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## **Introduction: A Moment to Mull, a Call to Critique**

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# Introduction: A Moment to Mull, a Call to Critique

Khoo Boo Teik\*

The year 2017, which marked the 60th year since the Federation of Malaya emerged from colonial rule to become a new nation, was a compelling moment to reflect on important social, economic, cultural, and political developments and changes that had taken place. Some changes were realized more or less as planned, while others were unforeseen. Some fulfilled hopes, but others scuttled expectations. Many brought lasting outcomes but many more only transitory impacts. This chapter serves as the introduction to a volume of articles that views Malaysia's multidimensional social transformation through lenses of "divides and dissent" to appraise key moments, incidents and expressions of contention, and trends of conflict that have shaped society and politics. The areas and issues covered by this exercise of critical reflection are ethnicity and class, political economy, federal-state relations, Islamism and Islamist practices, law and the judiciary, women's participation in politics, art and pedagogy, and the emergence of new streams of sociopolitical dissent.

**Keywords:** Malaysia, ethnicity and class, political economy, federal-state relations, Islamism, law and judiciary, women's participation, art and pedagogy, sociopolitical dissent

The year 2017 marked the 60th year since the Federation of Malaya emerged from colonial rule to become a new nation. The appropriateness of commemorating August 31, 1957, the date of Merdeka or Malayan independence, instead of September 16, 1963, the date of formation of the Federation of Malaysia, as National Day was sometimes—and with reason—disputed by people in Sabah and Sarawak, which joined Malaya and Singapore to form Malaysia.<sup>1)</sup> Yet there was (more than) a historic ring to "60 years" that made 2017 a compelling moment to reflect on important social, economic, cultural, and political developments and changes that had taken place, many of which had Malayan and not just

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1) See the essay on Sabah and Sarawak (Chapter 4); its title refers to 54 years of being in Malaysia.

Malaysian roots. Some of those changes were realized more or less as planned,<sup>2)</sup> while others were unforeseen.<sup>3)</sup> Some fulfilled hopes,<sup>4)</sup> but others scuttled expectations.<sup>5)</sup> Many brought lasting outcomes,<sup>6)</sup> many more only transitory impacts.<sup>7)</sup> Whatever their sources, internal or external, and however they might have begun, in clarity or in doubt, those changes in their totality had transformed the nation and society from their original state.

### Fresh Lenses of “Divides and Dissent”

At a time like this, a standard way of reflecting on the processes of national and social transformation and their consequences is to observe, accounting-like, a record of “continuity with change” or create a register of “change with continuity.” This volume of essays does not tread such a path of commemorative self-reassurance! Instead, the essays view Malaysia’s multidimensional social transformation through contrarian lenses of “divides and dissent” to appraise key moments, incidents and expressions of contention, and trends of conflict that have shaped society and politics.

Even so, this volume does not contain a call to celebrate instability or rejoice in discord. Suffice it for clarification here to recall that after Merdeka, every 10th year before 2017 had seen a major manifestation of social divide and political dissent. In 1967 there was the *hartal* in Penang, the unplanned but violent by-product of which presaged the much worse eruption of interethnic violence in Kuala Lumpur on May 13, 1969. “May 13” itself supplied the state with the justification for the radically transformative but politically divisive New Economic Policy. In 1977 the federal government’s imposition of Emergency rule over Kelantan terminated the collaboration between the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) in the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN, National Front). The revived UMNO-PAS antagonism, moreover, reshaped the contours of PAS’s internal politics and

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2) Those include major schemes of rural development and projects of urbanization.

3) Singapore’s separation from Malaysia just two years after the latter’s formation was a shocking development.

4) The hopes vested in the New Economic Policy’s twin objectives of poverty eradication and restructuring were realized to a considerable degree.

5) The impact of the East Asian financial crisis of 1997 dashed predictions of continued rapid economic growth.

6) Begun in the early 1970s, export-oriented industrialization retains its economic importance to the present.

7) A policy to change from teaching science and mathematics in the Malay language to English was barely implemented when controversy reversed the switch.

established new parameters for the politics of Islam. Ten years later, UMNO suffered a profound crisis of leadership that split the party and convulsed the entire political system, affecting state and society from the peninsula to Sabah and Sarawak. From the split came a precedent: dissidents forced out of UMNO would mobilize to defeat their former party. A decade after that, the East Asian financial crisis sparked a disaster of political economy that impaired Vision 2020, Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's ambitious project of socioeconomic advancement, and generated waves of political ferment that have not receded to this day. And in 2007, a trinity of mass demonstrations, separately organized by the Bar Council, the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH), and the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF), set in motion the momentous "tsunami," or the opposition's unprecedented gains in the general election of the following year.

