Imagining Identity: Visions of Malaysia and the Interrelationship Between State, Society and the Global.

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October 2012

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the product of my own original research, and contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other degree at any other university, or any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Michael Gary O’Shannassy
Acknowledgements

With apologies to Wilde’s Lady Bracknell, if the loss of one supervisor may be seen as a misfortune, and the loss of a second appears to be carelessness, then I’m not exactly sure what it means to have had three separate supervisors over the course of this PhD project. What I do know is that each of my supervisors has brought something special to this experience. Beginning with Heather Rae who, way back when I had just completed my Master’s thesis and when the very last thing on my mind was further study, casually mentioned that a PhD might be a good thing for me to do. As such, Heather must take her fair share of credit for this thesis. Heather was then kind enough to be there at the start of this project and I have appreciated both her critical eye and her genuine warmth as a mentor. Upon Heather’s departure for more cultured climes, Greg Fry took up the post as my supervisor and although he was only in the chair for a relatively short period of time before he, too, left Canberra for warmer climes, I am eternally grateful to him for his emphasis on the story that was being told in this thesis. Without his help and guidance in this regard, this would be a far less rich tale. My final supervisor was Lorraine Elliott who simply has been brilliant. It cannot be the easiest task to inherit a PhD candidate who should be nearing the end of their candidature and whose project you are not entirely familiar with. A true professional, Lorraine never skipped a beat and I could not have asked for a better supervisor given where my project was when Lorraine kindly agreed to guide me to its completion. I have genuinely valued Lorraine’s critical perspective and her firm but sympathetic demeanour. I can honestly say that without her help it is unlikely that I would have finished this thesis.

In a similar fashion, I would like to thank the members of the Department of International Relations at the Australian National University, both faculty and staff, for their assistance with this project in terms of the feedback I received in formal and informal discussions but also for contributing to an atmosphere conducive for intellectual exploration and wonder. Special thanks goes to my fellow PhD travelers – Beverley Loke, Greg Collins, Kate Sullivan, Madeleine Carr, Lacy Davey, Jason Hall, Matt Davies, Thuy Do, Gilberto Estrada-Harris, Sarah Logan, Jeff Wilson and Jon Kuyper – for opening up my mind to a range of different perspectives and topics that I had never really thought much about previously and also for being a swell bunch of people, I’ll miss you all. Special mention must go to Danni Chubb for being the best officemate a person could hope for, one that was able to put up with my idiosyncrasies and randomness with good cheer and humour.

For the past year, I have been fortunate enough to teach at the International School of Bangkok and it would be remiss of me if I didn’t recognize my colleagues and students for reminding me daily why I will always be a life-long learner. I couldn’t ask for a more engaged and engaging group of people to be around. Not only have they indulged my social aloofness with good nature as I struggled to work full-time and finish a thesis but they have often seemed sincerely interested in my topic. Many of them now know more about political legitimacy and national identity in Malaysia than any reasonable person should.

My fieldwork in Malaysia would not have been possible without generous funding from the Australian government’s Endeavour Awards. I am also grateful for the institutional affiliation offered to me by the Institute of Malaysian and
International Studies (IKMAS) at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and especially for the assistance and guidance provided by Professor Abdul Rahman Embong. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the forty Malaysians from all walks of life that were kind enough to agree to be interviewed for this thesis. Without a doubt, their insights and reflections critically shaped my research and these interviews were easily the most meaningful part of my PhD experience.

Without my family, I would not be the person I am. My late father, Gary, my mother, Sandra, and my brother, Sean, have been constant sources of support throughout my life and this thesis is dedicated to each of them. Finally, I would like to express my love and thanks to my girlfriend, Beverley Loke, who is not only spectacularly gorgeous but also has been instrumental in keeping me grounded throughout the ups and downs of my PhD journey. I know that I wouldn't have been as happy or as productive these past few years without her.
Abstract

The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998 and the political crisis it engendered in Malaysia called into question the framework of governance associated with the long-standing Barisan Nasional (National Front, BN) government. And yet, despite the traumas induced by these twin crises, the fundamental relationships and structures that characterized political and economic relationships in Malaysia were not radically transformed. The underlying puzzle this thesis seeks to address is just how domestic reverberations of ‘the global’ are mediated by the specific historical structure of a state. Utilizing the concept of national identity as an organizing principle while employing a model which positions the relationship between the international and domestic spheres and the state as a mutually constitutive dynamic offers a much more complete picture of the processes in operation. The central research question this thesis seeks to answer is: How are conceptions of national identity in Malaysia being shaped by the interrelationship between domestic society, the state and the global?

By carrying out an in-depth empirical investigation into the historical (re)construction of and practices associated with national identity discourses in Malaysia, this thesis not only illuminates the society-state-global interrelationship but, in doing so, tells a story about how political elites in Malaysia have sought to construct and use ideas about ‘national’ identity in order to, first, sediment their power and, second, to legitimize that power as authority. This thesis demonstrates that political elites in Malaysia found it easier to manipulate that identity in the periods immediately following independence in 1957 but that, in recent times, doing so has proven more difficult. The broad hypothesis behind this thesis is that state actors have found it increasingly difficult to avoid external socio-political and economic pressures, which has then made the maintenance of power and authority more problematic. That is, global forces increasingly act upon and destabilize political culture and assumptions about what is ‘eternal’ and ‘taken-for-granted’ in Malaysian politics and society, disrupting elite efforts to maintain social control and authority.

The findings of this research have important theoretical and policy implications. At the theoretical level, they suggest that, in practice, any divide that exists between analyses of state-society relations on the one hand and state-global processes on the other, is largely redundant. But while they may be conceived of as two sides of the same coin, the exact nature of the mutually constitutive dynamic between domestic society, the state and the global may be an asymmetrical one. What is required, therefore, is a means of exploring the shape of any such asymmetry and a central finding of this thesis is that a historical consideration of discourses on national identity provides one such way of doing so. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that political leaders in multiethnic states need to strengthen their role in formulating more inclusive conceptions of national identity if they are going to find an acceptable balance between particularistic ethnic desires and the universal desire for economic development and ‘national’ stability in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized.
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**Glossary**

