

Chapter 8

Sustaining Peace through Psychologically Informed Policies: The Geohistorical Context of Malaysia

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Although the notion of what constitutes sustainable peace has been contested ever since Immanuel Kant penned his 1795 essay on “Perpetual Peace,” there is a growing consensus among scholars in the transdisciplinary field of Peace and Conflict Studies that “peace” is usefully conceived in a broad way (Galtung, 1969), to include both the absence of direct violence (negative peace) and structural violence (positive peace). From a psychological perspective, a broad conception of peace would include preventive and promotive processes, that is, the prevention of both direct violence and structural violence and the promotion of nonviolence and social justice (Christie et al., 2001).

It may seem overly ambitious to suggest that the science of psychology could have implications for public policies. The discipline of psychology typically operates at the micro-level of analysis and public policies are implemented at the macro-level. There are, however, some noteworthy examples of psychologically informed principles having an impact on national-level policies that bear on social justice and peace. Examples include the US Supreme Court ruling against racial segregation in graduate school education which was based on the testimony of social scientists on the harmful psychological effects of segregation (Jackson, 1997); psychologically-informed expert witness testimony by social scientists in lower court cases led to the US Supreme Court decision declaring state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional (Jackson, 1998); a self-help group facilitated by psychologists in Apartheid South Africa became politically active and

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applied political pressure to have the “secrecy clauses” removed from the Truth and Reconciliation Act thereby making the testimony by perpetrators and victims of violence available to the public rather than taking place behind closed doors (Hamber, 2009); problem solving workshops, conducted with influential but politically unofficial Israelis and Palestinians, helped create a climate that resulted in the Oslo Accord (Kelman, 1995); social cognitive theory has been used as the intellectual scaffolding for “social engineers” who have produced serial television dramas to promote social justice and changes in literacy, gender equality, HIV prevention, family planning, population growth, and environmental sustainability (Bandura, 2004); the liberation psychology movement that swept across Latin America in the 1980s spawned community-based and culturally grounded emancipatory agendas and policy changes in many countries such as Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Perú, Venezuela, Australia, England, Philippines, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, and Spain (Montero & Sonn, 2009); and psychologically-informed testimony influenced the International Criminal Court in The Hague to increase physical protection and psychosocial support for women from the former Yugoslavia who were raped and testified before the Court (Anderson, 1999).

In this chapter we explore some ways in which psychological principles can inform national policies designed to prevent intergroup violence and promote intergroup harmony. We begin by briefly positioning the discipline of psychology within the larger context of scholarship in Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS), a transdisciplinary field where multiple levels of analysis are examined, including the policy level. We discuss the degree to which psychology, as the science of thoughts, feelings, and behavior has made inroads into the study of PCS. We suggest one barrier to fully integrating psychological principles into PCS is the lack of scholarship in psychology that works across levels, from micro (individual) through meso (group and intergroup) and macro (societal) levels. Then we turn to a particular geohistorical context, Malaysia, and describe how macro-level policies have been advanced at the national level to improve relations between ethnic groups. We conclude with some principles of psychological science that could be used more effectively to inform policies designed to *prevent* ethnic conflict and *promote* social justice in the Malaysian context.

Psychology and the Field of Peace and Conflict Studies

Prior to World War II, the study of peace was not center stage in the academy. Instead, the study of war was focal and the field of International Relations, a specialty typically housed in political science departments, was home for many scholars who studied inter-state relations and war. At the time, the field of International Relations was dominated by a realist philosophy (Burchill et al., 2005) in which sovereign states were thought to operate within an anarchical international system with each state seeking to advance its interests through the demonstration, consolidation, and projection of power (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1985).

In the aftermath of World War II, an alternative to the realist paradigm emerged in the academy as scholars coalesced around the study of “peace and conflict.” Questions were raised about the proper subject matter of “peace and conflict” (Clemens, 2012) and while not entirely resolved, many of these questions have been parsed and clarified. Two intellectual camps now cohere around one of two academic cultures, either (1) Peace Science (PS), or (2) Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS). PS works within a positivist tradition to improve social science theory as it relates to international relations and aspires to be objective, quantitative, and analytical while avoiding social, religious, or national biases as well as polemic arguments and political action (Isard & Smith, 1982; Peace Science Society International, 2011). In contrast, PCS is a transdisciplinary field dedicated not only to an analysis of the causes and consequences of violence, but also the reduction and elimination of violence combined with promotive conditions that favor human well-being. The field involves nearly all academic disciplines and seeks to research, educate, and promote both preventive and promotive peace processes across all levels of analysis, from individual to global (Clemens, 2012).

Generally, scholars in the United States focused on the causes and consequences of conflict, rather than peace, largely because “peace” was regarded as a normative concept that was controversial, especially during the McCarthy era (Kelman, 1981). In addition, the field of psychology since its inception has been dominated by Western individualism and has subscribed to the epistemic values of PS, placing emphasis on data-driven, reproducible knowledge that is objective and shorn of context (Gergen et al., 1996). The traditional focus of psychology on a decontextualized version of the individual does not lend itself to the construction of knowledge of peace and conflict processes that are multi-leveled and embedded within geohistorical contexts. These levels are dependent and interactive in the sense that individuals and groups are influenced by macro-level processes and conversely, the functioning of the macro system depends on the behavior of individuals and groups (Suedfeld et al., 2012).

In contrast to the United States, throughout Europe, and Scandinavia in particular, there was a conscious decision to focus on “peace” rather than conflict and to define peace broadly to include both the absence of physical violence (negative peace) and the absence of structural violence (positive peace), the latter of which is an indirect form of violence that kills people through the deprivation of human needs (Galtung, 1969). From a European perspective, sustainable peace required the pursuit of both positive and negative forms of peace or what Galtung (1996) referred to as peace (positive) by peaceful (negative) means.