There were, of course, many other divisive incidents and dissident articulations in the intervening years. Some were more serious and threatening or, conversely, more promising than others. The objective of this volume is to use the theme of "divides and dissent" to look at society afresh by picking out social, economic, and political tensions that have been embedded only to surface in sharp controversies, astounding incidents, or portentous trends. By analyzing the tensions in certain sectors, the contributors to this volume explain how some of the tensions have been resolved and why others have remained unsettled.

Three points about this volume should be made at the outset. First, it is not meant to be a comprehensive 60-year recitation of familiar background and overworked issues. Second, focusing on divides and dissent in sociopolitical transformation does not presuppose conformity with any particular theoretical or paradigmatic stance. Third, not all tensions are assumed to be dismal or ominous; some may provide the impetus for rethinking social change or redirecting institutional reform. As such, each contributor to this volume has been free to be selective (of issues, incidents, and actors), subjective (in vantage point), and, if necessary, searing (in commentary and evaluation) while observing scholastic standards. The goal is a collection of bold and personal but coherent interpretations of the divides and dissent in Malaysian society.

## **The Structure of the Volume**

No social schism in Malaysia has seemed as natural and intractable as its ethnic divide. Ethnicity is invasive in its social life and pervasive in the study of its politics. Still, as Abdul Rahman Embong (Chapter 2) stresses, ethnicity no less than class is a social construct and paradigm. In fact, ethnic and class divides are historically constituted, grounded

in political economy, and moored to state policies that, wittingly or otherwise, provoke dissent in different classes, groups, and organizations. Besides, there has always been a complex contestation between ethnicity and class not only “as social facts, policies, and programs” but also “as paradigms, or ways of thinking and analysis.” In the 1980s, for example, UMNO’s ideologues re-fashioned the “plural society and ethnic bloc” thesis as an ideology of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy) by manufacturing notions of Malay “first-ness” and original ownership of the land to legitimize ethnically determined claims on power and privileges. Yet class is ever present in ownership and control of wealth, state-capital relations, transformation of the middle and working classes, politics and civil society organizations, and the workings of globalization. For Rahman, ethnic-class contestation is expressed in the competing visions and struggles of political coalitions that arose or disappeared at different historical moments. In recent times, that contestation and its accompanying dissent partly compelled state economic planning, which long entrenched ethnicity in policy direction and programmatic design, to incorporate “income class categories” to address the class dimensions of “social exclusion and income inequality.” In that continuing contestation lies a hope that Malaysia may not be “trapped in the ethnic paradigm” and Malaysian studies may not be skewed by the “ethnic prism.”

In fact, ethnicity and class and the state interact to produce ruptures and conflict, as Jeff Tan (Chapter 3) demonstrates with his schematic four-phase depiction of economic development from 1957 to 2016 in terms of cycles of accumulation and conflict. For each phase the state was impelled to allocate rents for accumulation and accommodation to balance economic growth with political stability. But emergent Malay intermediate classes tilted the balance toward redistribution, intensifying contestation over rents, factionalizing UMNO, and fragmenting patron-client networks. Politically, the accumulation-accommodation dialectic produced episodic conflict in or around 1969, 1987, 1998, and 2016. Economically, pressures for redistribution subverted the state’s ability to deploy rents for productive accumulation, in manufacturing, say, and diverted learning rents from technological and industrial upgrading to accumulation in unproductive sectors. But the economy could not deliver high enough growth rates to sustain redistribution when manufacturing, previously the engine of growth, faltered. Recent long-term declines in GDP growth, Tan contends, reflect the cumulative effects of unproductive accumulation, including premature deindustrialization. At the center of this situation stands the core constituency of UMNO and the state, namely, the Malay intermediate classes. Large segments of them, unable to rise as a successful Malay capitalist class, rely on rents and state protection for quick profits from unproductive accumulation. The state cannot now undo its previous neglect to enforce discipline or performance targets. The state seeks instead to lead the accumulation process again via government-linked

corporations (GLCs). Tan concludes, however, that the turn to GLCs as a politico-economic response to the failure of Malay capital rigidifies current accumulation preferences and reinforces the shift from higher-level manufacturing.

