Accommodation and Acceptance of Non-Muslim Communities within the Malaysian Political System: The Role of Islam

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To what extent has the Malaysian political system accommodated non-Malay and non-Muslim communities? Why has this happened, and how should political accommodation develop in the future?

Background

To understand the accommodation of non-Malay and non-Muslim communities, one must have a clear view of Malaysian history. Present-day Malaysia—it is worth repeating over and over again—evolved from a Malay–Muslim polity. The illustrious Melaka kingdom, with Malay as its language and Islam as its religion, marked the genesis of this polity, which, in a sense, has remained an integral part of this region for more than five centuries. Although this kingdom ended in 1511, its successor states retained the defining characteristics of Malay–Muslim polities in relation to language, religion, culture, politics, and administration. British colonialism acknowledged these sultanates as Malay–Muslim polities and concluded treaties and agreements with them on that basis.

The vast demographic transformation wrought by colonialism did not change the nature of these polities, for the Chinese and Indian immigrants of the early twentieth century remained largely "on the outside": they were part of the economic enclaves created by colonial rule. Neither the colonial administration nor the Malay rulers regarded them as citizens.

It was only after the Second World War that the situation changed dramatically. Many Chinese and Indians—the overwhelming majority of whom were first generation immigrants—were given citizenship rights on

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a very liberal basis. Their children received automatic citizenship—citizenship as a birthright or *jus soli*—in the 1957 constitution of independent Malaya.[1] As a result of these and other changes, almost 44 percent of the citizenry in the early 1960s was of Chinese or Indian descent.

Their incorporation into the Malayan, and then Malaysian, state transformed the polity's very character from exclusively Malay to a multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious society. In the process, the Malays, who once constituted the nation, were reduced to one community—albeit primary—among communities. This decline in status represents a great concession by an indigenous people to nonindigenous communities in its midst. It is this metamorphosis in the status of the Malay-Muslim population that lies at the heart of the Malaysian political system's accommodation and acceptance of non-Malay and non-Muslim communities.[2]

What enhances the historical significance of this accommodation is that in the 1950s Malays were, on the whole, extremely poor in comparison to sections of the Chinese community in particular. On almost every score—health, education, skills—they lagged behind non-Malays. Even worse, non-Malays were a huge portion of the new nation's citizenry. Given this, why did the Malays choose to accommodate the non-Malay communities? What were the reasons behind what appears to be the Malays' tremendous political magnanimity?

The Reasons

To start with, the Chinese and Indian communities were crucial to the important economic sectors of rubber, tin, and trade. The Malay elite realized that if these communities were not somehow accommodated there could be considerable social instability. Besides, unlike the prewar decades, Chinese and Indian leaders and groups were demanding citizenship rights. The British supported them in order to prevent postindependence disruption to their rubber, tin, and trade interests. Securing citizenship for non-Malay communities was seen as one way to realize this goal.

There was another reason for British support: The underground communist revolt from 1948 onward drew its strength from the Chinese community.[3] If full citizenship were extended to the Chinese, it was believed, they could be drawn away from the lure of an ideology that promised equality and justice. The communist threat also influenced the response of the Malay elite. Staunchly anti-communist in orientation, the leadership of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) was as determined as the British to crush the communist revolt. By extending citizenship on generous terms to the Chinese and the others, the UMNO leadership hoped they would be loyal to the new Malayan nation.

A more mundane factor may also have persuaded the UMNO leadership: The leading articulator of Chinese rights in the immediate post-war decades, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), provided UMNO with financial and organizational assistance in jointly fought elections during

the 1950s. This gave the MCA some leverage over UMNO—leverage that translated into certain concessions to the Chinese on citizenship.

Even if this MCA–UMNO relationship had not existed, UMNO would have forged ties with non-Malay groups to show the British that it could work with the other communities in the larger interest of a peaceful multiethnic society. Otherwise, Britain would have used its alleged inability to cooperate with others to delay independence (*merdeka*). In order to gain Chinese and Indian support and cooperation, UMNO leaders knew they would have to consider their principal demand: citizenship rights.

