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# The Post September 11<sup>th</sup> Politics of Globalism, Localism and the Malaysian State

Peter Kell

## Abstract

This paper explores a series of key dilemmas associated with the nation-state project in Malaysia and the threats to this project posed by elements of the neo-liberal globalisation in the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> period (S11). This post S11 period created a series of opportunities and dilemmas for the Malaysian state and was also characterised by a series of tensions as domestic political developments clashed with ambitions towards embracing neo-liberal globalisation. Political struggles featured attempts by the government parties to balance the tensions and between longstanding developmental modernist policies designed to position Malaysia and a simultaneous process of maintaining a commitment to the progressive Islamisation of everyday life in Malaysia. This paper discusses these issues in the context of observing the social, cultural and political tensions around the teaching of English and policies that proposed the teaching of science and mathematics in Malaysian schools and universities.

## Introduction

This paper explores a series of key dilemmas associated with the nation-state project in Malaysia and the threats to this project posed by elements of the neo-liberal globalism in the post September 11<sup>th</sup> period (S11). This post S11 period created a series of opportunities and dilemmas for the Malaysian state and was also characterised by a series of the changing of leadership as the long standing Prime Minister, Dr Mohammad Mahathir, relinquished the leadership of the nation as well as the ruling party, the Barisan Nasional (BN). It was also typified by fierce political competition between the ruling Barisan Nasional and the opposition Islamic Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS) in the prelude of the 2004 general election and a series of unforeseen by-elections in the state of Kedah.

These electoral struggles featured attempts by the government parties to balance the tensions and dilemmas between longstanding developmental modernist policies designed to position Malaysia as an active participant in the neo-liberal global market and a simultaneous process of maintaining a commitment to the progressive Islamisation of everyday life in Malaysia. This paper discusses these issues in the context of observing the social, cultural and political tensions associated with globalisation in the post S11 environment, particularly in a multiracial, multicultural and multilingual country as Malaysia. The paper explores these tensions through an analysis of the introduction of policies that proposed the teaching of science and mathematics in Malaysian schools.

The paper comprises of observations and data collected from English media in Malaysia during mid 2002 when many of these events occurred.

## Dilemmas and Opportunities: Malaysia Response to regional and Global Instability

The post-September 11<sup>th</sup> environment has concurrently re-shaped and re-defined the politics of the state in the South East Asian region as the major powers have been forced to reengage with the region.

The United States of America (US) and Australia had failed to note the extent to which terrorism had emerged as part of the South Asia political landscape. The region has already been subjected

to periodic acts of terrorism. Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines have during the period 1999-2001 been characterised by cyclic attacks, localised insurrection and movements calling for separatist Islamic states. Regional incidences have included the assassination of a member of parliament in Malaysia; kidnapping and hostage taking of international tourists from the island of Sidapan in Sabah, Malaysia; period bombing and communal violence in the Molukas, Sulawesi and Kalimantan in Indonesia and bombing and assassinations by the Abu Sayaf in the Philippines.

These incidents all pre-date both September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on New York and October 12<sup>th</sup> 2002 Bali bombings which had the effect of heightening the awareness of the American and Australian people and their governments of the growth of ultra-radical movements in the South East Asian region. Rather than the issue of terrorism being a Middle Eastern problem the centre of activity quickly became focussed on the South East Asian Region.

The heightened urgency and reordered priorities led to a more aggressive and interventionist American and Australian foreign policy in the post S11 period and this subsequently created dilemmas and opportunities for governments in South East Asia.

Relations with the previous Clinton administration had previously been tense around the issue of human rights. The trial and gaoling of Anwar Ibrahim the former Deputy Prime Minister and the use of the Internal Security Act with indeterminate detention without trial had identified Malaysia in the Clinton administration's eyes as a country with a poor human rights record.

In the wake of S11, Dr Mahathir was able to realign Malaysia with the George Bush's "global war against terrorism" even though there was limited support for US foreign policy. Recognising the importance for a middle ranked power in the region to harness the support of the US, Dr Mahathir soon after the S11 attacks declared Malaysia an "Islamic state" against terrorism (Mahathir, 2002). It was a statement that was criticised as contradicted the multicultural intent of the constitution of Malaysia and challenged the historic consensus around the multiracial state that existed since independence in 1957. Opposition to attempts to create a perception of a mono-religious state emerged from elements in the Chinese community and signalled their opposition through the creation of the "29.9" movement to commemorate the day on which the statement that Malaysia was an Islamic state was made.