Sabah and Sarawak, as Faisal Hazis (Chapter 4) shows, have always faced a peculiar divide in their relations with the federal government. Three factors periodically remold those relations. First, there is history. When Malaysia was formed, Sabah and Sarawak were accorded “safeguards”—the “Twenty Points” for Sabah and “Eighteen Points” for Sarawak—or a large degree of state government control of many matters elsewhere administered by the federal government. Second, there is geography. Their physical separation from the peninsula, the locus of federal power and a more advanced economy, rarely eases resentments in Sabah and Sarawak over their domination and neglect by the federation. Third, the states have been ruled by local strongmen who, despite their different interests and agendas, personify the two states’ continual attempts to juggle amity with autonomy vis-à-vis the federal government. Thus, Faisal suggests, the divide between Sabah and Sarawak, and the peninsula crucially rests on center-periphery-like negotiation over power, resources, and the strongmen’s reliability. Out of this comes an amalgam of “domination, contestation, and accommodation,” in Faisal’s view the leitmotif of Sabah and Sarawak’s uneasy 54 years in Malaysia. Rules have been set and reset to manage this elite-level divide before. The situation, however, has become more complex. Sabah and Sarawak, long taken for granted as the BN’s vote banks, are more assertive, Faisal observes, now that BN and the opposition are virtually stalemated in the peninsula. And, if they seem remote from the post-1998 dissident ferment on the peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak could yet experience a contrasting divide as “pockets of resistance” oppose the corruption, abuse of power, inequitable growth, land grabbing, and shrinking democratic space associated with local strongman rule.

Islam as faith and as official religion does not in itself create a contentious divide where the constitution guarantees freedom of worship for adherents of other religions, who form almost half the population. But as Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid (Chapter 5) observes, an interplay of Islam and politics in public space over 60 years has created intra-Muslim and interreligious rifts. One source of the divisiveness is discursive. It lies in an unrelenting engagement by an assortment of politicians, commentators, scholars, bureaucrats, and civil society activists in a discourse of Islamic politics to impose social control or to express dissent. By essentializing Islam for political interests, that engagement arrests the evolution of concepts of “religion” and “secularism” and hardens boundaries between what is considered Islamic or un-Islamic. Here, contemporary Islamic discourse in Malaysia inclines toward a severe politico-legal direction that consigns the philosophical and spiritual aspects of Islam to the periphery of the Malay-Muslim religious

worldview. When it is defined, interrogated, and essentialized through institutional lenses, Islam invariably bears politico-legal coloring. A practical consequence is to undermine a “much-cherished multiculturalism and pluralism” by systematically marginalizing non-Muslim and unorthodox Muslim voices. Another source of divisiveness is policy making that “professes fealty to Islam” while adopting an ideology of Islamism or Wahhabi-Salafi-driven political Islam that is preoccupied with the legalistic injunctions and prohibitions of Islam. Without an internalization of Islam as a religious faith in all its civilizational manifestations, Ahmad Fauzi cautions, it would not be difficult at the present juncture for Islamism to acquire “a little addition of jihadism” and turn toward violent extremism.

In a common law system, Azmi Sharom (Chapter 6) notes, the judiciary bears considerable responsibility for minimizing “partial and imbalanced decision making” to prevent unnecessary conflict and maintain “enough space for dissent.” On this score, and especially in recent times, Azmi Sharom argues, landmark cases show the Malaysian judiciary to have failed. For instance, court rulings on several cases of religious controversy ignored unambiguous constitutional provisions, such as the freedom of worship, or disingenuously interpreted the constitution without offering sound legal reasoning or firm historical foundation. To that extent, the judiciary has not lessened but effectively exacerbated the interreligious divisiveness (to which Ahmad Fauzi’s essay also refers). Nor can the judiciary be credited with upholding democracy. Judges have mostly treated dissent with suspicion rather than protect it by rigorously testing laws that were enacted to quell dissent against fundamental principles of democracy. The constitution does not have an encompassing statement of a “higher ideal,” but, Azmi Sharom argues, other historical documents show the nation’s founders aspiring toward an ethos of equality among citizens. When judges proffer literalist interpretations of the law bereft of a higher ideal, however, they undermine respect for fair electoral choice or transparent decision making. Finally, Azmi Sharom insists that in a nation saddled with ethno-religious schisms, the judiciary is duty-bound to protect the spaces open to lawfully conducted, alternative, and dissident viewpoints on controversial matters. He declines to speculate on judges’ motives but concludes that the judiciary has failed to perform that duty.