The UMNO leadership was not opposed to this, for it was prepared to grant them citizenship if this would not lead to Malay annihilation in their own land. This is why, in 1946, the Malay leadership opposed Britain's planned Malayan Union and why, in 1948, the same Malay leadership was prepared to accept the Federation of Malaya Agreement. The terms of the agreement, as we have hinted, were extraordinarily generous, and there was no danger in the second plan that the Malays would become an insignificant minority vis-à-vis the economically stronger Chinese elite.[4]

Part of the UMNO leadership's inclination toward voluntary accommodation might be due to its social background. In the early years, UMNO's core leadership came from the traditional elite or aristocrats and administrators. As aristocrats and administrators (or administocrats), they occupied a privileged social position: An aristocrat's role and status within the feudal hierarchy were secure and could not be challenged. This confidence extended to the Chinese and Indians who, no matter how wealthy or educated some of them were or became, could threaten Malay aristocrats. This may explain why the UMNO leadership—men like Tunku Abdul Rahman, UMNO president throughout the 1950s and 1960s—did not see large-scale accommodation of non-Malay communities as inimical to Malay interests. One might ask: If, during those years, UMNO had been led by traders, professionals, or other social groups that feared the overwhelming Chinese (economic) or Indian (professional) presence, would UMNO have been so accommodating? Is it possible that fear of competition and challenge would have resulted in a more restrictive approach?[5]

There is perhaps yet another explanation. Of the groups involved in the Malay nationalist movement, it was this elite that had the greatest exposure to non-Malay communities. Through its members' roles as *mentri besar*, district officer, assistant district officer, and the like, both in the Federated and the Unfederated Malay States, these administocrats came face to face with some fundamental Chinese and Indian concerns. As a result, they developed sympathy for the non-Malay desire to acquire some kind of legal status within the emerging Malayan nation.

Orientation and inclination aside, however, the UMNO leadership may have chosen accommodation because it was certain, after the Malayan Union fiasco, that Malay principles, symbols, and institutions

would be safe and secure in the new federation. The Malayan constitution recognized the sultans as heads of their respective states, Islam as the official religion, and Malay as the national and official language. Most of all, it guaranteed the Malay's special position. This meant, in effect, that Malays, as an economically disadvantaged community, were entitled to special assistance and opportunities designed to improve their socioeconomic position. With these safeguards in place, the UMNO leadership may have felt that it could afford to extend citizenship rights, including *jus soli*, to non-Malays.

If there was still some doubt—and there was within UMNO and among Malays—about granting *jus soli* to non-Malays, the UMNO leadership tried to remove it by invoking the mythical power and appeal of *merdeka*. The promise of *merdeka,* Malays were told, made some concessions worth the sacrifice. As the Tunku put it in the Federal Legislative Council in 1957: "It (citizenship) is a right which has given the Malays very grave concern and fear. Nevertheless because of their desire to put Malays on the pedestal as an independent nation they are prepared to give that right to the new people."[6] A few months before that, he had assured them that they "had nothing to lose and a lot to gain with the advent of independence."[7]

The desire for *merdeka,* constitutional safeguards for the Malay community, the background and orientation of the UMNO leadership, the UMNO–MCA relationship, the communist threat, British pressure, non-Malay demands, and the significant non-Malay role in the economy, among other factors, seem to have been responsible for the resulting accommodation. Does this mean then that Islam per se played no role?

The Role of Islam

The Parti Islam SeMalaya (PAS), the only political party in the 1950s with an Islamic label, opposed accommodation on the ground that as Malaya belonged to the Malays, only Malays had the right to exercise political power. All other communities would have to settle for the status of political minorities. This is why the restoration of Malay sovereignty became so crucial to PAS's political struggle,[8] which was seen clearly in October 1962, when it moved just such a resolution in Parliament.

Though PAS viewed the question of non-Malay citizenship as a Malay party rooted in Malay society, it nonetheless tried, now and then, to justify its stand in the name of Islam. In a genuine Islamic state, it opined, political power belonged to Muslims, for only they would be committed to creating a society founded upon the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Since all Malays are Muslim, and since there has always been an intimate nexus between Malay and Muslim, PAS transferred the concept of Islamic political power to Malay political power and vice versa.

Parti Negara, another Malay-based party, also called for the restoration of Malay sovereignty. Although it did not see itself as an Islamic party

and clothed its aspirations in nationalist garb, its underlying concern was the same as PAS's: the accommodation of non-Malay communities through liberal citizenship laws threatened to make Malays a "back number" in their own country.[9]

Both PAS and Parti Negara made the restoration of Malay sovereignty their battle cry in the 1955 federal legislative elections and in the 1959 general elections. Even in the 1964 general election, PAS was still championing the cause of exclusive Malay rights. Only in the 1969 election did PAS, having accepted the non-Malay presence as a fait accompli, begin to focus upon the Malay community's economic and social deprivation.