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>1MP</td>
<td>First Malaysia Plan</td>
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<td>2MP</td>
<td>Second Malaysia Plan</td>
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<td>3MP</td>
<td>Third Malaysia Plan</td>
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<td>4MP</td>
<td>Fourth Malaysia Plan</td>
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<td>5MP</td>
<td>Fifth Malaysia Plan</td>
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<td>6MP</td>
<td>Sixth Malaysia Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>10MP</td>
<td>Tenth Malaysia Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABIM</td>
<td>Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Islamic Youth League of Malaysia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adil</td>
<td>Pergerakan Keadilan Sosial (Movement for Social Justice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFC</td>
<td>Asian Financial Crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMCJA</td>
<td>All-Malayan Council for Joint Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APU</td>
<td>Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (Muslim Unity Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bersih</td>
<td>Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMF</td>
<td>Bumiputra Malaysia Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BN</td>
<td>Barisan Nasional (National Front)</td>
</tr>
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<td>BNM</td>
<td>Bank Negara Malaysia (Malaysian Central Bank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Chinese Consultative Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLC</td>
<td>Communities Liaison Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAP</td>
<td>Democratic Action Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>DBP</td>
<td>Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Council for Language and Culture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNU</td>
<td>Department of National Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETP</td>
<td>Economic Transformation Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAMA</td>
<td>Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPI</td>
<td>Foreign Portfolio Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTZ</td>
<td>Free Trade Zone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gagasan</td>
<td>Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat (Coalition for People’s Democracy)</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gerak</td>
<td>Majlis Gerakan Keadilan Rakyat Malaysia (Council of Malaysian People’s Justice Movement)</td>
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<td>Gerakan</td>
<td>Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Malaysian People’s Movement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNP</td>
<td>Gross National Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Government Transformation Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>HICOM</td>
<td>Heavy Industry Corporation of Malaysia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICA</td>
<td>Industrial Coordination Act</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMP</td>
<td>Independence of Malaya Party</td>
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<td>IMP</td>
<td>Industrial Master Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISA</td>
<td>Internal Security Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCA</td>
<td>Joint Action Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KKN</td>
<td>korupsi, kolusi dan nepotisme (corruption, cronyism and nepotism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLCI</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange Composite Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>KLSE</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARA</td>
<td>Majlis Amanah Rakyat (Council of the People’s Trust)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBC</td>
<td>Malaysian Business Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>Malaysian Chinese Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCP</td>
<td>Malayan Communist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIC</td>
<td>Malaysian Indian Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPAJA</td>
<td>Malaysian People’s Anti-Japanese Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPM</td>
<td>Malay Consultative Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSC</td>
<td>Malaysian Solidarity Convention</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>National Consultative Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Development Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEAC</td>
<td>National Economic Advisory Council</td>
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<td>NECC</td>
<td>National Economic Consultative Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEM</td>
<td>New Economic Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEP</td>
<td>New Economic Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIC</td>
<td>Newly Industrializing Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOC</td>
<td>National Operations Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPP1</td>
<td>First Outline Perspective Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPP2</td>
<td>Second Outline Perspective Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAP</td>
<td>People’s Action Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Parti Islam (Islamic Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKR</td>
<td>Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People’s Justice Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMIP</td>
<td>Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>People’s Progressive Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Pakatan Rakyat (People’s Alliance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRM</td>
<td>Parti Rakyat Malaysia (People’s Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Parliamentary Select Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUTERA</td>
<td>Pusat Tenaga Rakyat (Center of the People’s Power)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>Ringgit Malaysia</td>
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<tr>
<td>S46</td>
<td>Semangat ’46 (Spirit of ’46)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>Socialist Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>UMNO</td>
<td>United Malays Nationalist Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDP</td>
<td>United Democratic Party</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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Introduction

The results of Malaysia’s twelfth general election in March 2008 have been described as a ‘political tsunami’. The ruling Barisan Nasional (National Front, BN) coalition, a multiethnic mix of constituent parties, suffered a major electoral swing against it with each of the primary peninsular opposition parties posting remarkable gains.¹ The BN’s share of seats in the country’s parliament, the Dewan Rakyat, plunged to 63 per cent, its overall vote plummeted to 51 per cent, and four state governments fell to the opposition.² While the end result was clearly startling, it is the process by which the political opposition achieved this outcome that bears further scrutiny. In many respects, the results of 2008 can be seen as a consequence of the economic and political crises that erupted in Malaysia in the wake of the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis (AFC). As we shall see below in greater detail, the claim here is that by helping to undermine so many of the prevalent assumptions underpinning the legitimacy of the Malaysian government, in particular, its emphases on economic performance and political stability, the AFC altered the socio-political terrain in Malaysia. This, in turn, forced the country’s political leaders to rethink the communally-based structures of political domination and/or hegemony that work to the advantage of Malaysia’s largest ethnic group, the Malays. What the 2008 election now hinted at was the substantive emergence of the kind of issue-based, cross-communal politics that had been promised by the rise of the Reformasi (Reform) movement almost a decade before and the potential for a political structure founded more on an inclusive sense of national identity rather than on the kinds of personalistic or identity-based appeals made by ethnically and/or religiously configured political organizations. What this suggested, in turn, was a distinct shift in the bases and processes of political legitimation in Malaysia, one that meant political leaders and their organizations would now have to attract support from a much wider cross-section of society if they were to be considered legitimate.

¹ As of October 2012 these are: the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO); the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA); the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC); Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia; People’s Progressive Party (PPP); Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu; Sarawak United People’s Party; Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS); Liberal Democratic Party; Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah; United Pasokmomongun Kadazandusus Murut Organization; Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party and; Parti Rakyat Sarawak. Historically, UMNO, MCA and MIC have held the bulk of the BN’s parliamentary seats. In addition, these three parties carry the legacy of the Alliance Party, which controlled the Malay/Malaysian government from Independence in 1957 until 1969. The primary opposition parties on the peninsula are: Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People’s Justice Party, PKR), the Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Parti Islam SeMalaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS).
² The BN had already lost Kelantan, which had been under continuous PAS rule since the 1990 general election.
However, a disaggregated analysis of the election results renders this supposition unclear, for while the BN lost support generally this was not equally distributed across Malaysia’s main ethnic communities; there were drastic falls in Indian and Chinese support for the BN but only a marginal dip in Malay support.\(^3\) Such statistics seem to reflect the continuing communal nature of Malaysian politics.\(^4\) Thus, while the results of the 2008 general election seemed to point to a significant shift in the socio-political terrain of Malaysia, doubts persist over whether or not the traditionally communal, i.e., ethnic, nature of Malaysian politics had fundamentally changed. Although the opposition parties officially joined forces soon after the 2008 election as the Pakatan Rakyat (People’s Alliance, PR) and have continually stressed minority economic, cultural and religious rights, such advances, although significant, do not necessarily signal an end to a communally-based system of politics. While the opposition coalition advances a vision of a Malaysian national identity defined less by ethnicity and/or religion and more by a shared civic nationhood, the implementation of this vision remains an essentially communal one, in the sense of there being conscious attention paid to power-sharing among Malaysia’s primary ethnic groups.\(^5\) The Malaysian ‘imagined community’ and any notion of a genuinely inclusive Malaysian national identity apparently remains an on-going and contested project.