The PAS party was ambiguous and non-committal in its response to the attacks on New York. Seizing on this opportunity, the government detained leading figures in the PAS party and making arrests under the ISA provisions arguing that they were the equivalence of a "Malay Taliban" (Ahmad, 2002). In addition the government was able to portray many figures in the PAS movement as ultra-radical fundamentalists and the mosques as hot beds of dissent to justify intervention in the appointment of religious leaders and the closure of schools run by the mosques. The government was also able to justify the extension of the Internal Security Act (ISA) by pointing out that some of the planning for both S11 and the bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen was conducted in Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia's new found ally status with the US was reaffirmed with the location of an international centre against terrorism in Kuala Lumpur and, Malaysia and the United States enjoyed a period of unusual harmony in international relations. This "honeymoon" diminished with the intervention in Afghanistan in 2002 and sank further with the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Little attention has been paid to the emergent tensions and dilemmas as values and ideas about the nation-state clash with ideologies of globalisation. Much less attention has been directed to questions about how these tensions impact on the politics of the state and how governments respond to the contradictions of globalisation and localism.

## The State and Neo-liberalism: Perspectives on Globalisation.

The most common view of globalisation is the orthodox neo-liberal view that sees the globe as a seamless global market where the movement of goods, services, finances and labour is a trans-national phenomenon. This orthodox neo-liberal interpretation of globalisation assumes a preparedness of governments to meet the demands for more competitive and efficient, and open economies through radical reform measures. These economies exhibit high levels of system reform that includes the deregulation of financial and labor markets, the reduction of the state/public sector while increasing incentives for private investment and export growth by business (Falk, 1999).

This form of "top down" globalisation has an impact on education and training in two ways. First, substantial economic restructuring that has resulted in global dispossession, unemployment and poverty is a trend that identifies education as a tool in alleviating poverty and re-skilling communities across the globe to participate in the new global economy. This economic developmental view of higher education is posited on traditional theories of human capital theory. Secondly the global dimension of economic activity has also spawned a global response to education beyond the nation state (Burbules and Torres, 2000; Currei and Newson, 1998; Kell, 2000; Lingard and Rizvi, 2000).

Increasing this international marketisation is accompanied by the emergence of supra-state trade blocs such as the European Union and APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Community) in close collaboration with peak economic organisations such as the economic group of eight, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the WTO (World Trade Organisation). Increasingly education is utilized to underpin the labour requirements of these trade blocs as well being subject to strong influence by the emerging trans-national markets in education (Falk, 1999; Kell, 2001; Morley and Robins, 1995).

Another view of globalisation suggests an erosion of the power and influence of the nation-state has accompanied globalisation. This view suggests a homogenising effect accompanying globalisation that is seen as threatening authentic aspects of localism. Many of the reactions to globalisation are simply futile attempts to defend mono-ethnic, mono-lingual and mono-religious state structures in the face of growing complexity and diversity (Beck, 1999). This response to globalisation has however spawned hyper-nationalistic responses that reify and valorised notions of authentic localism. Many of these responses have been hyper nationalistic responses based on racism, divisive "wedge" politics and a culture of blame (Singh, Kell & Pandian, 2002). These developments are damaging in countries such as Malaysia and Australia that are characterized by ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity.

University educators have a particularly problematic positioning in this, as traditionally they been one of the most influential state projects in affirming the identity of nation state projects. However, globalisation is not something that should be passively accepted and that globalisation offers new opportunities for activism but also enables new forms of inclusion that enable notions of "otherness" to be challenged (Kell, Shore & Singh, 2004). These opportunities emerge from a third view of globalisation that influences the issues of state explored in this paper (Singh, 2001).