Following the Cold War, the discipline of psychology, and Peace Psychology in particular, increasingly aligned itself with the PCS approach, distinguishing between structural and direct forms of violence and peace (Christie et al., 2001) and using a systems perspective to understand the relationship between episodes and structures of violence as well as episodic and structural peacebuilding (Christie, 2006). However, despite the enormous growth of Peace Psychology as evidenced by citations to “peace psychology” in research databases (Blumberg et al., 2006), even a cursory review of the PCS curricula in higher education reveals a paucity of psychology content and courses (Harris, 2007).

Ironically, although major international organizations, such as UNESCO, recognize that “war begins in the minds of men,” the academic discipline that places human cognition center-stage is often not explicitly acknowledged in PCS. This invisible status prevails even though much of what passes for the corpus of knowledge in the fields of PCS and International Relations is replete with psychological assumptions. For example, scholars in PCS recognize that the field is value-laden (e.g., antiwar, antiauthoritarian, anti-nuclear, pro-human rights, pro-environment, etc.), and authors often explicitly acknowledge their own personal values (e.g., Barash & Webel, 2002). However, the psychological literature on human values as they relate to attitudes toward violence, peace, militarism, power, nuclear weapons, and a host of other variables (Mayton, 2012) is oddly missing in the major books used in PCS courses. Similarly, in the field of International Relations, the school of realism includes the psychologically-based assumption that human nature is driven by self-interest and power motives that necessarily result in competition between states. However, the whole notion that one can posit immutable, us versus them, qualities to human nature is questionable. As Deutsch (1999) notes: “There is no reason to assume that one potential or another is inherently prepotent without regard to particular personal and social circumstances as well as life history (p. 19).” Not surprisingly, the narrow realist view of “human nature” provides an imperfect and often misleading fit with interactions that take place at the macro level of analysis (Herrmann & Keller, 2004); its descriptive adequacy and explanatory power are limited in part because of faulty assumptions about what is happening at the micro and meso levels of analysis where the dynamics of human psychology play out.

Psychology and the Levels of Analysis Problem

A question that arises in any scholarly inquiry into behavioral or social phenomena is the level or unit of analysis that will be chosen for systematic research. As Lewin (1951) noted: “The first prerequisite of a successful observation in any science is a definite understanding about what size of unit one is going to observe at a given time (p. 157).” To date, scholarship in psychology has been slow to contribute to macro level phenomena including public policies that bear on peace and conflict even though reciprocal relations exist between macro levels of analysis and psychological phenomena.

To illustrate, beginning with the macro level of analysis, “peace” engenders societal-level norms and policies that prevent direct and structural violence, and promote nonviolence and social justice. At the meso level, prevention and promotion processes take place in collective narratives and actions of groups. At the micro or individual level of analysis, “peace” involves subjective states and behaviors that are aimed at the prevention of direct and structural violence and the promotion of nonviolence and social justice. Ideally, prevention and promotion processes would operate not only within levels as illustrated but also across levels; that is, among individuals, groups, and society as a whole. As Cacioppo and Berntson (1992) have

noted, a target event at one level of analysis may have multiple determinants both within and across levels of analysis. Hence, the meso-level of psychological analysis, situated between micro and macro levels, is particularly well positioned for transdisciplinary explanations that bear on peace and conflict.

In the following analysis, we focus primarily on the reciprocal relationship between two levels of analysis, national-level policies (macro) and psychological phenomena at the intergroup level (meso), using Malaysia as a case study. Our purpose is to identify the structural origins of intergroup conflict in Malaysia and describe public policies that have been implemented in a top-down effort to manage intergroup tensions, prevent violence, and pursue social justice. We will suggest ways in which these top-down policies have played out at the psychological level of analysis and conclude with some bottom-up psychological principles that could inform national-level policies in an effort to prevent violence and promote social justice and harmony in Malaysian society.

Malaysia: The Geohistorical Context

As the bipolar power struggle between the United States and Soviet Union diminished at the end of the Cold War and ethnopolitical conflicts began to gain salience from a Western point of view, peace psychologists reoriented their work and exhibited a greater sensitivity to the value of geohistorical conditions that give rise to peace and conflict (Christie, 2006). While not eschewing the search for generalizable findings and universal principles, it became increasingly clear that peace and conflict could not be adequately understood with a dyadic lens that pitted one superpower against another; instead, peace and conflict processes were nested in geohistorical contexts and focal concerns and appropriate interventions varied accordingly.

In Malaysia, as in many South and Southeast Asian countries, the focal peace and conflict issue is structural violence and efforts are aimed at the pursuit of social justice while sustaining inter-ethnic harmony (Montiel & Noor, 2009). We are using the term “ethnicity” broadly, to include a category of people who share similarities in race (physical), religion, language, and cultural backgrounds. Hence, each of these similarities represents only one feature of the broad term, “ethnicity” (Eriksen, 1993). Many Asian countries have a history of colonial occupations that have been replaced by postcolonial regimes that are authoritarian and continue to rule in much the same way as the colonial masters (Noor, 2009). Malaysia presents a particularly interesting case for peace psychology and more broadly PCS. Within one nation is a multi-ethnic society that has been relatively peaceful in the post-Cold War era despite having three major ethnic groups that could hardly be more different from one another, varying by race, culture, linguistics, religion, politics, geography, and socio-economic class (Abraham, 1999); moreover, the groups vary in the strength of their ethnic and national identities (Liu et al., 2002). Unlike most Western nations, in which the typical normative experience is the assimilation of the minor-

ity groups into the dominant ethnic group, Malaysia is different because it embraces multiculturalism (Guan, 2000). In the second quarter of 2011, with a population of 28.5 million, Malaysia was comprised of 61% *Bumiputra* (Malay and other indigenous groups), 23% Chinese Malaysians, 7% Indian Malaysians, and 9% people of other origins, including non-Malaysian citizens (Statistics Department, Malaysia, 2011).

