

## **Dynamics of Ethnic Relations in Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research sought to understand and affirm key factors that helped shape ethnic relations in a multi-cultural, ethnic and religious Malaysia. Samples were drawn from three public institutions of higher learning, namely Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and compared to see whether different settings had significant influence on how samples responded to ethnic relations-related constructs. Findings indicated that (1) some societal structures needed to be transformed further to provide opportunities for various ethnic interaction; (2) in many instances, student samples' preferences were ethnically influenced; (3) nature of the environment that the student samples were in could influence their preferences. Therefore, policymakers need to be aware of these societal impediments and the dire need to introduce a relevant policy to address these shortcomings. Public policies for inter-ethnic relations must be formulated based on the bottom-up input, i.e. listening to people on the ground, for the former to be effective in nation-making.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

History of more than fifty years together has not brought closeness among Malaysia's diverse ethnic communities as ethnic sensitivities, religious divides and differences continue to dominate public discourses. There are other countries with more diversities that are perhaps doing

better than Malaysia. The main issue that differentiate societies lies in different nature of human to human relations in these countries (Horowitz, 1989).

The Federation of Malaya was formed in 1948 from the merger of various Malay states or sultanates. Independence was attained in 1957 through a “contract” among its three major ethnic communities as they promised to be “good and civil to each other” (Federal Constitution, 2010; Hanna, 1964; Sopiee, 1974). This promise facilitated British’s withdrawal and subsequently, independence was granted to the former. In 1963, Federation of Malaysia was formed through the coming together of Federation of Malaya, Singapore and London-administered territories of Sabah and Sarawak which further reinforced the notion that diverse communities could come together to achieve a common goal, which was independence.

However, Malaya, and later Malaysia, was not characterised by the ‘togetherness’ as the value of working as one began to wane over time. Malaya was formed to defeat a common enemy, the British, and that common goal made people pledged to work together to show the British their capability. When Malaysia was formed, the common enemy was communism. Again, coming together was necessary to defeat the communists. As soon as the goal was achieved, (the independence of Malaya, the formation of Malaysia or overcoming threats of communism), the people, especially their leaders, went back to their former parochialistic political and social attitudes.

Figuratively speaking, once the “common enemy” is defeated (the British by Malaya and communism by Malaysia), the people would then go after “each other’s throat” like they used to prior to the formation. The fall back inevitably caused varying political and social perspectives, leading to disputes. The disputes had dire consequences and to exemplify, irreconcilable differences between the Federation and Singapore had led to the latter leaving the newly minted Malaysia in 1965.

The departure of Singapore from the Federation of Malaysia did not ameliorate inter-ethnic conflict and competition. Conflict and competition were as intense in Malaysia. Hence, this study sought answers to the question “What continues to divide Malaysia?”

## **Background**

Ethnic relation is an ongoing challenge Malaysia faces in her nation-making processes. Before this, Malaya was locked in inter-ethnic disputes during the Malayan Union era (1946-1948). The main issue could be reduced to the single concept of power balance between indigenous Malay and latecomers, the Chinese and others, to the Malay states. British sponsored Malayan Union opened the state to fluid power configuration as liberal citizenship gave both indigenous and latecomers the same weightage in Malayan Union’s power configuration. The indigenous’ refusal to accept the Union’s power configuration led to them forming the Federation of Malaya. Nevertheless, the formation did not end the

contestation as it spilled over into the newly formed nation, Federation of Malaysia. Issues related to political and economic powers' balance were amplified when an ethnic riot broke in 1969, six years after the birth of the nation-state. Previously, it was perceived that the balance of power in Malaya/Malaysia existed when Malays held the political reins while the Chinese held the economy. However, Malays' hold on the nation's political power was shaken when Parti Perikatan, the leading Malay-led political party, lost its 2/3 majority during the 1969 General Election. The idea of sharing and power balance with the Chinese, who was still firmly holding the economy, was deemed unacceptable. Hence, the riot and its aftermath were an opportunity to find or orchestrate a new balance and sharing of power between Malays and Chinese.

The 1969 Riot was a tragic ethnic event that resulted in loss of lives and destruction of properties. The event had been well-documented and analysed, for example, by the first prime minister (Tunku Abdul Rahman, 1969) and an official account by the government (National Operation Council, 1969). Several studies investigated the reasons behind the riot, and reports formed the basis of many affirmative actions to correct overall "imbalances" between national-foreign economic assets' ownership in the country. Power and economic balance are crucial between ethnic communities in terms of various issues such as ownership of wealth and opportunities in various industries.

