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THE IDEAS, PERCEPTIONS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF ETHICS IN TUN DR. MAHATHIR'S THE CHALLENGE (1986)

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews and investigates, as a discourse, the contents of a book, The Challenge (1986), written by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in 1986 when he was the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia. It analyses how Tun Dr. Mahathir, as a political leader, a Malay elite, and intelligentsia, informs on ethics during Malaysia's economic development in the 1980s and 1990s through the millennium when globalisation was promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Applying discourse and conventional content analyses as research methodologies, it also examines and analyses the ethical values, issues, and concerns of the Malays as manifested by Tun Mahathir at the prevalent time. The Challenge, as a text, has focused on the Malay ethnic group, either directly or indirectly, within the context of the Malay identity, embracing Islam as a religion. Tun Dr. Mahathir expounds on the need for a new system of values, ethics, and attitudes which the Malays, the population majority of Malaysia must adopt in the country's quest to become a mature and developed nation by the year 2020 i.e., to realise Vision 2020.

***Keywords**: Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir, ethics, Malays, values, discourse*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This article presents a discourse analysis of a book, *The Challenge,* written by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in 1986 when he was the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia. The text contents will be critically reviewed, analysed, and interpreted from social-constructionist approaches, while investigating and presenting Tun's manifestations of Malay values, ethical issues, and concerns. The article author is hence trying to investigate the thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of a renowned Malay elite, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on ethics while Malaysia was transforming from an agricultural to an industrial nation beginning the 1980s and onwards. This study will focus on the Malay ethnic group in identity, within the context of the Malaysian Malays, embracing Islam as a religion.

Dr. Mahathir was the prime minister with 22 years of service from 1981 to 2003. An outspoken politician, a defender of Asian values and famous for "putting across his views much more strongly", he is well remembered as the Father of Modern Malaysia and the Father of Development (Ali, 2019). Tun's leadership patterns and strategic thoughts would have also spearheaded the development of modern Malaysia and her success stories (Mohd Udin et al., 2020), not to mention, the creation of the progressive indigenous/ *Bumiputera* majority group of Malaysia, the *Melayu Baru* themselves. Dr. Mahathir's reverberative thoughts about the Malays (his ethnic group) and his vision for Malaysia to be a progressive nation, as presented in his book, *The Challenge* (to be analysed in this discourse) may have, to a considerable extent, contributed towards the transformation of Malay values while they drive the nation's socio-economic progress, as the population majority.

The following further justifies why *The Challenge* has been selected for this discourse. Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, being a Malay politician and intelligentsia, is well known for his original ideas and incisive plain-speaking. Both traits are grippingly evident in this book, where he takes a hard and honest look at certain modes

of thinking and living that are vying for supremacy in the modern world, in general, and within the Malaysian Malay community in particular, the main indigenous (*Bumiputera*) group in Peninsular Malaysia and the most progressive among the other indigenous groups today (Ali, 2021). With his straightforwardness, Dr. Mahathir explodes fallacies and exposes distortions concerning religiosity, education, role models, democracy, communism, freedom and discipline, and the concerns of this world and the next (Goodreads, 2018).

Malaysia was under the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) government for 61 historical years since Malaya's 1957 independence. Interestingly, Tun Dr. Mahathir returned to the Malaysian political scene on 9 May 2018 as the seventh Prime Minister (PM), leading the nation under a new ruling government, *Pakatan Harapan* (PH). Tun's leadership, legendary experience, and influential presence in the Malaysian political scene are still felt today despite his prime years of age (Note: Currently, Tun is 96 years old).

Research Methodology

This interdisciplinary social science study links ethics, Malay studies, and economics to develop the discourse. It utilises conventional content analysis as a complementary research method for discourse analysis. A discourse study or discourse analysis is a general term for several approaches to analysing written, vocal or sign language use or any significant semiotic use (Ali, 2019). The author herself is the research instrument as she interprets facts and data from the text (in this case, *The Challenge*) from her knowledge and background on the subject/s to be discussed (in this study, ethics and ethical concerns of the Malays from Tun Mahathir's manifestations).

Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from texts (Weber, 1990). It can be used for many purposes, such as to reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional or societal attention (Weber, 1990). Conventional content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique whereby coding categories are directly derived from the text data. It analyses content according to key variables (such as economic development initiatives, education system, and social problems). It is the longest established method of text analysis among a set of empirical methods of social investigation (Holsti, 1968; Titscher et. al., 2000, pp. 55) and describes a family of analytic approaches ranging from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses (Rosengren, 1981; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). A text may, among others (such as writings on tombstones, written speeches, etc.) be a book or newspaper (Titscher et al., 2000, pp. 20; Ali, 2019).

Researchers regard content analysis as a flexible method for analysing text data (Cavanagh, 1997; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). They, therefore, avoid using preconceived categories (Kondracki et al., 2002). Researchers allow the categories and names of categories to flow from the data; in this case, the book, i.e. *The Challenge* itself. Researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge (Kondracki et al., 2002), also described as an inductive category development (Mayring, 2000).

This flexible approach to content analysis is indeed most appropriately used in studies aimed at describing a phenomenon, defined as something that is typically unusual or difficult to understand or explain fully (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). For example, ethics, character development, ethical issues, and concerns of a particular ethnic group.

Definitions and Elaborations on Important Applied Concepts

Ethics is derived from the Greek word, *ethos* which means character, spirit, and attitudes of a group of people or culture (Abdul Rahman, 2012, pp.58). As a discipline, it is the study of morality. Several factors influence ethical values including culture and the social environment (Nickels et al., 2008; Velasquez, 2012; Ali et al., 2018). Culture broadly refers to a set of norms, values, and beliefs of a particular group or community (Hofstede, 1980). From western perspectives, it covers a wide spectrum of one's life; from religion to rituals as well as language and ethnic group membership (Awang et al., 2012) including ideas, morality, and lifestyles (Eberle, 1992; Ali, 2019; Ali, 2021).

In defining ethics, Wiley (1995) identified three key elements i.e., responsibility, obligation, and social justice. Consequently, Mauro et al. (1999) refer to ethics as the critical analysis of the rightness and wrongness of human conduct based on two major criteria: truth and justice. *Ethics* is also inclusive of the application and

internalisation of religious principles as well as rational relativistic thoughts to promote social justice (Ali, 2019).

The Malaysian Malays embrace Islam as their religion and are always associated with their faith and beliefs in Islamic principles (Mutalib & Kua, 1993; Singh, 2001; Ahmad, 2009). As religion is inclusive in cultural contexts and dimensions, this highly significant connection implicates the centrality and dominance of Islam in the Malay culture (Ali, 2021).

In this study, the author has classified two main themes or categories to craft the discourse, i.e., *Integrity and Social Justice*. The definitions and elaborations on each theme are provided next. *Integrity* is a moral value that relates to honesty and righteousness (Ali et al., 2010; Ali and Merican, 2014; Ali et al., 2019). Aptly, from religious perspectives, a person of integrity will be God-conscious and virtuous in all aspects of life. *Integrity* is therefore a value of people with *taqwa* (God-consciousness) from Islamic dimensions (Ali, 2019). *Social Justice* is commonly referred to as justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society (Oxforddictionaries.com). From Islamic viewpoints, social justice means giving each individual what he/she deserves, the distribution of financial benefits in the society, and equal provision for basic needs (Chaudury, 2003). It is also the egalitarianism in opportunities, i.e., each person has a chance to climb the social ladder.

Figure 1 further provides the two main themes (i.e., *Integrity* and *Social Justice*) and sub-themes developed by the article author while doing the content analysis through manual coding as she concurrently reviews *The Challenge* before crafting the discourse, to be discussed in this article.

THE CHALLENGE (MOHAMAD, 1986): A DISCOURSE STUDY AND ANALYSIS

Written from social-constructionist and ideological approaches, this publication came at the right time when the Malaysian government, headed by Dr.