In spite of the emphasis given to Malay sovereignty and the injustice of liberalizing citizenship for non-Malays, PAS (Parti Negara from the outset was a political lightweight) had little impact upon the Malay electorate, except in the preponderantly Malay states of Kelantan and Terrenganu. The vast majority of Malays in the rest of the peninsula did not respond to PAS's battle cry, its emotive tone notwithstanding.

Perhaps some of the factors responsible for this accommodation made more sense to the Malay electorate than PAS's slogan. Perhaps the UMNO leadership's stand was the decisive factor, for Malay society, more so in the past than in the present, has always evinced a deep sense of loyalty to its ruling elites.[10] Since the UNO elites, inheritors of traditional feudal power, were willing to accommodate non-Malays, the Malay masses were prepared to go along with them. It was, in that sense, a manifestation of implicit faith and trust in the Malay community's traditional leaders. In other words, loyalty to the UMNO leadership prevailed over the seductive promise of regaining exclusive Malay political power.

But would Malay society have remained loyal to its leadership if the idea of accommodating individuals and groups outside one's own ethnic and religious boundaries was abhorrent to one's value system? Is it possible that Malays supported their leaders because, based on their own attitudes and beliefs, they did not see accommodation as wrong? It was this harmony between Malay values and the position of the Malay leadership that enabled the latter to retain the support of the former right through the 1950s, when the citizenship controversy threatened to destroy the fragile political ties binding Malay and non-Malay communities.

That the Malay value system is inclined toward accommodation is borne out by a number of trends and tendencies in Malay history. In the Kingdom of Melaka, for instance, there was an accommodation of non-Malay commercial and political interests that sojourned there and an atmosphere of cultural cosmopolitanism without precedent or parallel in any southeast Asian empire.[11] Some post-Melaka Malay sultanates, such as Johor, were also open to alien cultural influences. Even when Malay nationalism began to grow in the early twentieth century, there was very little evidence of rabid Malay hatred or unbridled communalism toward other communities, although some nationalist writings did contain traces of racial

prejudice and ethnic bigotry.[12] Nonetheless, Islamic reformers, one of the major groups in the nationalist movement, advocated greater Musilm–non-Muslim communal interaction so that they could learn from one another. Likewise, the Malay associations that emerged in the various administocrat-led states gave some consideration to non-Malay economic interests. Thus, even in the midst of anti-Malayan Union agitation, an agitation vital to Malay survival, the community never considered the total exclusion of non-Malays from national life.[13] Even at that dark hour, accommodation was the Malay preference, provided it did not lead to annihilation.

Having established that the Malay value system, and not just the inclination of the UMNO leadership, made such accommodation possible, we must ask: What is it in the Malay value system that supports accommodation? What is the force that persuades the Malay community to accept others? It is generally recognized that Islam has been the single most powerful influence upon the Malay value system. In shaping Malay attitudes toward "the other," Islam has been particularly important.

Right from its arrival in Southeast Asia during the fourteenth century (perhaps earlier according to some), Islam established amicable relations with the indigenous communities. Brought mainly by traders from India and Arabia, Islam spread peacefully and rapidly. While royal patronage in Melaka and other regional sultanates helped the spread of Islam, there is no doubt that the presence of Sufi saints was also a major factor. Revered for their piety and compassion, these Sufis, in some respects, set the tone and tenor of Islamic attitudes and values among the masses. The *tariqah*s (Sufi orders) established by the Sufis emphasized, by and large, Islam's universal spirit and its humanitarian concern for all living creatures. Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas, an Islamic scholar, believes strongly that

> the Sufi preaching of the self-same Universal Spirit that accounted for the identical expressions in the doctrines of different religions, has made it possible for the plural societies that have existed in Malaya to live side by side peaceably and with a spirit of tolerance that is evident even to this day.[14]

The universalism reflected in Sufi teachings is integral and fundamental to the Qur'an. There are, perhaps, at least five dimensions to Qur'anic universalism. One, the Qur'an expounds a concept of all-encompassing and all-embracing human unity:

> Humanity was one single nation, and God sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent The Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed. (2:213)

Two, the Qur'anic vision of justice, in which discrimination has no place, is also universal:

> O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety and fear God. (5:8)