What then is the actual effect of external phenomena such as the AFC on domestic socio-political structures and notions of national identity within states such as Malaysia?\(^6\) The underlying puzzle this thesis seeks to address is just how domestic

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\(^3\) K.M. Ong (2008). “Making Sense of the Political Tsunami”, Malaysiakini, 11 March, 2008, www.malaysiakini.com, accessed 25 April, 2011. The Malaysian government’s 2010 Census lists the ethnic composition of Malaysia as: Bumiputera – 67.4%; Chinese – 24.6%; Indian – 7.3% and; Others – 0.7%. The issue here is that the designation ‘Bumiputera’ includes both Malays as well as other groups considered indigenous to the country. As such it presents a group, which is, in reality, more heterogeneous than the term might suggest.

\(^4\) This view is further supported by the fact that, since the previous general election in 2004, racial and religious tensions had been simmering, stirred by non-Malays’ sense of socioeconomic marginalization in a period of increasing globalization, the destruction of dozens of Indian temples, a series of challenges to non-Muslims’ legal rights, and incendiary pro-Malay and pro-Muslim rhetoric, particularly from UMNO leaders.

\(^5\) I recognize that attempts to talk of who exactly are ‘the Malays’, ‘the Chinese’ or ‘the Indians’ as a people is to engage with a subject matter of bewildering diversity and contradiction. In particular, notions of just who is ‘Malay’ and what it means to be ‘Malay’ remain open questions today, just as they have throughout the history of the region. For an excellent overview of the historical development of the idea of ‘Malayness’ and ‘the Malays’, see: Anthony Milner (2008). The Malays. Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford. This issue is taken up in further detail below in Section 2.1.

\(^6\) While some might question how an apparently regional crisis can be considered global in nature, I would argue not only that some of the preconditions for the crisis were global in nature – financial globalization and the liberalization of international capital markets, for example – but that the consequences of this nominally ‘Asian’ crisis had global ramifications not least in the post hoc calls for a new regime of international finance as well as the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) within...
reverberations of ‘the global’ are mediated by the specific historical structure of a state, particularly within the postcolonial context. However, instead of viewing such historical incidents as either global forces or domestic social forces impacting upon the state and conceptions of national identity, this thesis will argue that what is actually occurring is the result of the interplay between these two broad fields of forces. Global forces and domestic social forces alike impact upon the state and social boundaries within a country, helping to give shape to constructions of who is ‘us’ and who is ‘them’ – issues which, I suggest in this thesis, are intimately connected to concepts of legitimacy and legitimation. Furthermore, in investigating these concepts I will argue that the relationship between the international and domestic domains vis-à-vis the state should be represented as a mutually constitutive dynamic – that a state’s interrelationship with ‘the global’ is constructed and reconstructed by the shape of its state-society relations which themselves are forged and reforged by the state’s interrelationship with global forces. Such an approach views the state as the common but contested ground overlapped by both the domestic and international spheres. Figure 1 below represents this process of mutual constitution.

Figure 1: A Dynamic of Mutual Constitution

Figure 1


The central research question this thesis seeks to answer is: *How are conceptions of national identity in Malaysia being shaped by the interrelationship between domestic society, the state and the global?* Utilizing the concept of national identity as an organizing principle while eschewing either a top-down (global-state) or bottom-up (society-state) approach in favour of a model which positions the relationship between the international and domestic spheres and the state as a mutually constitutive dynamic offers a much more complete picture of the processes in operation. Figure 1 represents such processes of mutual constitution not only with regard to the relationships between society and state on the one hand and state and the global on the other, but further seeks to illustrate how domestic society may impact on the mutual adjustment between state and global forces as well as how global forces may affect state-society relations. The global and the local are fusing in such a way that it becomes hard to see where one starts and the other ends. What is more, both the global and the domestic become something other than they were: each interacts not just with the other, but rather with the evolving social context which they both share. In this way the global becomes clothed in local knowledge and the very tension this creates raises new questions and new solutions, offering a means by which to explore mechanisms of transformation and change.

It is important to remember that national identity is almost always the result of political rather than natural processes and this is especially so in many postcolonial states where an overarching and coherent national identity is frequently lacking. In countries where social affiliations at the sub-national (or even transnational) level may be chosen over state-based and promulgated rationale certain issues arise: How to create a national army when other loyalties are prioritized? Why pay taxes if the state is associated with a particular group? How to apply the rule of law when a part of the population functions by or is subject to customary and/or religious law?

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9 For an example of such processes see Andrew Harding’s discussion on the transplantation of legal ideas between the colonizer and the colonized in Malaysia in, Andrew Harding (2002). “Global Doctrine and Local Knowledge: Law in South East Asia”, *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 51, pp.35-53.

10 Several authors have noted the need to more explicitly consider the nature of political legitimacy in postcolonial, developing countries. For example, see: Muthiah Alagappa (ed.) (1995a), *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; (especially, pp.1-8 & 11-65); Joel Migdal (1988). *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Douglas Blum
seek to legitimize their own position and power by appealing to some overall identity of those whose support they are trying to obtain. In postcolonial, multiethnic/multi-religious states like Malaysia such processes of legitimation are especially problematic. While such states are buffeted by many of the same ‘external’ and ‘internal’ social, political and economic forces that generally affect the sources of legitimacy worldwide, postcolonial states differ in that they lack the apparent ‘organic’ foundation that most Western states now purport to possess.\(^\text{11}\) In many Western states, legitimacy is ideally a concept founded on the premises of the doctrine of popular sovereignty, that as the ultimate basis of authority ‘the people’ are the only legitimate source of power.\(^\text{12}\)

The problem in many postcolonial states is that who and what exactly are ‘the people’ remains inchoate. As Daniela Obradovic comments, “legitimacy reflects the belief that one system is just because it embodies not just any shared understanding but an accepted superior justificatory principle, the myth. Myth is the state of belief that supports an organic model of politics because it provides an assertion of intertemporal identity and reveals the authentic actions of the popular sovereign.”\(^\text{13}\) Postcolonial, multiethnic/multi-religious states have generally lacked a coherent, inclusive myth to supply a metaphysical basis for the state; one that provides the terms by which questions of political authority are settled. Without such a master narrative to underpin conceptions of political authority governance becomes increasingly difficult, as state actors must instead rely on coercion or appeals to self-interest in order to achieve and maintain social control over their citizenry.

