The historical unfolding of the conceptions and practices of nation and nationalism in Malaysia unsettles much of current debates on nationalism whether they take culturalist (Smith 1995; Kedourie 1996; Gellner 1983), economic (Hobsbawm 1990), Marxist, or

subaltern (Chatterjee 1986, 1993) explanations, which, despite their different theoretical groundings, share a skepticism about the viability of nationalism.

Economic interpretations that treat nationalism in instrumentalist terms and predict its decline with the rise of international economic mobility do not appear to apply in the Malaysian case where capitalist globalization has only heightened nationalism at the state- and below-the-state-levels. The Malaysian case suggests that nationalism is relatively autonomous from economic processes and economic globalization has not weakened state power. In addition, economic instrumentalism cannot explain the power of ordinary Malaysians' effective attachment and identification with the nation. Likewise, the Malaysian experience does not conform to culturalist understandings of nationalism that tend to conceive nationalism in cultural or ethnic terms arising from either primordial homogenous identifications or coercive ideological apparatuses on at least two grounds. First, Malaysian nationalism has never been the sole prerogative of the Malays who constitute the cultural core of the nation; other ethnic groups equally see themselves as rightful Malaysians. Second, the persistence of nationalist sensibilities in everyday life suggests evidence of active and reflective participation by ordinary Malaysians, in particular, the middle classes, in nationalistic visions of progress and cultural futures, which dispels views of nationalism as mere products of state manipulation and coercion.

This brings us to the next set of ideas about nationalism, that is, efforts to find "authenticity" of national imaginaries via a deconstruction of statist and colonialist discourses in order to locate indigenous and subaltern imaginaries. The work of Chatterjee (1986, 1993), for instance, suggests an inner spiritual domain of difference versus that of Western imaginaries in efforts to decolonize Indian nationalism. Equally, the presumption of some depth of origins and authenticity in nationalism is found in Prasenjit Duara's (1995) attempt to rescue Chinese "history from the nation" whereby he prescribes the dispersion of dominant narratives in order to rescue silenced voices. Inevitably, these deconstructive approaches have lifted off from the ground laid by Benedict Anderson's work (1991) that links nation and nationalism to a type of imagined community linked to elitist interests and rhetorical deployment of nationalism for particular political struggles, which also open up grounds for its contestations. While deconstructive approaches have contributed important insights, a basic problem remains in that they posit the nation as some closed and uniform system with some

“true” internal depth rather than as an open changing system made up of a combination of cultural and noncultural factors as these approaches endeavor to escape from hegemonic or colonialist discourses but become caught in a binary fixation over what enforces and what resists.

Two major problems in the theorization of nationalism lie in their treatment of nationalism as some closed and uniform systems or in considering nationalism in binary terms, i.e., economic versus cultural integration or elitist/statist versus popular imaginaries. These conceptualizations have resulted in a preoccupation with instrumentalist dimensions of nationalism and emphasis on the centrality of cultural integration. As the Malaysian experience suggests, nationalism rests on shifting cultural and noncultural factors underlying political integration such as shared political struggle, future economic opportunities, and social rights across different historical periods.

Some scholars have advocated for more open conceptions of nationalism on the basis of overlapping historical and cognitive factors. Rey Chow (1995), for example, has called for a turn away from the search for fixed depths of elite culture to the fluid surface of mass culture (the cinema), which softens and loosens the foundations of domination of elitist imaginations of the nation. In a rather similar vein, taking the case of the formation of Vietnamese nationalist identifications, Keith Taylor (1998) calls for a need to pay attention to “surface orientation,” that is, to see how people view themselves and others at particular times and terrains in the context of material and cultural exchanges available to them. More recently, Rebecca Karl’s (2002) attempt to reroot Chinese nationalism in globality represents an important effort to decouple nationalism from a restricted association with statism or the political project of building a state. She argues that the formation of Chinese nationalism followed the emergence of nationalism globally during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of the restructuring of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Reminding us that the relationship between nationalism and the state (i.e., the goal of setting up a state) is historical but not inevitable or teleological, she argues that nationalism should be taken as “a congeries of diverse intellectual praxis and concept formations, which are not reducible to the pursuit of a political state, and are endowed with translocal significance precisely because of the emergence of nationalism globally” (2001, 24).

Using the Malaysian experience, we can take the retheorization of nationalism further. With the exception of a few studies (Hefner

2001), not many have advocated the use of alternative histories of national integration in multiethnic postcolonial societies as a step towards reconsidering the concepts of nation and nationalism. Malaysian nationalism, as discussed above, is never conceived in purely cultural, ethnic, or economic terms. While the modern nation-state may be a political institution universalized by colonization and its aftermath, it does not mean that its ideals are imported wholesale by local societies. Since its very beginnings, the Malaysian construction and definitions of nation and nationality have never been based directly on European ideals. Rather, the Malaysian schema of the nation and nationality has been the result of compromise, adaptation, and modification over time in which the ideal of a unitary nation comprised a reworking of both universal and indigenized meanings and practices at various historical junctures. The Malaysian nation, as we can see, is forged and contested through a *mélange* of cultural (ethnic and religious difference) and difference-neutral subjectivities such as political and economic destiny, aspirations, and struggles, which are formed and transformed over time at various junctures of local-outside interactions. Reviewing the different conceptions and practices of nation and nationalism in today's world, we need to remember that the formation and transformation of social and political orders are always necessarily informed from the start by people's shared histories, emotive allegiances as well as by their self-orienting recognition of cultural difference. Postcolonial formulations of nation-state and nationalism may in fact provide us with grounds to think about alternative conceptions of nationalism. ❀

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#### NOTES

1. The author would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out the importance of this argument in this article.

2. The Malays form the largest of three officially designated *bumiputera* (indigenous) groups. Other *bumiputera* groups are the *orang asli* in Peninsula Malaysia and the Malay-related groups in the states of Sabah and Sarawak.
3. Islam is the official religion in the Malaysian Constitution.
4. *Hudud* laws are limited to offenses that are strictly defined and punished by the terms of the Quran or the *Sunna* (Prophet Muhammad's teachings). These include theft, punishable by amputation of the right hand, and *zina* or fornication, punishable by whipping for unmarried offender or stoning to death for married offender. *Qisas (Jinayat)* are homicide causing bodily harm and are punishable by *qisas* or exact retribution (an eye for an eye) or repayment of monetary compensation.
5. PAS has held power in this state since the 1990.
6. The federal government strategically stepped aside and let public debates set the course of contestation against PAS's move (Faridah 2002).
7. For a more detailed account of this controversy, see the issue of *Aliran*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2002.
8. James Jesudason (1995) has pointed out that civil society in Malaysia is an encapsulated one given the historical "structuration" of class relations where the middle classes are created by state policies, thus the entwinement between the state and the middle-classes.

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