Fifty years on, the state of inter-ethnic relations is found to be wanting. Why? Many explained the what or the state of the relations, but do not address the "why". Many, including foremost scholars such as the late Khoo Kay Kim, lamented that things were not as they had been for inter-ethnic relations. He was reported to have said in his last interview with a paper that the issue, i.e. ethnic relations and integration, was not easy to address and that post Malaya/Malaysia did not help when politics took to ethnic path (Lee, 2019). There is also the explanation that Malaysians prefer to be in the state of stable tension, which is clear from Shamsul's (2008) argument that this state of affairs "tongue wagging is preferable to parang wielding". Nonetheless, what and how would we categorise post 1969-period clashes where mass detention and swoops were carried out to "douse" ethnic flames and fires? Stable tension is only acceptable as a transition period until a better position can be attained. The former cannot be the preferred state of continual flux analogous to a dam withholding water and waiting for it to burst the walls.

In between seminal studies and observation by these two major scholars, there are scores of others addressing various dimensions for examples, Muhamat and Don (2016) on the assimilation of Chitty ethnic in Malaysia, Roff (1969) on the rise and demise of Kadazan nationalism, and Jawan (1987, 1991) on Dayakism and ethnic factor in Malaysian politics. They provided little windows to the larger issue and how

the big picture could be crafted by patching the little stories' success to build separated narratives.

To promote unity and tolerance among younger Malaysians, ethnic relations have been taught as a subject of many mandatory courses offered in public and private institutions of higher learning (Jawan & Ahmad, 2006). Several ethnic relations – related courses namely Islamic and Asian Civilizations; Malaysian politics and government in its various forms and names; and Moral Studies have been taught to undergraduates since the 1990s. Despite many efforts taken to address issues related to ethnic relations, controversies and divergent views continued to plague it (Muhammad et al., 2007). Most of these controversies centred on the interpretation of events, and how moving forward should be carved. In any event, interpretations are always seen in the light of the interpreter, and how that interpretation would impact the future course of direction in addressing the issues. For example, studies by Boyman (2019) and Muhammad et al. (2007) had provided some evidence on how these mandatory courses helped in cross ethnic understanding.

In any event, the 'how' to address the issue must take cognizance of the core issue in question. Hence, this is what this study seeks to do, where it aims to begin, to go back to basic and recast as a mean to move forward.

## **Objectives**

This study sought to survey what the authors consider to be fundamental in building good inter-ethnic relations. It wanted to know who the process of inter-ethnic relations is forging on the ground and amongst the basic unit, the students, the future of multi-ethnic Malaysia. Samples were randomly drawn from three selected public universities. These three public universities were selected based on the following considerations: (1) three research collaborators have worked on the subject of ethnic relations and are based in UPM, UPSI and UNIMAS respectively; and (2) UNIMAS could reasonably represent public universities in the two East Malaysian states.

The researchers were mindful that there should be enough samples from major ethnic communities that could provide analysis on its own as well as comparative discourses among the various ethnic samples and the selected three public universities. Respondents were drawn from student population in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The analysis focused on frequencies of responses to selected questions and in selected cases, these were compared between university samples as well as between ethnic categories.

Basic questions and presuppositions that guided the construction of this questionnaire and study were as follow:

- First, what are the basis of promoting good inter-ethnic relations? Some thought on this helped shape questions that followed.
- Second, respondents' early backgrounds must have significant influence on their later socialization, and these include their homes and school environments.
- Third, the respondents' age. As the respondents age, their environment changes congruently with where they live, study and work in later phases of their lives.
- Fourth, some simple test of their basic understanding of issues related to inter-ethnic relations were administered.
- Finally, direct questions relating to their personal experiences with regards to the subject matter were also asked.

The questionnaire was constructed based on various experiences picked up over the years from many dialogues, seminars/

conferences attended and participation in national committees coordinating 'government' courses on ethnic relations and Malaysian studies. This study represents the first attempt to test this instrument on understanding ethnic relations in Malaysia.

## METHODOLOGY

Samples from three public universities were obtained through the distribution of questionnaires in various classes/courses during one of the semesters in the 2019-2020 academic year. Table 1 shows samples from Universiti Putra Malaysia (85), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (217) and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (439).