The Challenge (Mohamad, 1986)
THEMES AND SUB- THEMES
1st level Categories/Themes – • Polemics in Malay culture (I) • Lack of Integrity – Malays not industrious, honest and disciplined (I) • Social justice • Distributive justice – income gaps within ethnic groups (S) • Western ideologies – capitalism, socialism (S) • Malays becoming more materialistic (I) • Emphasis of Islam –*aqidah, ibadah* and *akhlak* (I) • Emphasis on holistic education (S) • Emphasis on ethics and integrity (I)
Second level Categories/Themes and Sub-themes 1. Integrity (1) • Polemics in Malay culture (I) • Lack of Integrity – Malays not industrious, honest and disciplined (I) • Social justice • Malays becoming more materialistic (I) • Emphasis of Islam –*aqidah*, *ibadah* and *akhlak* (I) • Emphasis on ethics and integrity (I) 2. Social Justice (S) • Distributive justice – income gaps within ethnic groups (S) • Western ideologies – capitalism, socialism (S) • Emphasis on holistic education (S)

Figure 1 *The Challenge*: Categorisation of Contents by Themes and Sub-Themes

Mahathir himself as the fourth prime minister, was aggressively promoting economic development within the realms of industrialisation while globalisation is introduced in the international trading arena. Mahathir's main objective and motivation for this piece of work remain the same as his earlier controversial masterpiece, *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) i.e., to drive the Malay ethnic group to realise the need to self-improve and stand up to compete with the other ethnic groups in Malaysia, in an ever-challenging and competitive pluralistic environment.

Interestingly, compared to *The Malay Dilemma* that has openly deliberated and somewhat criticised the traditional Malay cultural practices such as *adat, The Challenge* has incorporated Islamic elements while contextualising Malay-related issues. It sees the notion of morality in the 1950s and 60s, being consolidated with further emphasis on Islam as not only a religion of the Malays but a way of life.

Dr. Mahathir strongly views "The Quran promised the eternal survival of Islam but this promise does not extend to Muslims" (Mohamad, 1984; Somun, 2003). His consciousness and thoughts on various aspects of Islam are present and well noted in different occasions, conferences, and books, especially in *The Challenge* (Somun, 2003, pp.159). These developments may imply Mahathir's seriousness in adopting Islamic ethics to resolve societal issues (including Malay issues) in Malaysia.

The Challenge begins with an introduction to polemics (i.e., arguments or debates including discourses) as a concept associated with the Malay tradition. Dr. Mahathir then rationalises the extent of its benefits and concludes that polemics is unproductive since there is no common understanding after debates and in worse situations, it will lead to confusion among the society members. Based on his observations too, in the history of the Malays, many constructive ideas remain unimplemented even after heated discussions. The habit of entering into polemics has become so much a part of the Malay culture that some write books for launching a series of polemics (Mohamad, 1986, pp.1).

Dr. Mahathir then highlighted that while good values such as being industrious, honest and disciplined are highly regarded and recognised within civil society, they are not necessarily practiced by the Malays. The Malays are also viewed more often as followers; they are waiting for others to practice before they display such demeanour. For example, the Malays recognise that industry is desirable but they are not industrious. Consequently, Dr. Mahathir views that as a result of the lack of practice of such noble values, the nation eventually may become backward. He also well recognises that God will not change the fate of a nation unless the nation itself strives for improvement (Mohamad, 1986, pp.3). He calls for a change of mindset and emulation of virtues among society members to be a productive nation. This is related to Islamic teachings for the sustenance of societal progress and wellbeing. The Quran reveals,

> *"For him are watchers (angels) in succession, before him and behind him. They guard him by the Command of Allah. Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change that which is in their hearts. And when Allah desires to punish a people, then there is no turning back to it, and they have no one besides Him to help them."*
>
> *(The Quran: Surah Ar Ra'ad, Verse 11)*

The text continues with a chapter entitled "The Poor are Poorer, the Rich Richer!" with deeply rooted discussions on two distinctive economic systems; capitalism versus socialism to link its implementation within Malaysia's mixed economic system and nation-building agendas. Materialism, as an ideology is introduced as a direct western thought and a system of values that fanatically focuses on material being as the basis of life. This further suggests that spiritual values are compromised; hence they have no place in human society.

Interestingly, Dr. Mahathir well-highlighted that materialism has taken root among the Muslims in Malaysia, especially the younger generation. They have more often used material criteria to measure the value placed on spirituality i.e., "the material value given to the work of calling for spirituality or to activities with elements of spirituality" (Mohamad, 1986, pp.4). In a situation where materialism influences life, it is hardly surprising that materialistic values are used to control the movements and activities of the society. Members regard wealth accumulation as the very foundation of human contentment and happiness. It follows that

the more wealth one accumulates, the greater will be his/her happiness or vice versa.

These features are undoubtedly supporting capitalism as an economic system or rather the ideology that is largely promoted in the West as opposed to socialism which promotes state ownership of the nation's resources at its extreme to redistribute property/ material wealth equally among the society members for social justice.