Eschewing the dichotomous structure that characterizes practically all past models of change at the structural or organizational level, Joel Migdal suggests modeling state-

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\(^\text{11}\) Admittedly, such observations equally apply to the history of Western societies. For instance, many would argue that a French national identity really only developed from the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century. However, the relative ‘newness’ of postcolonial societies makes such struggles more acute and I would argue that the position of the industrial countries is qualitatively different that that of postcolonial states. Many postcolonial states were defined by a generally arbitrary geographical demarcation, based on colonial possession, which consequently made the problem of creating a sense of national unity particularly challenging and the integrity of the state more tenuous, especially when one considers the multiethnic and multi-religious makeup of many such states.

\(^\text{12}\) The universality of the idea today is acknowledged in the UN Declaration of Human Rights that ‘the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government’ (Art. 21).

society relations as a mélange of social organizations. Looking at Third World societies as a whole, he notes that while we can detect the presence of some important commonly held norms and histories that could potentially “provide the bases for the symbolic configuration underpinning social control”, these shared experiences often pale in comparison to the “radically different sets of beliefs and recollections dispersed throughout the society.”

Struggles for legitimacy in postcolonial societies thus involve state actors negotiating the push and pull of non-state social organizations in order to determine who has the right and ability to make rules in that society. Put another way, what power is legitimate and on what grounds? The goal of any government in this regard is to render itself the primary source of authority within its borders.

While there has been a renewed focus on the part of many postcolonial governments to develop a more robust empirical basis for their legitimacy since the end of the Cold War, their situation in this respect has been further complicated by the need for many such governments to engage with the global economy for the purposes of development. As political elites have had to take into account not only global economic but, also, political and social pressures, their ability to articulate a ‘national’ ideology with reference primarily to their specific historical, i.e., ‘internal’, circumstances has become increasingly problematic. This raises a second key question of this thesis: What are the bases of political authority in postcolonial, developing states such as Malaysia given the interrelationship between domestic social forces, the state and the global? There is a clear need to explore how conceptions of national identity have been, and continue to be, shaped by both domestic and global forces. What exactly is the link between the ethnic and/or religious bases of a national identity, for example, and the influence of global forces in a state? In turn, what impact might

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14 Migdal (1988), pp.28-29. In the case of Malaysia, such macrolevel change would involve a distinct shift away from the explicitly ethnic character of social, political and economic relations that has come to typify the country.
16 Admittedly, such observations equally apply to Western societies. However, the relative ‘newness’ of postcolonial societies makes such struggles more acute.
17 Obradovic, p.194.
global forces have on the ways in which national identity is conceptualized in multiethnic states? ‘National’ identity is a valuable resource in this endeavour and understanding how such identities have been (re)constructed and contested is a central aim of this thesis.

Central Argument of the Study

This thesis tells a story about how political elites in Malaysia have sought to construct and use ideas about ‘national’ identity in order to, first, sediment their power and, second, to legitimize that power as authority. In doing so, these elites have tried to define the contours of the Malaysian state, as it looks both inwards and outwards, in a way that serves their own political purposes. In the case of Malaysia, assumptions about ‘the nation’ were based on claims about the logic and primacy of certain identity preferences, in particular that of ‘the Malay’, which were then given political force through policies on national development including, for example, education, culture and the economy. While the assumptions underpinning conceptualizations of ‘national’ identity have always been a site of contestation in Malaysia and also have never been an entirely internal process, political elites in Malaysia found it easier to manipulate that identity in the periods immediately following independence in 1957. The reason for this, I argue, is because the centrality of ethnicity in both Malaysian political culture and narratives of ‘national’ identity at the time were shared by elites and a social majority. At the same time, there was less need for state actors to take account of the ‘global’, simply because it did not function then in the same ways as which it has come to do.20

In short, political elites could largely disregard the global and set their sights squarely on the internal/domestic scene when it came to legitimating their political power.

This situation, however, could not last and the broad hypothesis behind this research project is that state actors have found it increasingly difficult to avoid external socio-political and economic pressures, which has then made the maintenance of power and authority more problematic. This, in turn, has lead to greater political fracturing as state actors have either chosen, or have been compelled, to engage with ‘the global’, not just in terms of economic demands but also with respect to calls for socio-political transformation and democratization. As such processes have evolved, it has become

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more and more difficult for political elites to maintain and legitimate their power given that their position as the intervening variable between the internal and the external has become increasingly undermined by the actions of ordinary Malaysians who have begun to engage directly with ‘the global’, both positively and negatively. The situation for political elites has been further complicated by the ways in which particular ideas of Malay primacy have been embedded politically, economically and socially and how these notions have become potentially counterproductive given the demands for development and the need for investment. That is, global forces act upon and destabilize political culture and assumptions about what is ‘eternal’ and ‘taken-for-granted’ in Malaysian politics and society, disrupting elite efforts to maintain social control and authority (for their own benefit).  

Malaysia now faces a ‘rock and a hard place’ situation. On the one hand, Malaysian state actors, in the absence of more ‘organic’ bases for political legitimation, have come to rely more and more on the legitimacy offered by economic performance. However, for the Malaysian economy to remain viable in the global market place, socio-political transformation is now required. In this way, the very elements which political elites have made the bedrock of their policies – ideas about ‘national identity’ and the privileging of the Malay community – now threaten, or at the very least complicate immensely, their efforts to be globally viable. In this way, the underlying research puzzle of this thesis is illuminated; it is not just global processes which may affect the (re)formulation of a ‘national’ ideology but that the historical context of state-society relations within which such an articulation can occur might also constitute a particular framework for interaction between the state and global processes.  

All of these points highlight the need to conduct a historical examination of the Malaysian case so as to recognize the historical origins of powerful discourses, which claim to be universal and


23 In other words, states operate within a complex field of forces, which operate in both a ‘top-down’ (global processes) and ‘bottom-up’ (society/societies) manner. This will be taken up in greater detail below.
eternal, as such examples are indicative of a greater complexity vis-à-vis the interrelationship between domestic social forces, the state and global processes than most accounts would suggest.\(^\text{24}\)

This thesis thus problematizes the nature of national identity and, critically, brings both the state and the global as well as the state and domestic society into a relationship of mutual adjustment.\(^\text{25}\) However, it will be necessary to acknowledge how such processes of mutual constitution may be asymmetrical, with either the internal or the external predominant at any particular point in time. I argue that it is via a detailed consideration of national identity (re)construction that such asymmetry and an important under-examined aspect of these processes associated with this mutual constitution may be traced, thereby underlining the possibility of transformation and change.