Three, the Qur'an's commitment to universal justice goes beyond this life. It is significant that on an issue of tremendous significance to religion—the issue of salvation— the Qur'an adopts a position that very few scriptures do: belief in God and performing good deeds—and nothing else—are the means of salvation. Thus, salvation is not linked to a particular community or group or person:

> And they say: "None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian." Those are their (vain) desires. Say: "Produce your proof in you be truthful." Nay . . . whoever submits His whole self to God and is a doer of good—he will get his reward with his Lord: on such shall be no fear nor shall they grieve. (2:111-12)

Four, this particular view of salvation suggests that the Qur'an accepts religious diversity. It is true that the acknowledgment of human diversity is a powerful current that runs right through the Qur'an. As a case in point, Qur'an 22:67 observes that "to every people have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow." This is part of the divine plan, for

> If God had so willed He would have made you a singe people, but (His plan is) to test you in what he hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God. (5:48)

Five, in the ultimate analysis it is these virtues, which transcend all our ethnic, cultural, and religious differences, that matter. This is enunciated in an oft-quoted verse:

> O mankind: We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you." (Qur'an 49:13)

Righteousness, not religion per se, is the hallmark of our humanity, a fact that testifies to the Qur'an's unsurpassed universalism.

The Qur'an's universal outlook is embodied in countless other concepts and ideas. Rather than discussing all of them, however, it is more pertinent to assess the extent to which Qur'anic universalism has shaped Malay thinking on non-Malay communities. While there has been no scientific study of this, it would not be wrong to suggest that a great deal of

Qur'anic universalism has yet to penetrate the Malay heart and mind, which is also true of the *ummah* as a whole. Nonetheless, as a people, Malays often evince certain attitudes associated with aspects of Qur'anic universalism: one should not be unjust to non-Malays and non-Muslims, one should recognize that they are human beings with similar needs and aspirations, and one should tolerate some of their religious and cultural practices.

If Qur'anic universalism has had some affect upon Malay values, so has the Sunnah, for the example of the Prophet, unlike universal ideas and ideals, is perceived as something real and tangible and, therefore, has always exercised a powerful impact upon Muslim life. The Prophet offers an inspiring example of a leader who sought to accommodate the non-Muslim communities of Madinah by means of a constitution that ensured equality and justice for all of the city's inhabitants.[15] The constitution of Madinah encouraged cooperation and solidarity among Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others. Although it was violated at a certain point by Jewish treachery, it was nonetheless a remarkable endeavor to put into actual practice the universal ideals of the Qur'an. The Prophet also forged a treaty with the Christian monks of Najrān. In exchange for Muslim protection of their religious rights and the preservation of the monastery's sanctity, these Christians had to show respect for Islam and the emerging Muslim community. Here again the Prophet translated into concrete action the Qur'anic injunctions of religious tolerance and understanding.

The Sunnah, like the Qur'an, wrought a virtual revolution in the values and attitudes of the Prophet's society toward the non-Muslim communities that interacted with them. The generosity and magnanimity of such caliphs as 'Umar and 'Alī toward Christians and Jews testifies to this. Later caliphs and communities, with some notable exceptions, somehow did not measure up to this sublime spirit of universalism. Nonetheless, the accommodative attitude displayed by Muslim leaders and people toward non-Muslims living in their midst was so remarkable that Muslim societies were regarded as outstanding models of interethnic and interreligious harmony and amity within the historical settings in which they functioned.

In a sense, Muslim societies were compelled by circumstances to translate into reality the universalism of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. As Islam expanded rapidly eastward and westward, it came into contact with almost every known religion. In the words of Seyyed Hosein Nasr, a leading contemporary Islamic thinker:

> In the case of Islam it is particularly interesting that it is the only religion before the modern era which had confronted every major religious tradition of mankind with the exception of Shintoism and the American Indian religions. It had encountered Christianity and Judaism in its birthplace, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Mithraism in Persia. Shamanism, which in its Asian form is a sis-

> ter religion of Shintoism and the North American religions, in Central Asia and Mongolia, the native African religions south of the Sahara and, of course, Hinduism and Buddhism in India and eastern Persia.[16]

These encounters enriched the Muslim understanding of other faiths and revealed to both Muslims and non-Muslims the real meaning of Islamic tolerance.