The third view incorporates a more diverse and complex set of relationships between the local and the global. This global/local perspective explores how globalisation is interpreted within the local community and accommodates a diversity of experiences of, and views about globalisation. It also critiques neo-liberal assumptions of globalisation that neglect the differential impact of globalisation on various communities. It also accounts for the diversity of responses to globalisation on the basis of location, class, race and gender. In addition it has the capacity to respond to the

complexity of diasporic communities and how communal bonds around nationalism and civic citizenship are nurtured, formed and reshaped. It also situates language, culture and education at the centre of activity rather than at the periphery of meaning (Beck, 1999; Kell et al, 2004; Morley and Robins, 1995; Pennycook, 1998 & 2000; Ridge, 2000).

The final perspective on globalisation in linking the local and the global enables a broader exploration of the dynamics of the state and the impact on state policy of both global trends and the social and cultural context of the state. This chapter seeks to use this global local perspective to analyse the policy settings associated with the introduction of English as a medium of instruction.

### **Maintaining the State: Balancing the Tensions of Globalisation and Localisation.**

The congruence with the neo-liberal version of globalisation is evident in the Malaysian government's ambitious five-year planning cycle and 2020 vision for the Malaysian state. This policy documents aligns Malaysia with the neo-liberal western variant of globalisation and this has seen an emphasis on developmental economics with a strong relationship between continued economic growth, prosperity and political stability (Gomez and Jomo, 1999; Kell, 2004).

In Malaysia there has been a planned policy shift from primary industries such as tin, rubber, palm oil and timber to a manufacturing based economy underpinned by significant petroleum reserves. The Malaysian government 2020 vision sees a further shift from Malaysia's status as a "P" economy based on production to a "K" society where knowledge and innovation underpins economic development. A major part of this move to a "K" economy has been an emphasis on developing capabilities and capacities in information and computer technology. This variant of globalisation carries with it a strong emphasis on nation-state building as pre-requisite for participation in a world economy with infrastructure development such as roads, schools, ports being directed to enhancing Malaysia's competitiveness.

To partly fulfil these aims, the Malaysian government embarked on ambitious projects which included the development of a Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) between Port Klang and Kuala Lumpur, a super computer precinct called Cyberjaya close to the administrative centre of Kuala Lumpur and a Multimedia University to develop research and training opportunities in ICT. Aligned with this were reforms to schools through a "smart schools" program that designated schools to operate teaching and learning through ICT. This was also an attempt to develop an innovative constructivist approach to curriculum as an alternative to the exam dependent structure of the Malaysian education system and was promoted as enabling the creativity that the government saw as necessary to participate in the western variant of globalisation (Singh, Kell & Pandian, 2000).

This developmentalism is also accompanied by a modernist discourse that is harnessed on occasions to portray opposition to the government's aims as anti-modernist, lacking in patriotism and a threat to growth and stability through unnecessary divisiveness. Much of the sustaining rhetoric of developmentalism is linked to the advancement of the Malay people who are estimated at 59% of the population. There is also a large Chinese population estimated at 32% and an Indian community consisting of 9% that makes Malaysia one of the most ethnically diverse in Asia (Crystal, 1998).

The patterns of colonial rule conducted by the British administration saw much of the economic benefits remain in the urban areas of the former British Straits Settlement of Malacca, Penang, Singapore and the states surrounding Kuala Lumpur such as Selangor, Perak and Negri Sembilan. These areas with larger Chinese and Indian populations were directed at servicing the economic and administrative needs of the British Raj and were relatively well placed at the

time of Independence in 1957. On the contrary the Sultanates on the Peninsula, such as Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah were largely populated by rural Malays in regional areas that maintained a level of autonomy from the British. This autonomy however also contributed to patterns of differentiated economic development that left some rural Malays at the bottom end of the socio-economic ladder at the time of independence. When Malaysia was formed in 1963 the peninsula states integrated with Sabah (formerly British North Borneo) and Sarawak and these areas on the Island of Borneo showed evidence of similar under development.

Much of the government's economic policy since the early 1970s has been directed to redressing this historic imbalance. The turning point has been recognised as May 1969 when riots in Kuala Lumpur prompted a policy of preference in employment, finance, education and property provisions to Malays or "bumiputra" (sons of the soil). This preferential treatment was the central platform of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and was directed to the economic, social and cultural revival of the Malay people. The New Economic Policy required recognition of this special status by Chinese and Indians and this has been conceded with minor modifications, as the main economic policy instrument of the Malaysian government (Gomez and Jomo, 1999).