Fairly good random samples spread across ethnic groups were obtained particularly from UPSI and UNIMAS. However, samples from UPM tilted towards all Malay/ Peninsular samples. Despite the variation, rich data and a good picture of inter-ethnic relations based on ethnic background and region would still be obtainable from these samplings.

Table 1  
*Samples by region and university*

Region of origin	UPM No (%)	UNIMAS No (%)	UPSI No (%)
Peninsular	83 (98)	91 (42)	225 (51)
Sabah	2 (2)	24 (11)	128 (29)
Sarawak	0 (0)	102 (47)	86 (20)
Total	85 (100)	217 (100)	439 (100)

Source: Survey

Table 2

*Respondents by ethnicity and university*

Ethnicity	UPM No (%)	UNIMAS No (%)	UPSI No (%)
Malay	41 (48)	93 (43)	149 (34)
Chinese	18 (21)	33 (15)	70 (16)
Indian	23 (27)	4 (2)	40 (9)
Sabah: Moslem*	-	10 (5)	69 (16)
Sabah: Non-Moslem*	-	11 (5)	49 (11)
Sarawak: Dayak	-	41 (19)	37 (8)
Sarawak: Non- Dayak	-	17 (8)	17 (4)
Others	3 (4)	9 (4)	-
Total	85 (100)	217 (100)	439 (100)

Source: Survey

Note: \*In Sabah, it is common to use three classifications namely, Moslem, Non-Moslem and Chinese. Non-Moslem comprises largely Kadazandusun and may include other non-Moslem natives, e.g. Dayak.

Table 3

*Respondents by type of home background and university*

Ethnicity	UPM No (%)	UNIMAS No (%)	UPSI No (%)
One Ethnic	11 (13)	61 (28)	126 (29)
One ethnic dominant	29 (34)	39 (18)	58 (13)
Many ethnic groups	45 (53)	112 (54)	255 (58)
Total	85 (100)	218 (100)	439 (100)

Source: Survey

Table 2 portrays respondents in terms of their ethnicities. Some selected backgrounds of the respondents are presented. A large percentage of the respondents reported that they live in a mix-ethnic neighbourhood, i.e. 58% by UPSI respondents and this was followed by 54% from UNIMAS and 53% from UPM (Table 3).

In term of characteristics of schools attended by student respondents prior to coming to UPM, UNIMAS or UPSI, they

were asked to identify whether their former schools were national or national-type institutions and the nature of their former schools' student composition as well. Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 present the respondents' primary and secondary schools and their respective characteristics.

Most of the respondents from the three institutions attended national schools that were basically mixed in ethnic characteristics. On the other hand, a substantial percentage of respondents attended schools dominated

by one ethnicity. This can be a cause for concern as it may give rise to ignorance towards others and other cultures in later parts of their lives. Both respondents from Peninsular-based institutions show higher

percentages of one-ethnic pre-university background, i.e. 56% for UPM student respondents and about 52% for UPSI compared to 46% from UNIMAS.

Table 4

*Primary school attended by types*

Nature	UPM No (%)	UNIMAS No (%)	UPSI No (%)
National	60 (71)	175 (80)	336 (77)
Nation-type	25 (29)	42 (19)	103 (23)
Others	-	1 (1)	-
Total	85 (100)	218 (100)	439 (100)

Source: Survey

Table 5

*Primary school attended by ethnicity*

Ethnicity	UPM No (%)	UNIMAS No (%)	UPSI No (%)
One Ethnic	13 (15)	35 (16)	93 (21)
One ethnic dominant	35 (41)	66 (30)	137 (31)
Many ethnic groups	36 (42)	116 (53)	207 (47)
Others	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (1)
Total	85 (100)	218 (100)	439 (100)

Source: Survey

Table 6

*Secondary school attended by types*

Nature	UPM No (%)	UNIMAS No (%)	UPSI No (%)
National	70 (82)	200 (92)	381 (87)
Nation-type	15 (18)	18 (8)	58 (23)
Total	85 (100)	218 (100)	439 (100)

Source: Survey



A similar pattern of respondents' school background can be seen from Table 6 and Table 7. Majority of the three samples had had their education in national secondary schools, while between about 18%-23% had their education in religious or national-type schools. Approximately 92% of UNIMAS student respondents attended national

schools, followed by about 87% from UPSI and 82% from UPM (Table 6). The clear difference from student respondents showed that 56% of UPM's samples attended a one-ethnic dominated school compared to samples from UNIMAS (40%) and UPSI (29%) (Table 7).