Conversely, while religion is "silent" or rather accepted as a human right in capitalistic environments, the socialists, in totality and at its extreme, disregard religion as important in human life. They openly condemn religion and deny the existence of God. Such beliefs are certainly against Islam although the socialists have attempted to argue that their concepts of brotherhood and equality are compatible with Islamic principles.

While socialism claims that there will be a redistribution of resources among the society members, in reality, according to Dr. Mahathir, the rich will be richer and the poor poorer. Faced with the problem of financing public services, the state is forced to impose taxes on all irrespective of income levels. Even the low-income workers have to pay income taxes. Such government actions will result in low real incomes and insufficiency among the underprivileged groups.

In fact, in his vision, Dr. Mahathir highlighted that apart from these problems and the failure of the socialist state to maintain equality in people's incomes, there are two limitations in the system:

1. the materialistic values completely control people's minds and influence every move made by society or the individual. Thus, spirituality is ultimately destroyed by the total craving and devotion to materialism;
2. there is an easier and clearer deviation towards the communist ideology. In a society that is influenced by socialism, materialistic criteria control everything (Mohamad, 1986, pp.7) and questions of poverty and wealth are of perennial interest.

Comparisons between the rich and the poor will persist and even if wealth may be acquired, income differences between these two classes will continue to widen, hence, leading to discontent and social injustice. The slogan, "the poor are poorer, the rich richer" will always be cried among the masses. Thus, the community can never feel contented (Mohamad, 1986, pp.7) within a socialist system.

However, in Malaysia, while recognising Islam as the main religion and the nation implementing a mixed economic system, pure socialist features are unlikely to be adopted. Dr. Mahathir advocates and seemingly reassures that the poor are unlikely to be poorer. The policy of imposing income tax only to the high-income groups is right and fair (Mohamad, 1986, pp.10). Through this policy, those with business acumen will accumulate wealth and pay higher taxes. The government will then use these revenues to spend and support the underprivileged through affirmative actions for social justice. "In consequence, not only is the gap narrowed between the rich and the poor, but everybody can enjoy the benefits of communal life and the products of natural resources and human ingenuity i.e., all of God's beneficence. The richer a sector of society becomes, the greater are the benefits gained by other sectors that are less fortunate" (Mohamad, 1986, pp.10) and social justice will be realised.

Dr. Mahathir convincingly proceeded in his text to acknowledge that moderation, as a virtue, is preached in Islam and a balance between spirituality and materialism is essential for ultimate happiness (Mohamad, 1986, pp.14) of society members. Moderation is dependent on rational control of extremist values and attitudes, be it in terms of materialism or spiritualism. The values and slogans of socialists and communists, which solely focus on materialism as an ideology, fulfilling the unlimited desires of humans, therefore have no place in an Islamic society.

Nevertheless, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (1986) has critically acknowledged that the trend of these times (i.e., in the mid-1980s) is more towards fulfilling the material being rather than the spiritual being among individuals. Indeed, Dr. Mahathir views that the materialistic trends are bad for human development and continues advocating that "the middle path is the right one" by citing a Quranic verse,

"And be moderate in thy pace and soften thy voice. Truly the ugliest of voices is the voice of the ass."
(The Quran: Surah Lukman, Verse 19)

Dr. Mahathir went on to objectively justify that Islam is not against wealth accumulation. However, it preaches the rich to help the poor through the *zakat* system, a God-made rule; the third pillar of Islam. On the same note, the society is responsible for reducing any income/wealth imbalance found within it to do away with the unfavourable slogan, "the rich become richer and the poor become poorer" to promote social justice and fairness.

Next, Dr. Mahathir continues with a topic, "The Educational Dilemma," introducing the famous Quranic verse,

"Read in the name of thy God who created; created man out of a clot of congealed blood. Read and thy God is Most Bountiful. He who taught with the pen (writing and reading), taught man that which he knew not."
(The Quran: Surah Al 'Alaq, Verses 1-5)

These were the first verses of the Holy Quran, revealed and read by Prophet Muhammad *(saw)*. They have clearly stated that reading is propagated in Islam, indicating the pertinent role of education and the spread of knowledge to develop holistic and respectable Islamic personalities.