While the NEP has been attributed with providing the social stability by moderating inequalities as a foundation for economic growth there has been growing evidence of differential economic opportunities within ethnic communities, particularly between rural and urban Malays. These growing inequalities, can be partly attributed to the differentiated effects of globalisation that has created the conditions which have eroded the political unity of the Malay community, spawned calls for a democratic reform (*reformasi*), revitalised Islamic opposition parties and has prompted challenges to Malaysia's claims to being a secular state. The division was also exacerbated by the tensions around differential views about globalisation and the conceptualisation of Malaysia as an Islamic nation.

The second form of economic, social and cultural globalisation focuses on the growing Pan-Islam movement. Since the 1979 revolution in Iran, there has been an increasing presence of Islam in the social, political and cultural life of Malaysia (Ghosh and Salleh, 1999). Since independence in 1957, Malaysia has been constitutionally a secular nation in recognition of the ethnic and religious diversity in both West and East Malaysia but there has been strong pressure from elements of the Malay Muslim majority for the introduction of Islamic law.

This has been actively opposed by the coalition Barisan Nasional government which comprises of Malays; United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), Chinese; Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Indian; Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) parties. Governing since independence in 1957, this coalition has retained government with strong alliances in business, the media and in the public-sector mechanisms of government.

The revival of Islam has occurred since 1979. However, its recognition as a major political force did not emerge until several events coincided. These included the 1997 economic crisis that saw retrenchments, wage cuts and reductions in subsidies and support by government that exacerbated existing inequalities between rural and urban Malays. In addition, the trial and imprisonment of Anwar Ibrahim acted as a catalyst for criticism and opposition to the operation of the Malaysian judicial system. Anwar Ibrahim, the former Deputy Prime Minister, was the subject of judiciary and penal processes, which attracted international attention. His imprisonment on corruption and sodomy convictions were seen as highly politicised and a miscarriage of justice outside Malaysia. Internally it also acted as a rallying point for opposition parties to call for reforms to the justice system and political system. The Malaysian government was particularly vulnerable with the hosting of the Commonwealth games in Kuala Lumpur in 1998 and a general election in 1999 creating anxieties for the ruling Barisan Nasional alliance.

The combination of a revived political opposition at a time of economic and political uncertainty resulted in the Government being returned with a reduced majority. The erosion in support in the 1999 elections was principally a split in the Malay vote as support defected from the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) to the opposition PAS party. The non-Muslim opposition parties such as DAP were wiped out off the electoral map and the new re-elected Mahathir government had a challenge in reconnecting with a substantial part of the Malay electorate.

The key dilemmas around attempts to portray Opposition parties as ultra-radicals and aligned with terrorists was summarised in the comments of Abdullah Ahmad writing in the *New Straits Times*

“By pushing PAS to the extremes, they believe they would eventually be pushed in extremis. They seemed to be right, all the way up to the 1999 election. They might be right today, but the scenario has changed. UMNO’s grip on the centre is not as firm as it used to be. Unless the party can merge nationalism, modernism and liberalism with a strong Islamic grounding it could eventually lose out. PAS has carved a position in the Malaysian psyche where it can capitalise mightily on dissatisfaction with UMNO. UMNO represents Islam’s modern and tolerant face and it is in tough competition with PAS’s version of the religion” (Abdullah, 2002 p.10).

In states such as Kelantan and Terengganu where that are state governments led by the Islamic based opposition PAS, Islamic law has been introduced to incorporate both moral and economic life. Many of the initiatives have attracted wide publicity over gender segregation in shops and hotels where swimming pools have been designated on alternate days for men and women. In addition, theatres have been forced to operate with full lighting to prevent “immoral acts” with the result that theatres have closed. These laws had been broadly referred to as the Hudud laws and have introduced controversial religious interpretations around rape, marriage and divorce that have been interpreted as eroding the rights of women in Malaysia (*New Straits Times*, 8 July 2002, p.4).