Table 7

*Secondary school attended by ethnicity*

Ethnicity	UPM No (%)	UNIMAS No (%)	UPSI No (%)
One Ethnic	14 (17)	23 (11)	65 (15)
One ethnic dominant	33 (39)	39 (18)	109 (25)
Many ethnic groups	38 (45)	154 (71)	264 (60)
Others	0	2 (1)	0
Total	85 (100)	218 (100)	439 (100)

Source: Survey

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several questions in the questionnaire were basic and addressed the core of ethnic relations: how much do ethnic groups know about cultural plurality in Malaysia? Have they experienced direct discrimination? Do they know of person/ persons subjected to discriminatory acts?

### Ethnic Knowledge

Respondents were asked five questions in a form of a simple test on various communities' everyday lives, namely matching festivals with the ethnic groups: Gawai (Dayak), Kaamatan (Kadazandusun), Deepavali (Indian), Hungry Ghost Festival (Chinese), and Vaisakhi (Indian/Sikh). Table

8 shows the responses of the respondents based on the three sample locations, i.e. UPM, UNIMAS and UPSI.

Generally, respondents possessed a fairly good knowledge of major festivals celebrated in Malaysia, especially those celebrated by major ethnic groups such as by the Dayak (Gawai) and Kadazandusun (Kaamatan) of Sarawak and Sabah respectively and those by the Chinese (Hungry Ghost Festival) and Indian (Deepavali in particular). Noticeably, respondents from the three institutions show a lower understanding of Vaisakhi, a Sikh festival. A high percentage of UPM respondents were not able to associate Gawai and Kaamatan to Dayak and Kadazandusun respectively in comparison



Table 8

*Respondents' knowledge of main Malaysian festivals*

Festival	Responses	UNIMAS	UPM	UPSI
		No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Gawai	Correct	186 (85)	59 (69)	343 (78)
	Wrong	16 (7)	20 (24)	56 (13)
	Uncertain	16 (7)	6 (7)	40 (9)
Kaamatan	Correct	179 (82)	59 (69)	351 (80)
	Wrong	22 (10)	18 (21)	45 (10)
	Uncertain	17 (8)	8 (9)	43 (10)
Deepavali	Correct	203 (93)	83 (98)	407 (93)
	Wrong	4 (2)	1 (1)	2 (1)
	Uncertain	11 (5)	1 (1)	30 (7)
Hungry Ghost Festival	Correct	172 (79)	69 (81)	347 (79)
	Wrong	19 (9)	10 (12)	45 (10)
	Uncertain	27 (12)	6 (7)	47 (11)
Vaisakhi	Correct	89 (41)	36 (42)	215 (49)
	Wrong	52 (24)	19 (23)	107 (25)
	Uncertain	77 (35)	30 (35)	117 (27)

Source: Survey

to respondents from UNIMAS and UPSI. Although data collected from the three institutions showed that a sizeable number of student respondents were either uncertain or ignorance of the festivals celebrated in Malaysia, various cultural clubs had been formed along regional and cultural lines, and this would have contributed to these understandings.

The respondents' lack of knowledge and understanding of basic cultural elements in a plural society is of great concern.

Festivals have come far from being private celebrations as they are now viewed as political events held by politicians and political parties ("NST Leader", 2019). Festivals are also celebrated in large scales in universities to spread cultural awareness and understanding.

### **Perception and Knowledge of Discrimination**

With regard to the issue of discrimination, three questions were posed in the

questionnaire, namely: *I have not experienced a situation when I felt that I am being discriminated due to my culture, religion and ways of lives that are different from others; There are moments/times when I felt that comments said to me sounded racist/ ethnocentric; and I have overheard racist/ ethnocentric comments uttered by one individual to another.*

Table 9 shows a certain level of consistency regarding feelings and perceptions on the presence of discrimination. These data are matched with reports that these respondents also have personally had experienced discriminatory acts themselves. For example, many of the respondents had heard racist remarks aimed at others: about 57% of UNIMAS respondents responded in the positive, 61% and 72% from UPSI and

UPM respectively. UPM respondents were mainly peninsular-based students while UNIMAS and UPSI had a higher ethnic composition (see Table 2, above).