We shall now provide some concrete examples of Muslim tolerance and accommodation, from roughly the middle of the seventh century to the early eighteenth century, to show how widespread these attitudes were. In 638, Umar, the second caliph, allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem, thereby ending their centuries-long exile at the hands of the Romans as well as the Christians, the latter of whom had enacted a total ban upon their presence within the city. In other words, a Muslim ruler ended the Jewish suffering brought about by their first diaspora. In 1099, when the Christian Crusaders captured Jerusalem, "the streets of Jerusalem overflowed with the blood of innocent people."[17] After its liberation by the famous Muslim ruler Salah al Din al Ayubi in 1187, Christians were not given free access to their places of worship and guarantees that their holy sites, and those of the Jews, would be protected by the Muslim government.

In Spain, where the Muslims ruled from 711 until the fall of Granada in 1492, Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived in harmony for long periods of time. Islamic Spain was known as "an exemplar of religious tolerance. It also produced a flowering of science, arts and letters."[18] All communities participated in this intellectual and aesthetic blossoming. In fact, Islamic Spain gave birth to some of the most magnificent works of philosophy and culture within the Jewish tradition. Contrast this with what happened after the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella seized Granada from the Muslims in 1492: Thousands of Jews and Muslims were either killed or expelled in waves of religious persecution.

As in Spain, Muslim rule in India was on the whole tolerant and compassionate. It was not just such Mughal rulers as Akbar and Shah Jahan who attempted to bring together Muslims, Hindus, and Jains in various cultural and artistic enterprises. Even Aurangzeb, often described in western history books as a "bigot," was very accommodative toward non-Muslims. He "employed the largest number of Hindus in the highest echelons of administrative and military service."[19] Likewise Tipu Sultan, from another Muslim kingdom in India, who has been labelled in a number of western texts as a "fanatic," appointed Hindus as his prime minister and the commander-in-chief of his armed forces.[20]

These and other examples from East and West Africa, Central Asia, and the Balkans indicate that Muslim tolerance toward and accommodation of non-Muslim communities was the norm. This needs to be emphasized, because there is sometimes a tendency in certain circles to explain away Malay tolerance as something peculiar to the community that has nothing

to do with Islam. Our analysis has shown, however, that the tolerant and accommodative attitude of the Malay–Muslim community mirrors a larger Islamic worldview that has found expression throughout Muslim history. Acceptance and accommodation of the "other," to put it differently, is part and parcel of Islamic culture.

It should be stressed, however, that this does not mean that there are no instances of Muslim discrimination or oppression of non-Muslims, which would be a very naive view indeed. There are Muslims who have done terrible things, sometimes in the name of Islam, to non-Muslims. But these are aberrations and do not reflect mainstream Muslim attitudes or values, which, everything considered, have been just and fair to non-Muslim communities.

If this is so, how does one explain PAS's negative attitude toward the accommodation of non-Malay and non-Muslim communities during the 1950s and early 1960s? After all, PAS saw itself then, and even now, as an Islamic party. The truth is that PAS, in the immediate postwar decades, was essentially a Malay party whose ideological thrust was the preservation and protection of the Malay position. Its concept of Malay sovereignty left no room for accommodating non-Malay interests. Today, PAS has become more of an Islamic party, albeit a conservative and orthodox one.

Accommodation: Today and Tomorrow

So far we have examined the nature of Malay-Muslim accommodation for non-Malay and non-Muslim communities, the reasons for it, and the role of Islam in it. Now we will analyze how non-Malays are accommodated within the current political system. Have things changed significantly since the 1950s and the early 1960s?

The entire basis and direction of political accommodation was resolved in the 1950s before *merdeka*. Since the fundamental structure was in place by 1957, the last thirty-eight years have witnessed only minor shifts. Non-Malay communities continue to perform important roles in various spheres of society despite certain trends that have impacted upon their political and economic position since 1970. Following the ethnic riot of 13 May 1969, the UMNO leadership and a significant segment of Malay society became more conscious of the need to rectify the growing Malay–non-Malay economic imbalance.[21] To that end, Malays had to strengthen their political position, for it was only through political power that they could hope to improve their economic well-being. With economic advancement, the Malay economic role in certain economic sectors became more prominent. These two interrelated developments have resulted in a decline of the non-Malay political role and a change in the non-Malay economic position.

But these developments have not affected the fundamental principle of accommodation. More than one-third of the Malaysian Parliament is

non-Malay and non-Muslim. This is also true of the Federal Cabinet. Within public services and state agencies, there is still considerable non-Malay participation. Unlike the 1960s, certain senior political roles are now performed by non-Malays as a matter of course.[22] What this means is that the strengthened Malay political position—in more precise terms the appointment of Malays to crucial Cabinet positions connected with the economy since the mid-1970s—has not resulted in the abdication of a principle.