In his comprehensive historical account of how Islam brings the glory of knowledge to human civilisation (i.e., highlighting the developments and progress in West Asia, North Africa, East Europe, Central Asia, and South Asia), Dr. Mahathir expounds that the Malays have yet to be certain of the role that education can play and the attitude they should take towards it (Mohamad, 1986, pp.18). There are still fears among them that the new materialistic values may replace spiritual ones as a result of the secular western education which has its roots in the history of the development of systematic, large-scale education of Malaysia, being once a British colony. On the other hand, the Malays are worried that without education, they would be left behind and the income gap between them and other communities will widen.

Dr. Mahathir views that the educational knowledge provided by the Arab and Indian Muslims when the Malays first embraced Islam was confined to *aqidah* (i.e., creed, faith, or belief). It is also a branch of Islamic studies describing the beliefs of the Islamic faith) and *ibadah* (i.e., principles and rituals of worship). These are appropriate and rightful as the Malays must acquire a thorough understanding of their new religion and shed as much as possible their old beliefs (i.e., animism and Hinduism). The teaching of *aqidah* and *ibadah* is vital and should remain always so that the old animistic beliefs, which have been deeply rooted in Malay culture before Islam will not take control of the Malay mind (Mohamad, 1986, pp.19). However, he continued to justify that the Malays have to expand their horizons on Islamic teachings. Since education of the Malays on embracing Islam was virtually confined to *aqidah, ibadah, akhlak* (i.e., ethics and morality), and the like, other areas of knowledge which have been explored and pioneered by Islamic writers, scientists and mathematicians were not propagated among the Malays.

Without doubt, the Islamisation by the Arabs brought growth and greatness which spread to the Turks, the Slavs, the Persians, the Indians and the Malays in the East, and the Berbers, the Egyptians and the Europeans in the West, in line with the Prophet's propagation that it is a religion for the humankind till the end of time. However, although Islam is a system of life that is wide, holistic, and all-encompassing for man's happiness in this world and the hereafter, this has not been manifested within the Malay life after their Islamisation. Since the Islamisation of the Malays was confined to *aqidah, ibadah, akhlak,* and the like, the greatness of Islam was not reflected in the development of the Malays after embracing it, nor did it spread beyond them (Mohamad, 1986, pp.20). This is an area for improvement within the value systems of the Malay Muslims.

Next, there needs to be a change of perspective on how education is viewed by the Malays themselves. Education other than the "religious" is regarded merely as a means of earning a living in the world for economic value. The emphasis on the economic value of education has become so strong that there is pressure to decide the economic value of even "religious" education (Mohamad, 1986, pp.37). Certainly, those who look at religious knowledge (i.e., the fields of *aqidah* and *ibadah*) as economic tools

will benefit neither in their religion nor their society. Religious knowledge is for an individual's spiritual development, hence, to regard religious knowledge as a source of income may mean that material values have superseded spiritual ones. In other words, this may indicate that religious knowledge has not succeeded in forming the desired spiritual values. However, society must appreciate a person's religious knowledge if such apprehension results in the inculcation of good values within the society.

Dr. Mahathir then re-emphasises the usage of *Bahasa Malaysia* as the national language of Malaysia and the main medium of instruction at schools and higher learning institutions. However, English remains the second communication language critical for international deals, hence, students have to master both languages to be competitive. He even cautioned the Malay students not to refuse to learn English as a second language to ensure that the Malays will not be adversely affected in the competitive labour market, which now sees the emergence of foreign corporations employing the local school leavers and graduates. Learning English does not mean that the mother tongue/national language *(i.e., Bahasa Malaysia)* is side-lined. Indeed, English remains the *lingua franca* of the world within a global environment so students are left with no choice but to master this language to secure employment opportunities.

This chapter ends with a discussion on the educational dilemma of the Malays which revolves around questions of religion, choice of field or stream of studies (for example the sciences, arts, etc.), and the problem of language. Dr. Mahathir has courageously highlighted that these dilemmas are imaginary as they are based on misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and faulty logic (Mohamad, 1986, pp.43). He also cautions that these dilemmas will be an obstacle to progress, not to mention the religious integrity of the Malays unless they are analysed right down to the roots and fundamentals. Dr. Mahathir calls for the Malays to overcome these dilemmas from invading and subverting their minds to ensure that they move forward and not lag behind the times or even cease to be people with their own identity (Mohamad, 1986, pp.43).