_Aims and Focuses of the Study_

This thesis seeks to do three things. First, it aims to explore the under-investigated interrelationship between domestic social forces, the state and global processes. This mutually constitutive, dynamic arrangement is under-analyzed not only in general terms but, more specifically, with respect to postcolonial, multiethnic/multi-religious states such as Malaysia. Second, in exploring this interrelationship, this thesis traces how social boundaries have historically come into existence. Following on from this, it also analyses how social boundaries are both maintained as well as subject to change in Malaysia. Thus, the third aim of this thesis is to explore historically the influence of the interrelationship between domestic society, the state and the global on the foundations of political authority in Malaysia and the possibilities of transformation.

The focus of the study is the interrelationship between global processes, the state and domestic social forces and how this dynamic is reflected not only in discourses on national identity but also in how such discourses are employed by state actors. Clearly, such complex issues do not exist in a historical vacuum and I hold that historical

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\(^{24}\) Michel Foucault, following Nietzsche, argues that dominant discourses are the result of power struggles in which they have triumphed over other discourses and forms of knowledge. Nietzsche once suggested that where there is meaning, it is possible to trace the struggles, battles and violence that produced it. See: Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb (2000). _Understanding Foucault_. London: Sage; p.47.

\(^{25}\) In a similar vein, Othman and Kessler refer to Giddens’ “recursive” dynamic whereby, “mundane ideas and even powerful doctrines _about_ social reality, through their acceptance into human consciousness and the actions it informs, are fed back _into_ and thus become a constitutive part of evolving sociocultural practice”. Othman and Kessler, p.1021 (Emphasis in the original).
debates and/or struggles over (re)conceptions of the ‘imagined community’ best illuminate the dynamic outline above in Figure 1. While nation state identities do tend to be sticky there is always some leeway for the purposive attempt of political actors to alter existing ideational frameworks and boundary definitions. However, such actors cannot construct new identities at will; the choices available to be made at such moments are constrained by past decisions on institutional forms and national models. That is, new ideas about political order need to resonate with existing identity constructions embedded in political cultures and national institutions. As Marcussen, et al, observe:

While existing identity constructions are broadly defined and can resonate with a whole series of new ideas, they nevertheless define the range of options considered legitimate for new nation state identities. There is no reason to believe that these existing identity constructions are ‘givens’, which are elevated above identity politics and contestation...Rather, new ideas about social order and the nation state need to resonate with previously embedded and institutionalized values, symbols and myths.

It should be emphasized that I view any ‘national identity’ project as on-going and subject to contestation. A discourse is never a self-contained whole; there are open parts where it runs into other discourses in a discursive field in which meaning in which the battle over meaning takes place. To put it simply, there are many different ways in which actors may employ a discourse and these are rarely static. By analyzing the ways in which national identity discourses have been drawn upon historically and (re)conceptualized by political leaders in Malaysia, I aim to arrive at a more nuanced and richer understanding of the dynamic outlined in Figure 1. In particular, I emphasize the asymmetrical nature of this process of mutual constitution. To reiterate the story being told in this thesis, there are moments where ‘external’ pressures operating on the state predominate, whereas on other occasions the situation may be reversed with domestic social forces in the ascendancy. Herein lies a need to understand such a dynamic; such an analysis underlines the possibilities for transformation and change in multiethnic and/or multi-religious countries.

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29 To be fair, the ‘stage’ for the empirical chapters in this thesis does not cover the broad sweep of politics but, instead, is largely focused on specific processes surrounding general elections, aspects of development and other key policy areas.
The concept of ‘nations-of-intent’ as conceptualized by A.B. Shamsul is analytically valuable in this regard.\textsuperscript{30} While similar to Anderson’s conception of the ‘imagined community’, it differs in being a more open-ended concept.\textsuperscript{31} Discrete ‘nations-of-intent’ not only reflect the broader cultural context within which they operate but they also reveal the range of possible interpretations to which any foundational myth may be subject. A ‘nations-of-intent’ framework illustrates the dynamic processes involved in the (re)imagining of community. One of the main aims of this thesis is to shed further light on the nature of historical struggles, and accommodations, between state actors, domestic social influences and global forces by employing such a ‘nations-of-intent’ approach. I contend that the identification of separate and distinct ‘nations-of-intent’, as manifested in discourses surrounding notions of national identity, represents a productive and nuanced means of ascertaining and understanding what, within a specific state’s cultural context, is both (im)possible and (im)plausible as far as socio-political transformation is concerned.\textsuperscript{32} The ‘nations-of-intent’ concept helps to view the general discourse on nationalism and nationhood in a more positive light and allows us to examine more closely the mobilization of popular sentiments – “how identity forms are spread and transformed into fully fledged imagined communities, how legends and myths are rephrased, and how they are used to generate passion.”\textsuperscript{33} As noted earlier, the third aim of this thesis is to show how such processes operate in a historical sense in order highlight the possibility and shape of future transformation and change in Malaysia.

By focusing primarily on the actions and behaviour of political elites this thesis does not mean to deny that potentially powerful everyday-defined ‘nations-of-intent’ may exist alongside or beneath authority-defined ‘nations-of-intent’. However, while the former


\textsuperscript{32} This conceptual framework is probabilistic, not deterministic. As such, it aims to help reveal the tendency for socio-political transformation as well as the possible/probable shape of any such change based on a particular state’s cultural and historical context rather than predicting with any great degree of certainty what path a country shall take. See: Stanley Lieberson and Freda B. Lynn (2002). “Barking up the Wrong Branch: Scientific Alternatives to the Current Model of Sociological Science”, \textit{Annual Review of Sociology}, 28, pp.1-19.

may exert considerable influence in shaping the discursive terms and practices of national identity in Malaysia, particularly in more recent times, I contend that, historically, state actors have played an overwhelmingly significant role in such processes simply because the lack of a coherent myth to underpin notions of political authority in Malaysia has meant that political elites have had to assume a central and active role in the creation of a sense of national identity.