By the same token, the Malay's stronger economic position has not meant the abandonment of the concept and practice of economic accommodation. The New Economic Policy (NEP), implemented between 1971 and 1990, had as its first goal the eradication of poverty irrespective of ethnicity. The NEP's other goal of correcting ethnic imbalances in commerce, industry and the professions affecting Malays and other indigenous peoples also gave due consideration to non-Malay communal interests. As an example, while increasing the intake of Malay students in institutions of higher learning, a measure connected directly with the NEP's second goal, the Malay-led government maintained an ethnic balance of sorts by limiting Malay and indigenous recruitment to 55 percent of the total.

In any case, given the phenomenal economic growth since 1988, the interests of certain segments of the non-Malay communities, especially those linked to commerce and industry, have been more than accommodated. Indeed, at certain levels of the economy the non-Malay, specifically the Chinese, role has become even more prominent and more pervasive than at any time since *merdeka*. Government policies aimed at encouraging growth and development have also facilitated this.

Looking at the economy, politics, and other spheres of Malaysian society, it is very likely that accommodation will continue well into the future. Adjusting for ethnic needs, balancing ethnic aspirations will remain one of the most crucial and most challenging aspects of the Malaysian political system for a long time to come. How can we strengthen such adjustment and accommodation—the politics of balance—as we work for a more peaceful and harmonious society?

In order to strengthen accommodation, it is imperative that Chinese and Indian Malaysians understand the nature and extent of the accommodation that has taken place. It is a pity that there is so little understanding and appreciation of this among the non-Malays. How many non-Malay leaders and intellectuals have shown any appreciation at all of the Malay community's surrender of its dream for a Malay nation by consenting to equal citizenship for non-Malays and thereby becoming a community among communities in a new multiethnic society?

One of the reasons why the magnitude of this sacrifice is not appreciated is because non-Malays, in general, do not have an internal view of Malaysian history. The essence of such a view, as we have argued since 1974, would be empathy for the evolution of Malaysian society from a

Malay–Muslim polity to a multiethnic nation.[23] Such a view would enable non-Malays to understand better the position of Malay as the sole official and national language, the role of Islam in Malaysian society, the political preeminence of Malays, and the policies that extend special economic assistance to Malays and other indigenous communities at this juncture in history. Socializing non-Malays and Malaysian society into this internal view of history through schools, the media, community organizations, and the like should be one of our most immediate and urgent tasks.

As non-Malays and non-Muslims understand their accommodation through this internal view of history, they should also be made aware of the role of Islam in casting the Malay value system in a more inclusive, less exclusive mold—so much so that acceptance of the other has become part and parcel of Malay political culture. Non-Muslim communities should develop a more profound and more balanced outlook on Islam and Muslims and get rid of the anti-Islamic bias, prejudice, hostility, and antagonism that many of them harbor. As Islam becomes more and more important in the nation's life, such negative attitudes could emerge as a formidable barrier to interethnic harmony. One cannot help but observe with a tinge of sadness that, since *merdeka*, hardly any non-Muslim scholar, theologian, journalist, politician, or social activist has sought to reduce the negative perceptions of Islam within the non-Muslim communities. And yet in the West, which in a sense is the source of so much anti-Islamic feeling, there are several outstanding public personalities willing to correct unjust and unfair portrayals of Islam.

This brings us to the role of Malays and Muslims vis-à-vis Islam and accommodation. While Malay accommodation of the "other" has been extraordinary, the Malay-Muslim community no doubt realizes that there are elements in the relationship between Malays and Muslims, on the one hand, and non-Malays and non-Muslims on the other, that do not blend with Islamic values and principles. Applying an indigenous–non-indigenous dichotomy to those public policies related to social justice is unacceptable to Islam. If the central concern is justice—helping the needy or rewarding the deserving—ethnic affiliations or communal considerations should not cloud one's judgment.[24] By incorporating genuine universal Islamic values and principles into public policies impacting upon non-Muslims in education, commerce, and industry, it is conceivable that they will begin to appreciate Islam's commitment to justice and fairness. After all, it was Islam's passion for justice and fairness, when manifested in the repudiation of racial, ethnic, or even religious discrimination, that attracted millions of non-Muslims in the early centuries. Within the Malaysian context, the emergence of justice as a sacred principle of policy and practice will contribute to non-Muslim communal integration and accommodation.