Interestingly, similar to *The Malay Dilemma* (refer to Chapter 9), *The Challenge* has also included a chapter to deliberate on Malay values; "A System of Values and the Malays" (Mohamad, 1970, Refer Chapter 7). Such writings explicitly portray Dr. Mahathir's highly disciplined character and deep concern for the inculcation of good values within societal contexts. Dr. Mahathir rightly recognises that the existence of human society and civilisation is rooted in a system of values. Consequently, a society's level of advancement or backwardness is determined by its system of values. Therefore, a change in the system of values means a change in the state of the society (Mohamad, 1986, pp.103); a pertinent point Dr. Mahathir advocated in *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) too.

Considering its importance, a society must be vigilant and prudent of its value system and be aware of the changes that may form threats to the established value systems. Those with the training and authority within the society must play significant roles in shaping new values and substituting them with the old ones. Dr. Mahathir believes that the freedom to change at individuals' whims and fancies will lead to undesirable consequences (Mohamad, 1986 pp.103).

Interestingly, Dr. Mahathir opines that Malay values are changing without systematic study and proper guidance. Anybody can attack the current system and set up new values, resulting in senseless conflict and confusion. Given this, he draws upon the Malays to realise this and think through the right steps, to ensure that such a vital and potent tool as a system of values be properly emulated for the benefit of the Malay community. Acknowledging that the Malays in the age of instant communication cannot isolate themselves from other systems, Dr. Mahathir calls for the Malays to enhance their consciousness to internalise ethics and integrity.

The Challenge continues with equally provocative chapters (i.e., very much related to the Malays) to deliberate on spirituality and the modern challenge, nationalisation of foreign industries, corruption, UMNO and unity, and finally *quo vadis* Malaysia. The *Corruption* chapter (Mohamad, 1986, Chapter 12, pp. 140-153) deserves a special mention and analysis. Dr. Mahathir openly views that corruption, simply understood as "giving something to someone with power so that he will abuse his power and act favouring the giver", as a

sinful crime. Although a society accepts the fact that corruption cannot be erased, it cannot also be allowed to become a common practice. However, recognising corruption as wrongful and condemning it as a sinful act is not enough. Corruption no longer needs to be kept a secret (Mohamad, 1986, pp.148). Truth demands corruption to be revealed; be it through whistleblowing and legal actions to uphold social justice although the fight against corruption has its dilemma (Ali and Mohd Ali, 2017a; Ali and Sulam, 2017b; Ali, 2017c). Quoting Dr. Mahathir's wise words, "It does not only stem from the fact that some acts said to be corrupt are not so; there is also the need to give powers to certain quarters to stamp out corruption. These are substantial powers and like other powers, can be abused" (Mohamad, 1986, pp.151).

Aptly, Dr. Mahathir has strongly advocated that what is most important and effective is the system of values of a society that has a strong commitment to consciously eradicate corruption, and knowingly distinguish it as a sin; a wrongful act that has numerous negative consequences on the society at large. To quote, "It is vital to recognise corruption not just as a part of the culture but a disease with definite consequences. Stamping corruption needs honesty" (Mohamad, 1986, pp.153). His views on the establishment of an effective value system to combat corruption seem to complement Alatas's viewpoints in *The Sociology of Corruption* (1975).

The Challenge well acknowledges that the problems faced by Malaysia in the 1980s and onwards have increased manifold over those of early post-independence years. Many nations of the world that gained their independence together with Malaysia have broken up or changed in character. Some have become stooges of foreign powers. Quoting from the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1987), on heritage and materialism versus spiritualism, traditions, and values, "*The common ground of both Capitalism and Socialism is a materialistic view of life and being. Materialism in its war with the Spirit has taken on many forms; some have promoted its goals with great subtlety, whilst others have done so with an alarming lack of subtlety, but all have added, in greater or lesser measure, to the growing misery of Mankind. The forms which have done the most damage in our time may be enumerated as Freemasonry, Liberalism, Nihilism, Capitalism, Socialism, Marxism, Imperialism, Anarchism, Modernism, and the New Age.*"