**Research Methodology**

Charting and assessing the interrelationship between global processes, the state and domestic social forces is by nature a complex issue and one that lends itself to a distinctly qualitative analysis. In this sense, I argue that an interpretivist approach, which emphasizes the crucial role of contingency or ‘path dependence’ in politics, is required. Such an approach demonstrates how the idea of deterministic causation runs counter to the fundamental insight that social processes are stochastic in nature and thus require probabilistic thinking and a greater emphasis on meanings. One important reason why qualitative methods have been and remain important in International Relations (IR) research is that they possess “considerable advantages in studying complex phenomena...[which] often involved interaction effects among many structural

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34 Qualitative and quantitative approaches involve collecting data in different ways and the crucial question for any research project is whether the choice of method is appropriate for the theoretical and empirical questions that the project seeks to address.

35 Claims that define interpretivism include: (a) Human behavior is to be understood (made sense of) rather than explained (attributed to causes). (b) Social scientists, unlike natural scientists, study a realm already constituted by meanings. (c) Social action is to be analyzed not as the effect of causes but as the conformity of behavior to rules. (d) The social world is constituted by intersubjective meanings, not brute facts. (e) The vocabulary of causal analysis is inconsistent with the vocabulary needed for a proper interpretive understanding of social life. (f) Prediction is not a sensible or reasonable goal of social inquiry. (g) In the study of society, theory is used not to predict but to uncover or clarify the import of symbolic acts. See: David Dessler (2003). “The Positivist-Interpretivist Controversy.” *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), p.22.

and agent-based variables, path dependencies, and strategic interaction among large numbers of actors across multiple levels of analysis.\textsuperscript{37}

Due to both methodological and practical problems, quantitative analyses often break theories into sets of bivariate or multivariate hypotheses that do not capture the dynamic aspects of the puzzles being investigated or stories being told.\textsuperscript{38} Qualitative methods are, thus, most appropriately employed when the goal of research is to explore intersubjective phenomena and capture the meanings, processes and context attached to them.\textsuperscript{39} In terms of this thesis, charting and assessing the interrelationship between global processes, the state and domestic social forces is by nature a complex issue and one that naturally lends itself to a distinctly interpretivist and qualitative approach. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to discern discrete cause and effect relationships between domestic social forces and the state as well as between the state and the global, let alone between domestic social influences and global forces. There are simply too many factors at play, each with varying degrees of historically conditioned influence.\textsuperscript{40} Given the difficulties involved in measuring such relationships, I suggest that employing a broad organizing principle, such as (re)conceptions of national identity, is a more fruitful path to take. Not only do (re)conceptions of national identity cast a wide net and capture many of the processes in operation within the interrelationship sketched in Figure 1 but, furthermore, lends itself well to a historical analysis.

\textsuperscript{38} Zeev Maoz (2002). “Case Study Methodology in International Studies: From Storytelling to Hypothesis Testing”, in Frank P. Harvey and Michael Brecher (eds.): \textit{Evaluating Methods In International Studies}, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p.163. I recognize that there are not some excellent examples of quantitative analyses, which attempt to investigate many of the same processes that lie at the core of my thesis; in particular, legitimacy/legitimation. For example, Bruce Gilley considers the bivariate correlations to legitimacy of a range of socio-economic and political variables in order to arrive at a parsimonious and robust causal hypothesis, which reveals that universal factors appear able to explain roughly two-thirds of the variation in legitimacy levels across states. Nevertheless, even in this case, with the remaining one-third attributable to local or contextual causes, Gilley is force to admit that most causal factors will almost always have both universal and contextual interpretations. See: Bruce Gilley (2006). “The Determinant of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries.” \textit{International Political Science Review}, 27(1), pp.47-71.
\textsuperscript{40} Given the complexity and relatively unstructured nature of many of the phenomena that lie at the heart of international relations, many puzzles in International Relations are difficult to model formally and to test statistically. Indeed, I am not entirely certain what a quantitative methodology could look like with respect to my research project. See: Bennett and Elman, p.171.
(Re)conceptions of national identity over time form the central investigation of this study. While scholars have separately noted the influence of global processes and state-society relations on such (re)conceptions, very few have explored the overall interrelationship between these ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ field of forces. Chapter one of this thesis will survey this literature before outlining my theoretical agenda. What should be apparent at this early stage is that my argument recognizes the micro-macro linkages in operation in any (re)conception of national identity. A realistic analysis of the mutually constitutive dynamic outlined in Figure 1, therefore, needs to take into account how both the global and the local enable and constrain state actors. A multi-level approach is essential.

In this thesis, in-depth empirical investigations are carried out into both the construction and practice of national identity discourses. In order to explore the interrelationship between the state, global processes and domestic social forces I will employ a historical analysis of (re)conceptions of national identity in Malaysia, an ethnically and religiously heterogeneous postcolonial state. The primary discourse that will inform my research project involves notions of ‘the national self’ as well as the interrogation of the boundary between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ within any (re)conception of national identity. That is, the discourse(s) surrounding the (re)defining of the boundaries of the imagined communities called Malaysia. Or, to be more precise, the discourse(s) surrounding competing ‘nations-of-intent’ within Malaysia.

Discourses are systems of signification which construct social realities. In this sense, discourses operate as structures, “for persons to differentiate and identify things, giving them taken-for-granted qualities and attributed, and relating them to other objects.” In my historical case study of Malaysia, discursive representations of national identity, or ‘nations-of-intent’, have rendered complex relationships between the local, the national and the global understandable. However, the choice and practices of discursive representation are far from innocent and must be read in the historical context of a national political economy of power relations. While distinct discursive contexts make

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certain interpretations imaginable and particular policy responses plausible, they remain subject to contestation. As Jennifer Milliken observes, “[d]iscourses make intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards, the world and of operationalizing a particular ‘regime of truth’…” More specifically, they are understood to work to define and to enable, but also to silence and to exclude. Therefore, while there is a clear theoretical commitment towards the study of the dominant discourse(s) there is also a concomitant commitment to all discourses being malleable and subject to contestation. Particular regimes of truth require re-articulation making discourses, “changeable and in fact historically contingent.”