The Malaysian government was opposed to the introduction of these laws arguing that they undermine the secular nature of the state. In contrast to the state government, the Federal government ordered Federal police not to enforce state based religious laws and this led to a constitutional dilemma. Particularly, when the Terengganu proposed building prisons for Syariah offenders (*New Straits Times*, 28 August 2002, p. 2). While these laws are limited to Muslim majority areas they have been portrayed as archaic and a threat to Malaysia pluralist society even though they have not been applied to non-Muslims.

These potential tensions around role of Islam in the Malaysia state has been depicted, particularly by the government press as simply “regressive localism” and a retreat to pre-modern fundamentalism variations on Islam (Singh et al, 2000). This reading of the social and political order misinterprets the development of an oppositional politics that has emerged as a result of the differential impact of globalisation. The reaction to government policies is not simply fundamentalism in reaction to the growth of western values and norms but also a reaction to the emerging economic inequalities that characterise neo-liberal economics.

In this environment, the internal politics of Malaysia increasingly became a politics of ideological legitimisation with the established UMNO government continuing to promote development oriented and a pluralist multi-religious state as the prime policy framework but increasingly had to be demonstrating its credentials as genuine guardians of the Islamic faith. By mid 2002, these ideological tensions reached a crucial moment as the long serving Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir made a dramatic announcement of retirement at the 2002 UMNO national conference. Although, he was convinced to postpone his retirement until October the following year, the sense of

instability was increased with the sudden death by natural causes of the Opposition PAS leader, Fadzil Noor.

The resulting by-election held in the state of Kedah, previously a stronghold of UMNO but subject to inroads by the PAS opposition, exposed the impact of the ideological struggle in Malaysia. In the campaigns for these elections there were signs that the secular consensus was under attack.

### **Education: An Interaction of Secularism, Localisation and Globalisation.**

The New Economic Policy's preferential clauses to Malays have seen a "communal quota" system applied to university entrance on the basis of ethnicity and race. Until 2001 entry to Malaysian universities was allocated on a ratio of 60% of places to Malays, 40% to Chinese and 10% to Indians. In 2001, this quota system for higher education entry was abolished and a move towards merit-based system introduced. Although, this merit based system was designed to placate Chinese members of the governing coalition in the Malaysian Chinese Association, the outcome saw the status quo maintained with Malay students being guaranteed alternative entry priority through the Kolej Matrikulasi Melayu (Malay Matriculation Colleges) with the main losers of deregulation being Indian background applicants whose participation dropped from 10% to less than 7%.

The higher education quotas have been responsible for the high levels of overseas study by many Malaysians particularly ethnic Chinese and the growth of private higher education in Malaysia since the mid 1990s. An expansion of the private higher education system as a result of the Higher Education Act of 1996, has in effect developed a parallel education system funded by, and catering for, the Chinese community. Countries such as Australia have also been direct beneficiaries of this system with many ethnic Chinese seeking overseas university places in New Zealand, UK, US as well as Australia (Lee, 1999).

Despite these inequalities universities perhaps offered possibilities for communal and racial integration as the school system has been influenced by the segmentation of colonial times and features separate community systems within a national system of schooling. The state national school system is populated by a majority of Malay students and the medium of instruction is Bahasa Malaysia. For the Chinese, schooling operates around a network of Chinese language schools that utilise the national curriculum and also have a strong emphasis on English instruction. The Chinese-schooling system has remained resilient and maintained a high level of independence from what has been seen as the intrusion of the Malaysian government including attempts through the "vision schools" program to cluster national and Chinese schools.

The Indian community, and more particularly, the Tamil community operate communal schools up to the equivalent of high school. The Tamil community schools tend to be located in the poorest districts and Tamil students are amongst the most disadvantaged students in the Malaysian system in both resources and outcomes (Arumugun, 2002). A key aim of the national system is to inculcate values of patriotism (Rukun Negara) and also promote the interests of a secular society. However there are increasing tensions around the development of schooling outside the national system with the establishment of private colleges by the Chinese community. There is also the emergence of Malay religious schools responding to criticisms that the national system was "too secular". Commentator, Johan Jaffar observes that as many as 910,000 Malays students are outside the national system attending private religious schools and that their parents are escaping the secular system that they may have benefited from in the period from independence (Johan, 2002).