Divide and Rule Policies: The Policy Origins of Ethnic Inequalities in British Malaya

The origins of structural violence in Malaysia can be traced back to British colonialism. Traditional Malay society was feudal in nature before the British established colonial rule in 1726. Rich in natural resources and strategically positioned for trade between India and China, British Malaya was an important center for the acquisition of raw materials and trade. To extract raw materials, an ethnic division of labor was promoted by assigning the indigenous Malay peasantry to traditional methods of agriculture and fishing while bringing in groups of contract laborers from South China to work in tin mines and large scale commercial operations. South Indians were also contracted to serve as rubber tappers on plantations (Haque, 2003). The policy of dividing labor by ethnicity had the effect of segregating ethnic groups, making it unlikely that they would have much contact with one another or form an organized coalition against the British (Hirschman, 1986).

The importation of Chinese and Indians (known generally as the non-Malays) was seen as a threat to the Malay peasantry and the rulers (Sultans) of the Malay Kingdoms. The British assumed the paternalistic role of the “protector” of “Malay Special Rights” which, according to official rhetoric, meant protecting the traditional way of life for Malays in the agrarian and fishing sector and providing some economic benefits for the rulers (Sultans) of the Malay Kingdoms as compensation for their partial loss of power, which the British limited to matters of religion and Malay customs (Haque, 2003).

The British introduced the concept of private property and instituted land titles that could be purchased by foreigners, which further threatened Malays. To mitigate the threat, the British reserved land for Malay ownership only, but at the same time, only rice was permitted to be grown on these lands, a crop that would not compete with the British rubber plantations. Hence, these laws were ostensibly to “protect” Malay peasants but also prevented Malays from engaging in more lucrative kinds of farming. Moreover, poor Malay peasants were not protected from losing their land to the small number of elite Malay aristocrats who could enrich themselves, thereby further increasing the economic gap between the haves and have-nots among Malays. In short, the British divided the population into Malays (indigenous) and non-Malays (immigrants) and further consolidated their power by playing on the fears of Malays and setting themselves up as the protector of “Malay Special Rights” (Mah, 1985).

The paternalistic approach of the British was extended to education for the Malay masses, which was specifically designed to preserve Malay livelihood and make them “good farmers and fishermen” and hence, education was generally limited to the primary level (Hirschman, 1979). An exception was made for the children of Malay aristocrats who were given an English education and groomed to provide a pool of subordinate administrative officers for positions in the colonial bureaucracy (Tilman, 1969).

British Malaya actually had four separate education systems (Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English) which differed in the medium of instruction and course contents. Both Malays and Indians were given only 6 years of elementary education. The British did not feel obliged to provide education for Chinese but they were allowed to establish their own schools with their own curricula, with teachers and texts from China (Hassan, 2004).

Overall, rather than promoting the interests of Malays, the British “protection” policies kept the Malays in place while other ethnic groups made economic gains in income and ownership (Mah, 1985). As a result, with few exceptions, British colonialism consigned the Malays, the majority ethnic group, to a position of economic and educational backwardness, contributing to the later ethnicization of poverty (Zawawi, 2004).

Despite the “divide and rule” approach of the British, as Independence approached in 1957 progressive multi-ethnic organizations began to emerge. However, in response to the outbreak of a communist rebellion, the British colonial government declared a state of emergency, detained political leaders, and dissolved all of the progressive political organizations (Syed Husin Ali, 2008). The British vision was to create a Malayan Union where, among other changes, the status of the Malay rulers, the autonomy of the states, and the rights of the Malays, would be abolished. The British vision was met with disfavor by Malay elite who quickly occupied the political vacuum created by the dissolution of the progressive parties and formed an ethnically-based political party, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO) (Haque, 2003).

The formation of UMNO in 1946 was soon followed by other ethnically-based political parties: the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) in 1946 and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in 1949. These three parties, UMNO, MCA, and MIC, formed the Alliance Party (a multiethnic but Malay-dominated coalition) and developed a power-sharing working relationship which has become the hallmark of Malaysian politics ever since. The Alliance Party leadership was comprised of wealthy individuals, including Chinese business men, Indian professionals, and Malay ex-civil servants, some of whom had connections with royalty (Syed Husin Ali, 2008). The basis of the relationship was an understanding that there would be a balance of responsibilities: non-Malays would have economic dominance and Malays would have political supremacy. The heart of this balance was the “Bargain of 1957”, a social contract between Malays and non-Malays wherein Malays recognized non-Malays’ rights to citizenship and non-Malays recognized the “special rights” of Malays (Halim, 2000). Based on this agreement among the ethnic groups, the British acceded to the country’s demands for Independence in 1957.

The strength of UMNO as the dominant political force in the Alliance Party (today called the “Barisan Nasional”) can be seen in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution of 1957 which preserves the twin concepts of “Malay Special Rights” and “protector.” Interestingly, the “protectors” in the post-colonial context are the Malay Sultans (Mah, 1985) and the state (Haque, 2003) rather than the British. UMNO was able to shape the core components of the Malaysian constitution of 1957 which continues to influence state policies to the present day (Haque, 2003).

Managing Inter-Ethnic Tensions through National Policies

On the eve of Independence, segregation was a dominant feature of society. Malays were concentrated among the lowest socioeconomic classes, tended to populate rural areas, spoke primarily *Bahasa Melayu*, typically used *Bahasa Melayu* as the medium of instruction, seldom were educated beyond the primary level, were occupationally concentrated in the agrarian and fishing sectors and government bureaucracies, and professed Islam. Malays were defined more narrowly in Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia, as “...a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and was before Merdeka [Independence] Day born in the Federation or in Singapore”

In contrast, Chinese Malaysians tended to occupy higher socioeconomic levels, populate urban areas, speak a southern China dialect, use Chinese as the medium of instruction, have more education than Malays, engage in the business sector of the economy, and practice a range of religions including Buddhism. Indian Malaysians were involved in the plantation economy, spoke Tamil, practiced Hinduism, and by most economic measures fell somewhere between the Malays and Chinese Malaysians.