An equally interesting fact is that UPM recorded the highest responses from respondents who had had racist remarks targeted at them.

About 49% of UPM respondents had experienced racial-related remarks compared to UPSI respondents at 32% and UNIMAS respondents at 29%.

Consistent with the aforementioned data, UPM respondents recorded the highest percentage of respondents who said that they had been subjected to discriminatory action, i.e. about 32% compared to 16% and 17% for UNIMAS and UPSI student respondents respectively.

Table 9  
*Perception and experience of discrimination*

Issue	Responses	UNIMAS No (%)	UPM No (%)	UPSI No (%)
Heard racist statement aimed at others	YES	125 (57)	61 (72)	268 (61)
	NO	34 (16)	8 (9)	61 (14)
	OTHER	59 (27)	16 (19)	110 (25)
Have racist statement aimed at self	YES	74 (34)	42 (49)	133 (30)
	NO	64 (29)	27 (32)	141 (32)
	OTHER	78 (36)	15 (18)	165 (38)
Have NOT being subjected to racist action	YES	137 (63)	42 (49)	228 (52)
	NO	35 (16)	27 (32)	76 (17)
	OTHER	46 (21)	16 (19)	135 (31)

Source: Survey

### Who are Friends with Whom?

On the assumption that circles of close friends help influence an individual's outlook, the questionnaire asked respondents to name their best friends and their ethnicity. Many may argue that there is a natural propensity to congregate among one's ethnic group. Nevertheless, this presumption would help provide the forward outlook on the success or failure in building inter-ethnic relations. Studies have shown that having a wide circle of friends with those from diverse backgrounds, promises a better process of nation building comprising diverse elements congruent with characteristics of a plural society.

Responses to the aforesaid are presented in Table 10, Table 11 and Table 12. These

tables show friends each ethnic respondent have had in their early days at their respective universities. Generally, there is a high percentage that if the respondent is a Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazandusun or Dayak, the larger percentage of their friends would come from their own ethnic community. The percentage is high that their friends would be of the same ethnic group such as Malay at about 80%, Chinese 89% and Indian 67%. Although the choice of friends is natural, this may have been influenced by prior background where they had come from a single or one ethnic dominated community, schools and social environment. Nonetheless, this prior environment changed as they set foot into a new, diverse university environment.

Table 10

UPM respondents' friends by ethnicity

Ethnic	Friend 1	Friend 2	Friend 3	Friend 4	Friend 5
Malay	80	73	69	86	76
Chinese	89	78	56	78	61
Indian	67	43	48	48	38

Source: Survey. All figures are in percentages.

Table 11

UNIMAS respondents' friends by ethnicity

Ethnic	Friend 1	Friend 2	Friend 3	Friend 4	Friend 5
Malay	54	67	69	86	76
Chinese	69	61	56	78	61
Indian	77	46	48	48	38
Sabah: Moslem	67	86	-	-	-
Sabah: Non-Moslem	73	89	-	-	-
Sarawak: Dayak	69	57	-	-	-
Sarawak: M/M	94	93	-	-	-

Source: Survey. Legend: M/M: Malay-Melanau. All figures are in percentages.

Table 12

*UPSI respondents' friends by same ethnicity*

Ethnic	Friend 1	Friend 2	Friend 3	Friend 4	Friend 5
Malay	54	39	66	23	70
Chinese	69	61	55	56	69
Indian	77	46	55	44	49
Sabah: Moslem	52	86	89	81	83
Sabah: Non-Moslem	82	89	80	69	79
Sarawak: Dayak	69	57	53	61	76
Sarawak: M/M	65	93	80	73	93

Source: Survey. Legend: M/M: Malay-Melanau. All figures are in percentages.

It would be interesting if the study is longitudinal to explore how time spent at the more diverse university environments would influence selection of friends. Malay, Chinese and Indian student respondents have slightly lower percentage preference for their own ethnic in samples drawn from UNIMAS (Table 11) and UPSI (Table 12).

Contrary to the pattern observed for Peninsular samples (Malay, Chinese and Indian), Sabah and Sarawak student respondents show a higher propensity to choose their friends from their own states. These are shown in percentages especially in Table 11 and Table 12 where Sabahans (Sabah Moslem, Sabah non-Moslem student respondents) and Sarawakians (Dayak, Malay/Melanau) have higher percentages of preferences for friends from their own state/ethnic community.