What is required is more than the application of the Islamic concept of universal justice. The Malay–Muslim leadership has a rare opportu-

nity to establish a society that embodies the spirit of Qur'anic universalism. As we have observed, the realization of complete Qur'anic universalism in a specific social reality has eluded Muslims for a long time. A delicately balanced multiethnic and multireligious society like Malaysia compels Muslims, guided by Qur'anic universalism, to develop creative ways of integrating the nation's diverse communities.

Qur'anic universalism, when applied to Malaysia in a creative manner, requires us to stress the one fundamental identity that concerns the Qur'an: one's human identity.[25] It is the human being, shorn of every other affiliation, that the Qur'an addresses most of the time. It offers the human being guidance on values to uphold and vices to avoid in order to develop one's human identity as a vicegerent of God, an identity that transcends all other ethnic and religious identities. This identity should form the basis of unity and harmony in multiethnic and multireligious Malaysia.

Endnotes

1. For a comprehensive discussion on citizenship, see K. J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965).

2. See my "Trends in Ethnic Relations," *Trends in Malaysia II*, ed. Yong Mun Cheong (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore University Press, 1974) for some thoughts on the nature of this metamorphosis.

3. For more details, see B. Simandjuntak, *Malayan Federalism 1945–1964* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1969).

4. This is discussed in Mohammed Noordin Sopiee, *From Malayan Union to Singapore Separation* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1974).

5. The social background of the UMNO leadership and its implications for accommodation was first analyzed in my "Protection of the Malay Community: A Study of UMNO's Position and Opposition Attitudes" (Master of Social Science Theses, University Sains Malaysia, Penang, 1974).

6. See *Straits Echo*, 11 July 1957.

7. Ibid., 29 March 1957.

8. See *Cenderamata Pembukaan Bangunan PAS Kelantan dan Kongres PAS Ke 13* (Kota Bahru, Malaysia: PAS, 1965) for reflections on the concept of Malay sovereignty.

9. See *Parti Negara Election Manifesto 1955* (Kuala Lumpur: Parti Negara Headquarters, 1955).

10. This phenomenon is examined in my *Protector?: A Study of Leader–Led Relationships in Malay Society* (Penang: Aliran, 1979).

11. See Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, "Masyarakat Melaka Zaman Kesultanan dan Sifat Kosmopolitannya," in *Melaka: The Transformation of a Malay Capital c. 1400–1980*, vol. 1., ed. K. S. Sandhu and P. Wheatley (Oxford, UK: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Oxford University Press, 1983) for a discussion of Melaka's cosmopolitanism.

12. On the growth of Malay nationalism, see W. R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967).

13. This point is made in Anwar Abdullah, *Dato Onn Riwayat Hidup* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Nusantara, 1971).

14. See his *Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practised among the Malays* (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963), 99-100.

15. For details, see Muhammad Husein Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. I. R. al Faruqi (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1993), especially chapter 11; Zainal Abidin Ahmad, *Piagam Nabi Muhammad s.a.w.* (Djakarta, Indonesia: Bulan Bintang, 1973).

16. See his "Religion and Religions: The Challenge of Living in a Multi-religious World" (First Annual Loy H. Witherspoon Lecture in Religious Studies, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 8 April 1985), 15-17. See *Muslimedia International* 16–31 (July 1993): 1.

17. See *Muslimedia International*, 16–31 July 1993, p. 1

18. See Jeffrey Lee, "The Long Lost Land," *The Middle East* (May 1993), p. 45.

19. See "A Pampered Minority?," *Sunday* (7–13 February 1993): 27. This is an Indian weekly published in Calcutta.

20. Ibid., p. 28.

21. See my *The NEP Development and Alternative Consciousness* (Penang: Aliran, 1989).

22. The President of the Senate, for instance, since the early 1980s has been a non-Malay. Though largely ceremonial, it is one of the highest positions in the land.

23. See my "Protection of the Malay Community" for a discussion of this concept.

24. I have elaborated on this in my "Malaysia Bumiputraism and Islam," in *Readings on Islam in South Asia*, ed. Ahmad Ibrahim, Sharon Siddique, and Yasmin Hussain (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986).

25. This point about human identity is made very well in Syed Z. Abedin's "The Decade of Renewal," *Saudi Gazette* (30 January 1993), p. 7.