At Independence, the social-economic divide between Malays and non-Malays was apparent in the incidence of poverty. The percentage of Malays in poverty was 70.5% compared with Chinese at 27.4% (see Ikemoto, 1985). In addition, 88.8% of Malays were living in rural areas compared to 55.3% of Chinese (von der Mehden, 1975). At this time, equity ownership of Malays and Chinese were 1.5% and 22.8%, respectively (Government of Malaysia, 1996).

Even before Independence, it was recognized that the four educational systems, each with its own medium of instruction, were dividing the ethnic groups. A study was commissioned and resulted in the Razak Report of 1956 which paved the way for a common medium of instruction in all schools with Malay (later known as *Bahasa Malaysia*) as the official language of the country. Education was to be used as a vehicle to integrate the divided ethnic communities and provide equal opportunity for all to participate in the country’s economic and technological development. The existence of separate and independent schooling systems was seen as an obstacle to achieving the objective of integration, and creating uniformity in society.

However, there were difficulties in implementing the Razak Report. Attempts to introduce changes in the vernacular schools were met with hostilities due to differences in the cultures, religions and languages of the groups (Hassan, 2004). The main problem was the non-Malays' fear of losing their cultural identities and being dominated by Malay culture. This fear is indeed realistic for within a language resides the collective memory of a race and once this is lost, so too will the group's collective memory (together with the group's values, ethics, culture, etc). Due to this resistance, the intended results of using language as a tool for integrating the groups, was not achieved.

Since independence, the state has played an activist role in attempting to manage inter-ethnic tensions. The immediate challenge after Independence was dealing with the legacy of the past – a society divided by education, language, socioeconomic status, religion, geography, and labor. However, from a Malay perspective, the state fell short of dealing with the issue of structural inequalities and discontent became most apparent when inter-ethnic violence erupted in 1969.

Inter-ethnic Violence Drives the New Economic Policy (NEP)

While the “Special Rights” provision of the Constitution was supposed to address the discrepancies in education, business, and public service, on a psychological level the special rights became a source of discontent for both the Malays, who felt not enough had been done to level the playing field economically, and the non-Malays, who regarded the measures as discriminatory (Lee, 2000). Inter-ethnic tensions soon reached a peak as both Malays and non-Malays began to view the “Bargain of 1957” as broken and Malays felt particularly threatened as they saw their political power being eroded when UMNO lost a significant number of seats in the election of 1969. The results were inter-ethnic riots that broke out on May 13, 1969, which left an untold number of people (officially 196) dead, mostly Chinese. While the riots could have been attributed to mismanagement by authorities and a host of other causes, political elites and the intelligentsia singled out ethnic inequality as the most credible reason for the violent episodes (Mahathir, 1970; Tarling, 1999).

Explanations for the riots highlighted the exclusion of Malays in economic development (Lee, 2000) and reinforced the perception of “relative deprivation” among Malays. Soon a mandate emerged for the government to implement sweeping reforms and policies that would redress structural inequalities in order to prevent further cycles of inter-group violence. As a result, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was drafted. The NEP was a carefully crafted statement of goals that were to be achieved by 1990. The NEP offered little in regard to means but two ends were clear: (1) the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty, (2) the acceleration of efforts to restructure society to redress economic imbalances between racial groups in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function.

Hence, the NEP attached specific goals to the project of expanding Malay “special rights”, a feat that was politically feasible because Malays dominate the political sector of the society (Means, 1986).

Unlike Affirmative Action (AA) policies that are usually targeted toward one sector, the NEP instituted changes that affected nearly every aspect of society, including politics and civil service, economics and business, education and language, and religion and culture (Haque, 2003). In politics, while the British had already trained and placed Malays in the civil service sector, the NEP expanded Malay dominance throughout institutions of the state, including the cabinet, defense, police, and judiciary (Crouch, 1996). In economics, the NEP set an ownership target (30%) for Malay participation in industrial and commercial activities along with tax incentives. Malays also were given a percentage discount on the original price of properties they purchased. In education and language, *Bahasa Melayu* had already become the national language with the passage of the National Language Act of 1967 and accordingly, in the 1970s and 1980s, the government gradually converted English medium schools to Malay. In religion, the state supported the Islamization process through, for example, the establishment of the Islamic Bank and the International Islamic University of Malaysia, the expansion of Shariah courts, and allocation of permits, land, and financial support for the building of Mosques (Hamayotsu, 1999). In regard to culture or the symbolic sphere of life, Islamic symbols were increasingly associated with Malays while some Chinese symbols (e.g., pig) were regulated at times (Lee, 2000). After the riots, the preeminence of Malay culture became nonnegotiable and anyone who raised questions could be prosecuted under the Sedition Act (Lee, 2000).

One of the key areas targeted by NEP was education. It was felt that the education system could be a tool to create a national identity and to ensure racial and social cohesion. To do so, equal access to education (and subsequent economic development) needed to be balanced with each group’s rights to its identity, culture and language. Thus, despite the initial problems with the Razak Report, the Talib Report of 1960 aggressively promoted the national education system. The Education Act of 1961 reflected this concern. The vernacular education systems of the three ethnic groups remained, but once children entered secondary schools they had to continue their study in the national education system where Malay was the medium of instruction.

Because education has been seen as playing a pivotal role in decreasing economic imbalances between the ethnic groups and poverty, education was made obligatory for everyone up until lower secondary level (making a total of 9 years of schooling). Next, in line with the second aim of the NEP (to restructure the Malaysian society), the government committed itself to increasing gross enrolments in higher education. This move paved the way for AA in higher education, resulting in increased access for those who had been traditionally absent or excluded from higher education, notably the rural Malays (Gomes, 1999). In the parlance of PCS, the NEP was a result of episodic violence and its implementation was intended to deal with the structural roots of episodic violence in order to prevent further cycles of violence.