Dr. Mahathir raised a few questions before concluding his text. Will Malaysia follow the trend of other nations which have broken up and changed their character? Will a democratic government prove too weak to overcome the problems mentioned above, and will it be replaced by a dictatorship? Will Malaysia gradually become paralysed and finally disintegrate because of its inability to solve its prevailing problems? Or will Malaysia, after realising all these constraints, decide as a society to cooperate and support the leaders and work side by side to preserve the integrity and sovereignty of the nation within a pluralistic society? If so, Malaysia will be a successful and progressive multiracial nation in the true sense.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSES IN SUMMARY

As a Malay elite and intelligentsia, Dr. Mahathir has critically manifested through his publication, *The Challenge* (1986) ethics, values, and concerns at the time when the Malaysian economy was steadily transforming from an agricultural to a manufacturing/industrial nation from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s onwards.

During these periods too, the Malays, a majority from the rural poor agricultural family background were changing to be public and private sector employees as well as business people through strong government support. The *Melayu Baru* was emerging and "in the making" as an outcome of the New Economic Policy (NEP-1970-1990). Although the middle class educated Malays/*Melayu Baru* emerged in the 1980s, by the end of the New Economic Policy (1970-90) implementation, they became significant and assumed high-income jobs and filled professional positions, mainly in the public sector (Embong, 1996). (Note: The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1970 when the late Tun Abdul Razak was the Prime Minister. It is an affirmative action to redistribute wealth accumulation for social justice. Its implementation was realised until 1990 with two-prong objectives:

1. To reduce and eradicate poverty among Malaysians irrespective of race;

2. To restructure the society to eliminate the identification of race according to economic functions).

While the Malays were progressing (as described above), Dr. Mahathir, in his socio-economic and political consciousness at the onset of globalisation, has again openly provoked and awakened the "docile and happy go lucky" Malays (as elaborated in the *Malay Dilemma* (1970)) to consciously and conscientiously step up and be competitive. Worried about his ethnic group from being "displaced" in their homeland, Dr. Mahathir has hence shown his moral concern to uphold social justice (in terms of equality of allocation and distribution of wealth among ethnic groups in Malaysia) within an emerging competitive global environment that supports the survival of the fittest.

This "outcry" message came when the nation was focusing on industrialisation, characterised by the setup of many public institutions to support business and entrepreneurial development. The Malays were given special privileges including educational sponsorships and business opportunities through the Bumiputra Industrial Commercial Community (BICC) and an affirmative government policy for all businesses to comply, i.e., to recruit at least 30% *Bumiputera* employees during the NEP implementation. Indeed, these initiatives have been undertaken to elevate their socio-economic status since they are the poorest ethnic group (compared with the Chinese and Indians), despite being "the son of the soil", their strong political influence and majority participation in the Malaysian civil service sector.

In sum, institutional support was made accessible for the Malays to capitalise on the available opportunities, all within the NEP (1970-1990) agendas to promote social justice. Realising the "backwardness" of his ethnic group, Dr. Mahathir has transparently urged the Malays to change their mindsets by being assertive, courageous, and emulating positive ethical values. In addition, he even advocates for them to internalise optimism/high spirits to be productive, educated, knowledgeable, and progressive Muslims. These ambitious thoughts also resonate, to a large extent, the views highlighted in Senu Abdul Rahman's edited publication, *Revolusi Mental* (1973).

Interestingly, while deliberating on the future survival of his ethnic group within competitive global environments, Dr. Mahathir has also deliberated on corruption as a contemporary challenging issue facing the nation. His serious thoughts complement Syed Hussin Alatas's works in the *Sociology of Corruption* (1975), i.e., to develop a sense of awareness and conscience among the Malay community, in particular, and Malaysians at large, that corruption is unethical from justice principles, what more from Islamic religious teachings. Hence, corruption cannot be left to breed within the fabric of a competitive society although realistically, it is impossible to erase it (Ali, 2017a; Ali and Mohd Ali, 2017b).

Fighting against corruption is critical; what more to uphold integrity, not to mention a stronghold to an established value system that promotes morality and ethics, as propagated in Vision 2020. Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (1986) further highlighted the need to combat corruption as a sinful crime by giving authority and power to appointed institutions such as The Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) to act accordingly, following the rules of law. His said recommendation is in addition to his constant reverberation for the Malays to uphold the code of ethics and value system, as the nation faces another wave of challenge, i.e., globalisation.