While there might be rival discourses surrounding conceptualizations of ‘national identity’ within a country this does not mean, however, that they must be antagonistic in every respect. Michel Foucault observes that a change in discourse is not necessarily a complete change of discourse; rival discourses might just differ from each other on one single point, while they agree in other respects (at deeper levels). A fundamental disagreement might also, in principle, be an expression of the geographical, geopolitical, demographic or historical factors that inform a particular ‘national’ discourse. Finally, by recognizing that the idea of ‘the power structure’ of a social unit is a dangerously misleading notion, a ‘nations-of-intent’ approach embraces an image of ‘patterned chaos’ rather than of smooth and predictable evolutionary change. In doing so, the evolving field of ‘nations-of-intent’ reveals that “the concept of power plays an important role in…political discourse in that it indicates realms where political action could have been different; or indeed where against apparent odds, it would have been possible in the first place. It defines the realm of political action and its justification.”

We must, therefore, pay careful attention to “the political responsibilities that come with ‘the specification of discourses’, [by] asking questions like ‘who speaks? who writes? when and where? with or to whom? under what institutional and historical constraints?’.

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In this sense the ‘nations-of-intent’ model represents a dialogic rather than a dialectic interpretation of any (re)conceptualizing of national identity. In a dialogical process, various approaches coexist and are comparatively existential and relativistic in their interaction. Here, each ideology can hold more salience in particular circumstances. Thus, particular interpretations of national identity (i.e. ‘nations-of-intent’) do not necessarily merge (or become subjegated) into other interpretations as in the dialectic process, but nonetheless modify themselves (sometimes fundamentally) over the course of mutual interaction. Adopting such an approach distinguishes my study from previous ones by subjecting possible changes in the construction and use of any national identity discourse in Malaysia to a more nuanced analysis. Tracing the historical discourses and sub-discourses surrounding (re)conceptions of national identity will allow me to arrive at a richer understanding of the interrelationship between domestic social forces, the state and the global.

Case Study Selection Criteria

This thesis seeks to contribute to the body of literature which stresses the need to acknowledge that conceptions of legitimacy, the practices of legitimation and the effects of globalization all have a particular shape in the Southeast Asian context, one that is not particularly observed in much of the general literature, even when presented in the


context of the developing world. Even within Southeast Asia it is apparent that there are many different kinds of stories to be told. For example, despite their coming together in a regional organization like ASEAN, each of the original five members – Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia – have had very different internal experiences. While this is an unsurprising statement, the degree to which the respective historical narratives of each can be contrasted with the others remains astonishing. With this in mind, it would be a mistake to treat each country in the region as if it was merely a different example of a similar, largely Eurocentric, model. Instead, the differences in what each state inherited from the colonial regime at the point of independence means that we need to adopt distinct and separate approaches to each story so as to follow the dynamics of change that each country encountered. While the modern nation-state may be a political institution universalized via colonization in the Southeast Asian region, its formation and evolution were never shaped by a wholesale adoption of the Western model. Rather, it was premised upon improvisations in response to cultural, contextual, and material particularities of different societies.

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. At its core, then, this thesis is a study of Malaysia for which I use a ‘nations-of-intent’ framework in order to investigate and illuminate the nature of the global-local-state interrelationship in a postcolonial setting. It is important to once more highlight the research objective; there are several kinds of research objectives, including not only the development of generalized theories but also the historical explanation of particular cases. That is, the explanation of a sequence of events that produce a particular historical outcome in which key steps in the sequence are in turn explained with reference to theories or causal mechanisms. The contingency inherent in my central research puzzle – just how domestic reverberations of the global are mediated by the specific historical structurations of a particular state – means that a single case-study is a wholly appropriate analytical approach. Certainly,

52 Wang, p.xiii.
this involves sacrificing parsimony and generalizability. Nevertheless, comparisons of hypothesized relationships at different points in time within the same case are particularly powerful as a means of making thick description possible; by addressing complex causal relationships case studies have the ability to accommodate complex causal relations.\textsuperscript{55} In short, a single-site case study generates “a multitude of qualitative-interpretive, within-case ‘observations’ reflecting patterns of interaction, organizational practices, social relations, routines, actions” thereby contributing not only to our knowledge of general causation but also as part of an explanatory understanding of concrete historical events and processes.\textsuperscript{56}

In avoiding this ‘compartmentalization’ of Southeast Asia within the broader Western-centric focus of International Relations, this thesis suggests that there is the need for profound understandings of local knowledge and global doctrine, that is, of the interrelationship between domestic social forces and global processes within individual countries like Malaysia. This matter is deeply related to the culture of Southeast Asia, a region whose principle characteristic, it has been argued, has been to absorb foreign influences in such a way as to develop rather than obliterate its own genius.\textsuperscript{57} Historically, the peoples of Southeast Asia have displayed the ability to embrace the best of that which is foreign without destroying that which is authentically local and, as such, the region as a whole presents an ideal laboratory in which global processes and local knowledge are, and always have been, partners locked in a dizzying embrace.\textsuperscript{58}

More than any other country in the region, though, Malaysia represents the ideal focus for in-depth empirical research vis-à-vis the postcolonial ‘nation-building’ project and how this exercise plays out in the local/global context. On the one hand, the unique mix of communities of Malays, Chinese, Indians and other indigenous peoples were thought by some to have been impossible ingredients for a new nation. At the very least, this ethno-religious blend was viewed as severe challenge to any idea of nation-building. More positively, Malaysia could be viewed as a microcosm of continental Asia’s encounter with the Western world, and could further be seen as an uneasy co-habitation


\textsuperscript{57} Harding, p.41.

\textsuperscript{58} Harding, p.47.
of several cultures whose merchant classes had known one another for several centuries.\textsuperscript{59} Malaysia, with its peoples of very different races and cultures, including many of recent immigrant origins, offers a striking example of the complications that a yet-to-be nation has to face, both in terms of its domestic ethno-religious composition as well as in its international relations.