Results of the NEP, Some Intended and Unintended

In some respects, the impact of the NEP was impressive, redressing poverty and the structural form of inter-ethnic violence that was thought to underlie ethnic tensions. The incidence of poverty was reduced dramatically from 49.3% in 1970 to 7.5% in 1999 (Stewart & Langer, 2007). Differences in registered professionals by ethnicity also equalized with the emergence of a Malay middle class of professionals, rising from 8% to 54% during the NEP. Inter-ethnic income disparity declined, as did differences in the share of corporate stock ownership. However, tensions increased in relation to some quotas. The target of increasing Malay ownership and capital accumulation to 30% by 1990 was particularly contentious. NEP guidelines required non-Malay firms to meet the 30% Malay equity ownership requirement if they wished to obtain or renew business licenses and although Malay ownership and capital accumulation increased, the question of whether or not the target of 30% was ever reached depends on whether “ownership” includes public or only private enterprises and therefore remains a hotly contested issue (Lee, 2000).

In short, the policy of economic restructuring has generally been effective in allowing Malays to garner more of the economic pie. At the same time, the impressive overall economic growth of Malaysia during the implementation of the NEP made it possible for all ethnic groups to increase their standard of living (Lee, 2000). Malaysia’s GNP averaged 6.7% per year from 1970 to 1990, which put Malaysia tenth among 126 nations with populations of one million or more (Snodgrass, 1995). From a social psychological perspective, the NEP did not create a “realistic conflict” in which the ethnic groups were pitted against each other in a zero-sum kind of relationship. Although Chinese Malaysians have viewed the NEP as discriminatory, the memory of the 1969 riots is seared in the collective memories of Malaysians and generally the Chinese have tolerated the notion of restructuring (i.e., the pursuit of positive peace) as a necessary means of preserving negative peace. Since Independence, and especially in the wake of the 1969 riots, the government has engaged in a delicate dance, trying to restructure society while attempting to minimize inter-ethnic tensions.

The NEP and its successor programs have also come under attack for other reasons. According to Anwar Ibrahim (2008), heavy reliance on AA rather than a meritocracy has had costly results, creating a non-competitive business environment and conditions that favor corruption. Preferential treatments have encouraged cronyism, dependency, and have led to a brain drain as Chinese seek more favorable conditions elsewhere (Haque, 2003). Accordingly, Malaysia has dropped five places (to 44th among 163 countries) on Transparency International’s 2006 Corruptions Perceptions Index. Corruption is a problem not only in regard to a sense of fairness among Malaysians but also in efforts to attract foreign direct investment, which in turn affects growth and competitiveness. As a result of these problems, Malaysia is falling behind comparable economic powers in East and Southeast Asia including Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea (Ibrahim, 2008).

Finally, while the NEP and successive plans have been credited with diminishing horizontal inequality (between ethnic groups), vertical inequality (within group) has risen, suggesting that Malay elite have benefitted more than those on the bottom of society. As of 2005, Malaysia had the largest income disparity gaps in Southeast Asia as measured by the GINI coefficient, which makes Malaysia comparable to countries in Central and South America (Ibrahim, 2008). The core elite of the upper class remains largely isolated from the concerns and needs of the lower class (Syed Husin Ali, 2008). Moreover, it is to the advantage of the core elite that problems continue to be framed by ethnicity, not class. As long as the dominant narrative views the core conflict as horizontal (ethnicity) rather than vertical (class), the lower strata of society is not likely to unite against the status quo and the power of the elite is more easily preserved.

In short, while the NEP was designed to run for a 20-year period (1970–1990), it has since continued under different names – the New Development Policy (1991–2000) and the National Vision Policy (2001–2010). The NEP has resulted in positive outcomes such as the reduction in poverty, increased economic opportunities for members of the targeted Malay group, and has also been credited for the emergence of a Malay middle class. At the same time, there have been down sides to these policies, not the least of which has been their effect on inter-ethnic understanding, harmony, unity, as well as nationalism and other indices that bear on national commitment, quality of life, and human well-being. Inter-ethnic conflict, while seldom reaching the level of organized violence, remains a dominant and intransigent feature of inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia, so much so that the conflict could be regarded as intractable, lasting more than one generation and perceived as existential and zero sum in nature (Bar-Tal, 2007; Coleman, 2003). Viewed from the lens of a cycle of violence (conflict → violence → post-violence), peace interventions in Malaysia have been aimed at managing the conflict phase of the cycle though national policies in order to prevent the violent phase of a cycle (Christie et al., 2008).

Using National Policies to Promote Social Justice and Manage Inter-Ethnic Tensions

While the NEP and its successor policies represented an unusually ambitious approach to the problem of historically-based structural violence, from its very inception as a sovereign nation, the issue of ethnicity has been the central policy issue in Malaysia and remains so to this day. Since Independence, the government has vigorously used policy to manage inter-ethnic tensions, promote unity, and pursue social justice. However, some of these policy initiatives have unwittingly deepened divisions between ethnic groups. For example, in the 1970s, the state sought to promote national unity by instituting Malay as the medium of instruction in education. In 1971, the state began to convert the medium of instruction at the primary and secondary level from English to Malay. The conversion was a

contentious issue between Malays and Chinese Malaysians. Malays strongly felt the Malay language could promote “national unity” while Chinese objected because the Constitution, they argued, guaranteed the right to be educated in their “mother tongue” (Lee, 2000).