This breakdown of the secular nature of schooling and its damaging effect prompted the government to reverse its' previously loose and supportive stance towards a system that allocated a priority toward the growth of private education. Worried about criticisms that the growth of the independent religious schools in Malaysia might spawn a Malaysian equivalent of the Taliban or a student movement like that which emerged from Pakistan and Afghanistan, the government tightened up registration requirements for schools and closed a number of schools (*New Straits Times*, 6 August 2002, p. 4).

This environment required skilled political management in balancing multiple policy discourses and the demands of multiple constituencies. The government has a challenge in maintaining the modernist and developmental policy discourse with a commitment to a neo-liberal globalisation while simultaneously maintaining legitimacy with the Islamic community. This achievement of this policy balance had been a feature of the government of Dr Mahathir.

Part of the Mahathir legacy to Malaysia has also been call for the revival and renaissance of the Malay people which dates back to his book, *The Malay Dilemma* where Dr Mahathir argued that a combination colonialism and certain features of the "self effacing" Malay identity left them vulnerable in modern times to exploitation (Mahathir, 1976 p.116). This message in 2002 was extended to the Islamic faith on a global scale and he was suggesting that Bangsar Melayu (Malay race) was vulnerable and weakened by a combination of eroded values and a failure to capitalise on the gains of the NEP. Dr Mahathir argued that discipline and hard work were needed and criticised the Malays for taking the "easy way out". In the twilight of his career, he lamented the lost opportunities, confessed disappointment and urged a recommitment towards a "correct path". These appeals to the local sentiments of the Malays is a response to the political agenda of PAS and represents a shift where the Qu'ran was invoked as part of UMNO's political philosophy. An example can be seen in responding to the Malaya dilemma in 2002 Mahathir where he states:

The Malays as Muslims can pray and appeal to Allah so that they become successful, but remember that Allah has stated in the Qu'ran that He will not change the fortunes of anyone unless he strives to change it himself (Mahathir, 2002).

This speech foreshadowed a continued Islamisation of the political discourse as well as a period of questioning and critique about many aspects of Malaysian life. Amongst them was the proficiency of the English language and its potential to provide a platform for globalisation. As a former British colony, Malaysia had long prided itself on its strong linguistic heritage in English but in 2002 there was persistent questioning about the proficiency of written and spoken English. This anxiety about proficiency also triggered concern on how this would affect Malaysia's prosperity and global position as a trading nation. From the immediate post-colonial times, English had been shifted from being the national language. As part of the unifying project of the Malaysian nation, Bahasa Malaysia, had been allocated the constitutional status of the national language and had displaced English from its former position as the main language (Pennycook, 1998; Pennycook, 2000).

The issue of English was also clearly identified in the media as enhancing global connections in aligning Malaysia with the US. The *New Straits Times* editorialised at the time of the English Proficiency crisis saying

English has become the global *lingua franca* given many centuries of Anglo Saxon political and economic ascendancy world wide, beginning with British Imperialism, now translated into American Superpower hegemony... And it has bestowed the United States the power if not the right, to determine all our futures (*New Strait Times*, 6 August 2002, p.10).

During 2002, the issue of the proficiency in English became a huge controversy and tended to dominate the news with headlines such as "Poor Grasp Of English Lands Man In Trouble" (*The*

Star, 14 June 2002); "Use of English Will Affect Many Varsity Courses" (*The Star*, 25 July 2002); "The Future Is Spelled Out in English" (*New Straits Times*, 6 August 2002) and "English To Benefit All" (*New Straits Times*, 12 August 2002). In response to this campaign, the government announced that Mathematics and Science would be taught in English (*New Straits Times*, 29 July 2002). This was justified as being necessary by the then Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi (He is now Prime Minister) to improve its usage and ensure Malaysians were not left behind in the Information Age (*New Straits Times*, 29 July 2002).

In a massive commitment of resources, the Malaysian government estimated that some 40,500 teachers would require training to teach Mathematics and Science in English. At the time of the announcement, the government was contesting the two by-elections in Kedah and was in a vulnerable position. Indeed, some in the Barisan Nasional alliances were tested, particularly the teachers unions and Gerakan, one of the Chinese political wings with a strong base in Penang.