### Some Observations

This survey attempts to portray how the study of ethnic relations may be approached. The fundamental of ethnic relations is studying what happens at the roots, people

to people relations. People are basic units of study and to understand people and their perspectives on certain matters, learning has to start from the bottom-up path and not the other way, i.e. state or authority defined. It must be people-defined, and the top must address the infrastructure needed to bring about change to facilitate greater interaction between people on the ground. Structural change will only happen from the bottom-up approach and become a sustainable feature instead of being enforced from the top down. Any other attempts may not address the issue effectively as relations is about whether people are connecting and building networks willingly among and between themselves. Willingness is the very essence of how relations are constructed and the basic thrust in nation-building.

First, through a survey, the authors of this study wanted to explore whether the pervasiveness of basic societal infrastructures that these student respondents have been exposed to. For example, are their homes and school environment characteristically one-ethnic? This is important as this

experience will have an impact when they work in a larger environment outside their homes and schools. Results have shown that most of these student respondents come from national schools, but the influence of national-type and religious schools dominated by one ethnic continue to be significant. The latter could only undermine nation-building but thwart effort at building inter-ethnic relations between student respondents of different religions and ethnic backgrounds (Table 4 and Table 5). This is a sensitive issue that has dodged the society and its leadership because the issue is politically exploitable and could be used to bring in votes in each election.

Second, the above pattern of schooling is also not helped by home environment where substantial percentages of one-ethnic home environment are still relatively high (Table 3). This means that a substantial number of these student respondents do not have opportunities to know people of other ethnicity and religious backgrounds when they are confined to such a restricted setting. Although that might be argued as a natural phenomenon, this situation meant that nearly more than 60 years of Malaysia had not changed the façade of societal fabric that had divided and separated multi-ethnic and multi-religious Malaya/ Malaysia. Nevertheless, in the last fifty years or so, there has been significant number of improvements in term of bringing together diverse Malaysians from all walks of lives. The effort, which was accelerated by the 1970 New Economic Policy (NEP) initiatives, lasted for 20 years. Changes

brought about by NEP Framework are significant as unlike the colonial period, Malaysians do not meet at bus stops, traffic lights and markets anymore, as Furnivall (1956) was fond of ascribing a plural society during colonial Burma. Malaysians of today have long-term contacts in many basic social structures such as in education, 'new' homes settlements/ housing estates and workplaces in urban and semi-urban locations.

In contrast to the less inclusive environments, there are some consolations. Student respondents across three public institutions of higher learnings showed a good level of basic understanding of cultural/ religious diversities (Table 8). Majority of the student respondents are knowledgeable of the various ethnic/ religious festival, especially those from UNIMAS and UPSI, which comes as a relief to total ignorance.

Third, although the majority of the student respondents had heard of racist statements or remarks, only a small percentage reported that they had been subjected to some discriminatory actions (Table 9). Among the three samples, UPM students recorded a higher percentage of those who reported that they had not only heard of racist statement but had also being subjected to discriminatory actions.

Fourth, the pattern of friendship differs slightly between the three samples. Generally, results show that friendship is built along the ethnic line, stronger among UPM samples and slightly lesser among UNIMAS and UPSI samples (Table 10, Table 11 and Table 12). This calls for more

vigorous investigation although overall, the student population would differ between the three public universities. UNIMAS would be more diverse in its ethnic student compositions as compared to UPSI and UPM.

The general findings are that: (1) more is needed to change the environment in various set-ups in order to provide a freer mingling that could facilitate better inter-ethnic relations. Clearly, the 1970 NEP promises have made some changes, but the changes are insufficient to proliferate ethnic mingling. While the natural home environment may not be easy to re-structure, new settlements and housing estates can consider the need to create spaces where diversities could thrive and better relations between various ethnic communities could be promoted for nation-building.

## CONCLUSION

It is obvious that for successful nation-building and ethnic integration, more effort is needed to bring these various ethnic groups together in various settings such as in home/ housing environment, education and workplace. People of different ethnic backgrounds need to be put in the same settings to allow interactions to build lasting relations that would benefit nation-building. It has been shown in some studies that when diversities mix, products get better as the whole that comprises diversities benefit from the many goodnesses from different components. In political science, this occurrence could be explained by using the term “interlocking directorate”, i.e.

networking produces greater good for each part that come together or strengthen each unit though togetherness (Dahl, 1961).

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