We can learn more from the Malaysian example than from other Southeast Asian countries in order to rethink some of the common assumptions about nationalism, nation and globalization. An important characteristic of Malaysian history has been the peninsula’s long history of openness to the movement of people, ideas and trade. Furthermore, conceptions of the Malaysian nation-state were modified right from the start, with nationhood operating on “a precarious notion of cultural differentiation but with equal opportunity and treatment for all members of a national society.”\textsuperscript{60} Since its very beginnings, then, the Malaysian construction and definitions of nation and nationality have never been based directly on European ideals. As such, Malaysia presents itself as an ideal means of illuminating just how the formation and transformation of social and political orders is always necessarily informed by people’s shared histories and emotive allegiances. As Goh Beng Lan has noted the “modified and perhaps awkward [Malaysian] 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 [Malay] core and other ethnic groups.”\textsuperscript{61}

Since independence state actors in Malaysia have found it necessary to engage with the global in order to meet their development aspirations as well as with respect to normative issues, such as international recognition. Considering the postcolonial, multietnic/multi-religious nature of Malaysia, state actors there have also found it necessary to create a sense of national identity and loyalty where perhaps one had never previously existed. As argued above, ethnic and/or religious issues arguably play a more significant role in such countries than they do in developed countries and, as such, issues of legitimacy/legitimation are perhaps more acute and subject to more apparent contestation in a country like Malaysia. What Figure 1 above aims to capture then is

\textsuperscript{59} Wang, p.xvi.
\textsuperscript{60} Goh Beng Lan, p.7.
\textsuperscript{61} Goh Beng Lan, p.8.
how the mutually constitutive dynamic between domestic society, the state and the
global informs issues of political legitimacy and legitimation. To reiterate once more,
this thesis argues that their operation, along with the interrelationship between domestic
social forces, the state and global processes is most evident in the (re)construction and
use of national identity discourses.

Significance of Research

This thesis seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the interrelationship
between the domestic and the global in International Relations, particularly with respect
to the under-analyzed area of postcolonial, multiethnic/multi-religious, developing
states. It builds on the works of a number of scholars who have investigated the
interplay between global processes and the state as well as those who have analyzed
state-society relations. Located within each of these two broad fields are discussions on
the nature and practice of legitimacy/legitimation. This research departs from the
mainstream theories on these issues in a number of ways. First, by focusing on the
triangular interrelationship between domestic social forces, the state and global
processes. In particular, it expands upon existing literature by drawing these three as
part of a mutually constitutive dynamic. Second, by considering dominant as well as
rival, subjugated conceptions and practices of legitimacy and national identity, this
research provides a much fuller picture of how these concepts are articulated in
Malaysia.

The findings of this research have important theoretical and policy implications. At the
theoretical level, they suggest that, in practice, any divide that exists between analyses
of state-society relations on the one hand and state-global processes on the other, is
largely redundant. But while they may be conceived of as two sides of the same coin,
the exact nature of the mutually constitutive dynamic between domestic society, the
state and the global may be an asymmetrical one. What is required, therefore, is a
means of exploring the shape of any such asymmetry and a central finding of this thesis
is that a historical consideration of discourses on national identity (‘nations-of-intent’)
provides one such way of doing so. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that
political leaders in multiethnic/multi-religious states need to strengthen their role in
formulating more inclusive conceptions of national identity if they are going to find an
acceptable balance between particularistic ethnic/religious desires and the universal
desire for economic development and ‘national’ stability in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is organized around the central theme of national identity and the interrelationship between domestic social forces, the state and global forces. Chapter one forms the theoretical backbone of this study and is arranged in seven sections. The first three sections of this chapter deal with the central elements of Figure 1: the state and its interrelationships with the global and domestic society, respectively. A distinct focus on the concepts of legitimacy and legitimation informs this discussion and, together with the subject of the fourth section – sovereignty bargains – are then further developed as a means of exploring the complexion of the mutually constitutive dynamic that forms the conceptual focus of this thesis. The final three sections then outline why and how an emphasis on discursive (re)conceptualizations of national identity over time are a valuable means of analyzing the shape of a country’s society-state-global interrelationship.

The chapters that follow comprise the historical case study with empirical investigations based on a range of sources, including primary materials and semi-structured interviews with Malaysian politicians, academics, journalists, activists, lawyers, artists, social commentators and business people. Each empirical chapter explores and analyzes the historical evolution of the society-state-global interrelationship in Malaysia using (re)conceptions of national identity as the organizing principle. Chapter two provides a brief historical sketch of the pre-colonial and colonial history of Malaya, providing a contextual background for the chapters that then follow. Chapter three covers the period immediately following Independence as the newly independent Malaya/Malaysia sought to negotiate a range of internal and external pressures in order to develop its own individual personality. In this chapter I argue that it was the inability of state actors to adequately manage the society-state interrelationship within the broader society-state-global dynamic that resulted in the eventual collapse of the system of legitimation most clearly represented in the bloody ethnic riots of May 1969. Chapter four explores the

62 Forty individuals were interviewed over two separate fieldwork trips in 2009 and 2010. Each interview was conducted in accordance with the provisions outlined in Human Ethics Protocol 2008/459 granted by the Office of Research Integrity at the Australian National University. If a full list of my interview subjects is required, please contact me directly via email (michael.oshannassy@anu.edu.au).
evolution of this dynamic and the changing nature of national identity discourses in Malaysia between 1969-1980, highlighting how state actors failed to develop a broadly acceptable collective identity in the wake of the 1969 ethnic riots. It is during this time period that we see state actors in Malaysia began in earnest to explicitly link conceptualizations of political legitimacy to economic performance which, considering Malaysia’s traditionally open economy, meant that they now increasingly were forced to negotiate between a range internal and external forces in order to legitimate their authority. Chapter five surveys the ways in which the interrelationship between society, state and the global evolved between 1981-1996. Specifically, it investigates how the Malaysian state under Prime Minister Mahathir attempted to more closely manage the terms of its internal and external relations according to the logic of its authority-defined ‘nation-of-intent’ in the face of domestic and international challenges to its political authority which encouraged alternative conceptualizations of the ‘national’. The final empirical chapter, which covers the time period 1997-2011, outlines how a range of economic, social and political forces, both external and internal in nature, compelled state actors in Malaysia to be more flexible in their articulation of an authority-defined ‘nation-of-intent’. In particular, Malaysia’s national model and authority-defined ‘nation-of-intent’ have been largely shaped by the government’s negotiations with the broad Reformasi (Reform) movement that emerged in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998. Furthermore, this chapter argues that meaningful socio-economic and political liberalization is now required if state actors wish to fulfill long-standing development objectives and legitimate their political authority vis-à-vis a broad cross-section of Malaysian society. The conclusion to this thesis summarizes the major research findings, discusses the theoretical and policy implications, and more broadly assesses the future prospects for change and transformation in postcolonial, multiethnic/multi-religious states like Malaysia.

63 I recognize that my choice of 2011 as the end point for this thesis may be somewhat arbitrary considering the fact that this introduction is being written in 2012. However, this is not a thesis that is focused primarily on contemporary Malaysia but, rather, one that explores a longer historical trajectory in order to chart how the interplay between the domestic and the international has affected conceptualizations of national identity and political legitimacy in Malaysia. Besides, at the end of the day, one simply must make a choice of when to stop writing.