Assurances regarding the funding and the continued autonomy of the Chinese School system ensured that these groups supported the government. The dimensions of the task were assisted by a combination of measures such as the re-employment of retired teachers and the production of new learning materials. The assistance from the British Council was instrumental here as this cultural arm of the British foreign office had been positioning itself for some time through teacher training programs and also material development and was working closely with the Malaysian Ministry of Education (Singh, et al, 2002).

The new policies attracted a range of reactions and concerns that had a strong influence on the politics of post S11. Not least was the government opportunity to portray PAS as reactionary and anti-modernist. The government strategist, Datuk Mahadzir Khir predicted that, "I believe PAS will politicise the issue in Pedang and Anak Bukit (by-elections). It will say the Malays are heading towards disaster". Continuing this theme, Mahadzir Khir responded to criticisms about Bahasa Malaysia's role by suggesting that the government wanted to "create a bilingual even trilingual generation and therefore cast aside any suspicions or aspersion" (*The New Straits Times*, 27 June 2002, p.6). Indeed, in developing a village level political campaign PAS pledged to highlight the issue of English in Mathematics and Science in the Kedah by-election (*New Straits Times*, 28 October 2002).

In support of this PAS voiced its concern about the move to teaching English and immediately announced that the PAS governed state of Terengganu would not require religious schools to teach Mathematics and Science in English. Predicting failure of the policy, Menteri Besar Datuk Hadi-Awang said that rural schools would be the most disadvantaged and that this undermined the status of Bahasa Malaysia (*New Straits Times*, 8 August 2002).

Although many of the same concerns about English had been expressed by groups aligned with UNMO and sympathetic to the government, Dr Mahathir was able to maintain a view that positioned PAS as suggesting that the speaking of English was a kaffir (Infidel) act and that PAS was incapable of dealing with a modern secular world and were not representative of moderate Islam. The ruling party were able to position their opponents as endangering the multicultural consensus in Malaysia, the political stability of Malaysia and the potential for Malaysia to participate in the global economy. These themes repeated by the media conveyed an impression that victory by PAS during a period of global anxiety would disrupt Malaysia's prosperity and create instability.

### **Epilogue and Conclusion.**

The by-election in 2002 was evenly split and observers called it a stalemate. Dr Mahathir retired in October 2003, as promised, and his successor, Abdullah Badawi maintained a strong

commitment to the teaching of Mathematics and Science in English. His early period as Prime Minister featured attempts attacking cronyism in UMNO and this involved some difficulties for his own family who were attacked as being beneficiaries of cronyism. Nonetheless, Badawi successfully steered BN to a landslide victory in the next federal election and overwhelmed PAS in their previous heartland of Kelantan and Terengganu.

For the moment, the prospect of the "Malay Taliban" being installed in federal government in Malaysia had been averted. The stunning reversal in 2004 had been achieved by the persistent tactics of portraying the Islamic opposition as pre-modernist extremists, who were discriminating against women and racist, something that many Malays saw as threatening the multiracial consensus that had typified Malaysia since independence. However, many of the inequalities that spawned PAS popularity are a continuing challenge for the Malaysian government. It is also made more difficult with clashes between separatists and the central government in Southern Thailand close to the states of Terengganu and Kelantan.

The portrayal of Islamic parties as ultra radical terrorist organizations has been part of the success story of the Malaysian government and its supporters. Said (1997) has documented the representations of Islam that emerged during the Iran hostage crisis and the durability of these perceptions about the politics of Islam which are generated through the media and experts sources. The perpetuation of the stereotypical view of Islamic fundamentalism and Islam as terrorism, does little to eradicate the causes of terrorism. Perhaps Edward Said's comments about the need for open-minded brokers, outside the "expert clique", who have not been influenced by the stigma of preconceived notions might be an important starting point towards addressing these issues:

The impressive thing is how, despite their lack of certification, they seem to understand certain dynamics within the post-colonial world and hence within a large portion of the Islamic world. For them the human experience, and not the limiting labels like the "Islamic mind" or "Islamic personality" defines the unit of attention. Moreover they are genuinely interested in exchange, and have made it a matter of conscious choice to overstep the rigid lines of hostility put down between peoples by governments (Said, 1997 p. 169).

Perhaps in the Post S11 era this will be one of the key challenges for the Asia Pacific region.

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