Ultimately, the state did recognize and support Chinese primary schools but not secondary schools. Thus, a pattern emerged in which the majority of Chinese sent their children to Chinese primary. While the percentages have varied over time, it is estimated that about 93% of Malays attend national schools at the primary level while about the same percentage of non-Malays, primarily Chinese, are enrolled in national type primary schools that are instructed in their mother tongues, either Mandarin for Chinese, or Tamil for Indian Malaysians. Ironically, primary national schools were supposed to promote ethnic unity with Malay as the medium of instruction but have failed to do so because of the lack of enrollment by non-Malays. Hence, a policy that was designed to increase national unity through a common medium of instruction has resulted in more intergroup segregation and less intergroup contact at the primary school level (Lee, 2000). In addition, there is ethnic segregation in higher education with most of the undergraduates in public universities being Malays and the majority enrollment in private universities being non-Malays (Syed Husin Ali, 2008).

While the medium of instruction was a major source of tension between Malays and Chinese in the 1970s, the 1980s witnessed another cultural clash as “Islamic resurgence” swept through Malaysia and was perceived as a threat to Chinese culture. The selling of pork in wet markets, for example, became a contentious issue as did the symbol of a “pig” in the public space, including books and television. McDonald’s hamburgers were marketed as “beefburgers,” a more apt description that might have appealed to Islamic sensibilities though certainly would not attract Indian customers! But the chief source of conflict was over places of worship. While mosques received funding from the state, non-Muslims typically did not receive funding for building temples or churches and local councils almost always chose not to issue permits to purchase land to build places of worship (Tan, 1985), tantamount to a form of cultural violence (Lee, 2000).

Glimmers of Hope: Indications of Improvement in Inter-Ethnic Relations

Since the 1990s there have been some indications that authoritarian structures and preferential policies are softening. Up until recently, the media could be controlled by the government and authorities could suspend or ban newspapers, magazines, or books under the Publishers and Printing Presses Act. The development of the Internet and social media have made centralized control difficult as a number of electronic venues have emerged and allowed the public to freely express various points of view without the threat of retaliation by government authorities. There also are indications that the Internal Security Act will be suspended, a policy that was instituted not long after

independence to detain and incarcerate without trial those (mainly Chinese) who were accused of being communists or communist sympathizers (Syed Husin Ali, 2008).

Preferential policies in higher education have also loosened with the Education Act of 1995, which increased higher education options for non-Malays by allowing the establishment of private universities in Malaysia with English as the medium of instruction. In addition, after being criticized, primarily by Chinese, for being discriminatory in its awarding of scholarships, the government has loosened AA by increasing the percentage quota of scholarships for non-Malays in higher education (Syed Husin Ali, 2008). There also have been changes in laws to allow private forms of higher education, making it possible for a growing number of Chinese to receive a tertiary education, as long as they can afford to pay (Lee, 2000). In the business sector, requirements for non-Malay firms to meet the quotas for equity ownership also have been relaxed, with provisions no longer applying to small firms (Haque, 2003).

Despite the ceaseless bickering at the political level, a study conducted on inter-ethnic relations by Veykuten and Khan (*in press*) has provided support for the proposition that members of all three ethnic groups already endorse a strong feeling of being one national community. In addition, members of all three ethnic groups did not consider national and ethnic identifications incompatible. For Malays and Indians, national identification was stronger than ethnic identification and for Chinese the two group identifications were equally positive. While all groups had some sense of national identity, Malays, due to their more politically dominant position showed higher national and ethnic identification, saw their own group as more indispensable for the national category, more strongly endorsed an inclusive national representation, and had higher in-group bias, consistent with past studies (Liu et al., 2002; Noor, 2007).

Two mega-forces that the Malaysian government continues to grapple with are globalization and Islamization. With globalization and the growing importance of China, there is increasing recognition of the value of having a Chinese culture in Malaysia to help expand relations between Malaysia and China. Indeed, there has been an increase in cultural exchanges, performances by Chinese cultural troupes, and Chinese art exhibits. There has even been a growing acceptance of Chinese primary schools as evidenced by the enrollment of about 35,000 Malay students in Chinese schools in 1999. In relation to Islamic resurgence, a question that arises is how Malaysia will continue to distinguish itself as a moderate Muslim country when there is no longer recourse to the Internal Security Act to detain extremists? While most detainees were once allegedly Chinese communists, most detainees today are Muslims accused of being extremists, some of whom have been held for more than 6 years (Syed Husin Ali, 2008).

Perhaps the most significant indication of change can be found in the 2008 general elections in which the majority of voters were willing to cross party (which means "ethnic") lines with their vote. Chinese were willing to vote for Muslim candidates and Malays voted for Chinese candidates, a trend that was most evident among younger voters (Syed Husin Ali, 2008). While changes in voting patterns inspire confidence that inter-ethnic relations are improving, there are factors that continue to exacerbate inter-group tensions, particularly between Malays and Chinese Malaysians.

Continuing Sources of Inter-Ethnic Tensions

Malaysia's rapid economic growth during the past few decades benefitted all ethnic groups and made it possible for the state to implement policies aimed at restructuring economic resources to reduce inter-ethnic inequalities. At the same time, the politics of ethnic identity and economic restructuring has underscored political power differences between the ethnic groups (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Malays, as the dominant political force in ethnic politics have been able to exert their power and implement the NEP (from 1971 to 1990) as well as subsequent AA programs, all of which have been designed to disproportionately benefit Malays as compared to other ethnic groups. Hence non-Malays often feel marginalized and view the NEP and related AA policies as a power play. Tensions have been further exacerbated because the time-frame for implementing AA policies has been extended repeatedly. Not surprisingly, non-Malays have seen the policies as increasingly unfair, thereby creating social conflict and collective resentment, especially among Chinese Malaysians. There also are growing concerns that the policies have created a sense of entitlement and dependency among the Malays.