The Challenge (1986) vehemently reflects Dr. Mahathir's wishful thoughts and aspirations to strengthen the Malay community's Islamic worldview, ethics, and values while secularism (i.e., a western ideology that promotes the separation between worldly affairs and religion) has somewhat been driven in a global environment supporting Capitalism. Consequently, Dr. Mahathir has attempted to build consciousness among the Malays that materialism and the craving for wealth accumulation may lead to greed and sinful actions. Therefore, the virtue of moderation should be adopted as a life principle, following Islamic religious teachings. Only by striking an equilibrium between an interest in spiritual and secular aspects, can the Malays hope to face and overcome the conflicting forces and challenges of the modern world (Goodreads, 2018).

Dr. Mahathir has also proliferated on income equality and distribution issues by comparing the features of two distinct man-made economic systems, Capitalism

and Socialism. While Capitalism drives competition between individuals and promotes freedom in wealth accumulation, (supporting justice principles in general), Socialism restricts them through government interference, being the powerful sole owner of the nation's resources.

The established structured progressive income tax system appropriately requires the rich to contribute more to the national revenue by paying higher taxes for economic development and redistribution of income to the underprivileged. In a mixed system, practiced in Malaysia, the government collects taxes from the rich and redistributes them to the poor as subsidies and social benefits to promote social justice.

Likewise, Islam strongly advocates the rich to help the poor through almsgiving/*zakat* payments as well as charity. Dr. Mahathir has assured that the poor will not become poorer since they will receive support through *zakat*. Malaysia, being an Islamic nation, may institutionalise and expand the *zakat* system with professionalism, as a primary noble initiative to support the underprivileged. Collective funds from the rich are efficiently redistributed to the poor and other eligible groups (i.e., the 8 "asnafs") by the state authorities, with integrity and accountability, to elevate their income status, as part and parcel of the *Syariah* system.

The Challenge, much similar in approach with *The Malay Dilemma (1970),* has also transparently provoked the thinking process and living that are vying for supremacy in the modern world in general, and Malaysia's Malay community in particular. With directness, Dr. Mahathir has challenged fallacies and exposed distortions concerning Islam, communism/socialism, freedom and discipline, and the concerns of this world and the next. Dr. Mahathir has dissected Islamic issues within the social evolvement and reformation of the Malays at the time when free-market/capitalistic features were aggressively promoted through globalisation.

In a nutshell, Dr. Mahathir further calls for value reformation among the society members, particularly the Malaysian Malay Muslims by internalising the virtue of integrity and social justice principles, as Malaysia progresses within competitive global environments, facilitated by the Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a book publication, *The Challenge* is thought-provoking and is of special interest in the 1980s till 2000; when Malaysia was industrialising and globalisation was aggressively promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Dr. Mahathir's advocated ideas in the text are still relevant today.

As a prime minister then, he was at the helm of a nation striving for racial balance and religious sanity. Always with an eye for the future, Dr. Mahathir expounds on the need for a new system of values, ethics, and attitudes which the Malays, (the indigenous/*Bumiputera* group and population majority of Malaysia) must adopt, in the country's quest to become a developed nation and realise Vision 2020, an aspiration unveiled by Dr. Mahathir himself in 1991. While attempting to transform the characters and mindsets of the Malays, in the making of the *Melayu Baru* of the 1970s, 1980s through the 1990s, *The Challenge* has also drummed into the Malay Muslims that worldly affairs and the hereafter are equally important for societal progress. Nevertheless, religious orders must not be compromised, by all means, being Islamic believers and Muslims of faith.

The resurgence of Islamic thought, practice, and internalisation through knowledge-seeking is elaborated in this text. The importance of knowledge acquisition through education has been emphasised to drive civilisation within a progressive society by recalling the glorious days of Islam during the caliphates' times while upholding the *Syariah* principles; what more a stronghold to an established value system that promotes morality and ethics (i.e., *adab* and *akhlaq*). Relating to social justice, Dr. Mahathir has also transparently discussed income equality and distribution by highlighting the limitations of different economic systems and recognised the *zakat* system as a noble initiative to help the underprivileged, following the Syariah principles of Islam.

However, "For anyone who understood the essence of modernism based on and originating in the

secularising and humanistic tendencies of the European Renaissance, it was easy to detect the confrontation that was already taking place between traditional and modern elements in the Islamic world" (Nasr, 1990; Nasr, 1993).

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