There are even divisions within the Malay community over the question of whether AA policies actually benefit them and should be continued. According to one nationally based survey of Malays (Merdeka Survey, 2010), 40% said that all Malaysians should receive equal treatment regardless of ethnicity or religion, and 45% indicated that the policies only benefitted the rich and politically connected. In short, while members of all ethnic groups generally agree that AA policies were necessary to address grievances that led to the 1969 riots, it is unclear whether or not continued NEP-style policies will produce harmony or tensions among ethnic groups (Sriskandraja, 2005).

In the following section, we return to psychological considerations in relation to public policy issues and emphasize the usefulness of introducing inter-ethnic contact groups to promote (1) dialogue on sensitive issues and (2) craft policies designed to mitigate and prevent inter-ethnic tensions and conflict. Moreover, we underscore the value of measuring the psychosocial consequences of public policies as part of an ongoing evaluation program.

Contributions of Psychology to Public Policies: Returning to the Levels of Analysis

Thus far, we have emphasized deliberate attempts of the Malaysian government to craft policies at the macro level that promote inter-ethnic equality and harmony at the meso level of analysis. In this section, we describe how meso-level actions can feed back into policy decisions. In particular, we demonstrate how the science of psychology, which operates at the individual, group, and inter-group levels, can contribute to public policies that promote inter-ethnic civility and social justice

from the bottom-up. To this end, we discuss two ways in which psychological principles could be used effectively to inform public policy: first, through the application of “intergroup contact theory” (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006); and second, through the timely, regular and frequent use of psychological measurements for evaluation purposes.

The Case for Applying Intergroup Contact Principles in the Policy Formation Process

As it stands, the current political party structure in Malaysia is a continuation of the British divide and rule policy. The parties are divided by ethnicity and politicians use ethnicity to garner support for their parties, a tactic that runs counter to any efforts to build inter-ethnic harmony and national unity (Syed Husin Ali, 2008). In the 2008 general elections, for example, the Barisan Nasional and the media they control used a number of tactics to whip up inter-ethnic tensions, chauvinism, and anger. Tactics typically besmirch the reputations of political leaders and claim that “the other side” is a threat to Islam or to Malay Special Rights, or has insulted Malay rulers (Syed Husin Ali, 2008).

While it is difficult to imagine how the entrenched political structures in Malaysia could be reconfigured to promote inter-ethnic unity, the 2008 general election results suggest the public, and especially the younger generation in Malaysia is wary of ethnic politics and more concerned with intra-ethnic, rather than inter-ethnic, disparities. Shortly after the general elections, Malaysia’s Prime Minister, Najib Razak, introduced the concept of 1Malaysia. 1Malaysia provides a crude roadmap for improving inter-ethnic relations by emphasizing national unity, ethnic harmony, and fairness to all, with the goal of making Malaysia a more vibrant, more productive and competitive society where Malaysians perceive themselves as Malaysians first before other social categories (e.g., ethnic group, religion, etc.). The 1Malaysia agenda outlines six National Key Results Areas: reduce crime, fight corruption, improve student outcomes, raise living standards of low-income households, improve rural infrastructure, and ramp up urban public transport systems.

Movement toward implementation of the 1Malaysia concept has been met with some concern and skepticism: For Malays, the right-wing group, *Perkasa*, sought clarification of the policy fearing that it would undermine *Bumiputra* rights (Malay and Indigenous people) in favor of the non-Malays. For non-Malays, 46% believed that 1Malaysia was only a political agenda to win their votes, and only 39% believed that the concept was a sincere effort to unite the groups in Malaysia (Merdeka Survey, 2010). Caught in-between, Najib held back on drastic reforms to AA policies.

Part of the problem is that efforts to promote 1Malaysia have taken place in a top-down fashion, from macro to meso, rather than encouraging changes in threat perception and social identities at the grassroots level through the application of

psychologically-informed principles. The application of intergroup contact theory is particularly well suited for changes at the intergroup level. There is plenty of evidence in the research literature on intergroup contact that supports the notion that inter-group relations can be improved by arranging to have conflicted groups of people cooperate in the pursuit of common goals, especially under conditions in which the groups are equal in status and are working within a context of institutional support (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tropp, 2011). Inter-group contact works by providing knowledge about outgroup members, inducing empathy and perspective taking, creating more inclusive group representations, as well as diminishing intergroup anxiety and the perception of threat (Tausch et al., 2006; Tropp, 2011).

There are provisions in the 1Malaysia agenda to promote intergroup contact, referred to as inter-ethnic “social interaction.” However, at present, social interaction is treated as one of seven broad clusters of initiatives, alongside politics, government, religion, education, media and the economy. Initiatives that are identified and cluster in the “social interaction” category include a number of programs that are already in place (e.g., neighborhood watch, 3-month youth camps, joint extra-curricular activities). Several problems with the current agenda are readily apparent from a methodological and conceptual perspective: the programs are largely stand-alone programs and therefore have a piecemeal quality; the programs are not scaled-up enough to address the problems on a societal-wide basis; it is not clear whether the existing programs improve inter-ethnic relations because “unity” and “inclusiveness” are not evaluated; and finally, there is the question of program sustainability particularly during those times when tensions between ethnic groups increase. There are some efforts to integrate and promote national unity in the context of some other clusters, such as education and economics, but to a large extent “social interaction” is treated as a separate category even though the principles of intergroup contact theory would suggest inter-group interaction, along with other conditions (equality, common goals, institutional support), should be suffused within and across all clusters.

In addition to implementing intergroup contact principles within and across clusters, there are some creative applications of contact theory that can address some of the structural barriers to implementation. Intergroup contact theory has demonstrated, for instance, that direct and extended cross-group friendship can reduce prejudice (Turner et al., 2007) and this information can be put to good use in Malaysia where children are segregated by the schools they attend. In these cases, extended cross-group friendship (the knowledge that members of one group have friends belonging to the other groups) can be introduced to primary school children via stories that involve members of their own group having close friendship with members of other groups. For older children, discussion sessions sharing their experience of friendship with members of the other groups are helpful. Other examples to introduce extended cross-group friendship would be via videos and films about close friendships involving cross group friends. In this way, the government controlled media also could be put to good use.

The Case for Measuring Psychological Outcomes of Policy Initiatives

We have emphasized the use of the 1Malaysia concept to guide the topics of discussion and action plans generated by dialogue and contact groups. While the goals of 1Malaysia are admirable, these goals have been called for in previous plans and the implementation process is vague. Moreover, there is the built in assumption that movement toward the 1Malaysia goals will improve inclusiveness and unity; however, no methods for measuring and monitoring inclusiveness and unity are proposed.

More broadly, public policies in Malaysia have been designed to deal with historical inequalities through a radical restructuring of society; however, some of the consequences of the policies have been ambiguous, particularly at the level of human psychology. To date, policies have been implemented without follow-up measures that could provide some indication of the effectiveness of policies on important psychological constructs such as unity, ethnic identity, national identity, fluctuations in inter-ethnic tension, rigidity of social categories, and other relevant psychological constructs. Hence it is not surprising that it remains unclear whether the absence of intergroup violence since 1969 is due to policies designed to reduce intergroup inequalities or other factors, such as the Sedition Act, which makes the discussion of “sensitive issues” subject to imprisonment (Crouch, 2001). Instead, the emphasis in Malaysia has been placed on comparisons of ethnic groups based on economic indices with the assumption that a more equitable distribution of material resources will prevent violence, rather than testing this proposition by directly measuring and tracking changes in perceptions of social harmony within and across ethnic groups in response to policy initiatives.

In recent years, there has been some survey research in Malaysia and the results have given a glimpse of how a more rigorous approach that examines attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral tendencies could be useful. For example, in one survey (Merdeka Survey, 2011) that compared 2006 with 2011 there was an increase in the percentage of Malaysians who thought ethnic relations would get worse in the next 5 years. Other trends indicated a decline in the percentage who (1) described ethnic relations as good, (2) thought ethnic unity was sincere and friendly, (3) were happy to live in a multi-ethnic society, (4) felt Malaysian society was mature enough to discuss issues openly, and (5) thought government policies were improving ethnic integration. Item (5) is particularly revealing because there are large inter-group differences in the percentage of Malaysians who agree with the proposition that government policies are improving ethnic integration: 82% Malay; 63% Indian Malaysian; and 37% Chinese Malaysian. Amidst all the bad news, there were two encouraging trends: there was a decline in the percentage of non-Malays who considered themselves to be second class citizens, and an increase in the percentage of Malaysians who indicated they have friends from different ethnic groups.

Although the results reveal the potential for survey data to give a snapshot of perceptions of intergroup relations at two points in time, we have no idea why this configuration of responses took place at each point in time, nor do we know how to interpret the trends in the data. We can speculate that government policies bear on

these response patterns but there has been no rigorous and systematic attempt to map survey research onto the policy formation and implementation process. Moreover, without instituting regular and frequent surveys that tap relevant perceptions, there is no mechanism to serve as a lead indicator that signals whether or not policies are having their intended consequences. The importance of measurement seems particularly timely as politicians grapple with questions about the degree to which the society should move toward a meritocracy and the relative weight that should be given to the values of equality versus freedom.

In short, it is possible to outline an agenda that would draw on inter-group contact theory in order to promote cooperation, harmony, and a strong sense of nationalism that would not trade on ethnic identity, as envisioned in the concept of 1Malaysia. The agenda would be driven primarily by grassroots efforts that would bring ethnic groups together to work on issues across all clusters, on a scale that would be commensurate with the size of the problem, under intergroup contact conditions that favor improved intergroup relations, combined with the application of extended contact principles, and the use of sophisticated assessment tools that would carefully monitor key indicators of intergroup relations. Although contact groups would generate the tools to measure the anticipated psychological outcomes of the policy formation and implementation process, it seems likely that desirable assessments would include the extent to which (1) members of the ethnic groups form an inclusive group representation where they see themselves as Malaysians first; (2) intergroup threat, prejudice, and tension are reduced; (3) empathy, perspective taking, and inter-ethnic contact are increased; and (4) sensitive issues such as the problem of vertical inequality, cronyism, resentment, and dependency are queried.

Finally, we have emphasized the utility of carefully measuring psychosocial constructs and implementing inter-group contact theory to shape public policies in Malaysian society. Given the sensitive nature of the issues, there is an important role for political leadership in laying the groundwork for intergroup contact and constructive dialogue by using the state-controlled media and other social network channels to minimize the potential for ethnically-based rhetoric and the politics of ethnic identity. In particular, the public could be educated on the history of the ethnic groups, and within this context, reframe AA policies as initiatives that are meant to correct past historical injustices, not special privileges that have an open-ended time frame and imply inborn ethnic rights (i.e., *Bumiputra* rights). The limitations of the term “race” which implies immutable characteristics, and the substitution of the term “ethnicity” which offers a more flexible frame for multiple social identities, also could become a theme in the dominant narrative.

Conclusion

The potential contributions of psychology to the transdisciplinary field of PCS and national-level policies that promote peace and social justice have been largely unrealized, if not marginalized. We have suggested that part of the problem is that research in psychology is often decontextualized and not examined in relation to

other levels of analysis. In the current chapter, we have examined public policies within the geohistorical context of Malaysia, a multi-cultural society where inter-ethnic inequality and harmony are focal concerns. We have identified some ways in which intergroup contact theory and the measurement of intergroup relations at the meso-level of analysis could inform policies at the macro-level of analysis. From our perspective, sustainable peace is not an end state but a process that requires contextual sensitivity and the pursuit of social justice through an ongoing iterative relationship between psychologically-based principles that inform public policies, and carefully measured policy outcomes that inform psychological principles.

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