Across social divides posed by ethnicity, class, religion, and gender, Malaysian women have never been politically quiescent. They have been involved in a full spectrum of pre- and post-independence political activity, whether they belonged with the establishment, the opposition, or nonpartisan civil society. The prominence of women in the movement for electoral reform, BERSIH, for example, is evidence of their continuing political presence. Yet their representation in formal political positions is not commensurate with their record of activity. Among Southeast Asian parliaments, Malaysia’s has



one of the lowest proportions of women as parliamentarians. Maznah Mohamad (Chapter 7) suggests, though, that women's involvement in formal politics has taken on novel characteristics since new divides and fresh waves of dissent emerged from 1999. She explores the specificities of women's ground-level experience in formal politics to explain what really goes on at the everyday level when women navigate politics that is not favorable to their presence. She asks how women's involvement in formal politics can be expanded via social, political, and administrative processes that can cohere as a strategy for strengthening their electoral advantage. Those processes include the collaboration between women's civil society and state political actors, the cultivation of clientelist and patronage relations, and the maintenance of a cohesive multiparty opposition coalition. Such a combination, Maznah contends, could have a bearing on subsequent "formalization" of women in politics. Drawing from current practices and conscious of the tenuousness of political alliances in the present state of politics, she regards some form of a gender quota mechanism as being part of a more reliable method of increasing women's representation.

The political ferment of the past three decades or so found many forms of dissident creative expression, in literary work, art, theater, film, cartoons, and even posters and banners used in demonstrations. Simon Soon (Chapter 8) posts a reminder, however, that intersections of creativity and dissent need not be demarcated by individual rebellion or precipitated by moments of political crisis. Soon reflects on some artists' projects of "building a critical mass" that depart from the standard narrative of art and politics that links artistic output to critical juncture. With an eye on historical conditions, he examines the thoughts and actions, motives and impacts of at least two generations of artists who have moved from the politics to the art of pedagogy. Soon's subjects cover established artists of international repute, individual figures of dissident art, and loosely structured reading or study or experimental art groups. These subjects form a broad countermovement to the institutionalization of art and pedagogy by dissenting against conventions of postcolonial higher education within. From Soon's perspective, movements of the "art of pedagogy" spurn the sociocultural codes and political decorum of institutions of art in search of an alternative mode of creativity attuned to the current sociopolitical situation. Dissent within the ranks of creative artists is not bound to the conventional idea of an artist producing an image to deliver a political message. Even then, creativity in dissent has become part of social-engagement projects that have seen eruptions of expression, not least in the streets and over cyberspace.

Khoo Boo Teik (Chapter 9) explores connections between social divides, which stimulate or provoke dissent, and dissident interventions that change the contours of social divides. He focuses on dissident convergence and oppositional transformation that



have altered the terrain and terms of politics within the past 20 years. He argues for a dynamic view of waves of dissent that emerged, receded, or resurged to challenge the regime. Separately viewed or organized as Reformasi, BERSIH, and HINDRAF, post-September 1998 dissent mobilized alongside an opposition project that had poor results before making a historic electoral breakthrough in 2008. Another spurt gave the opposition, now institutionalized as Pakatan Rakyat (PR, People's Pact), its best electoral result in 2013; but this second coalition was still unable to unseat the ruling coalition. Thereafter, external repression, internal disunity, and fortuitous events combined to unravel the PR. But ironically, just when the opposition was headed for another nadir, new scandals and fresh crises struck at the regime and once again divided UMNO's leadership. As a result, new sociopolitical divides have sprung up, the regime is hobbled, and a restructured opposition coalition struggles to coordinate dissent. What social transformation has produced this uncharted political terrain? What has been the impact of broad, deep, and sustained dissent on contemporary politics? What are the implications for political contestation when neither the opposition nor the regime can claim a convincing hold over the popular imagination? Addressing these and related questions, Khoo's analysis brings the situation up to the moment of writing (March 2017).

This volume does not offer a collective conclusion on an overall situation that remained fluid. Up to the eve of the 60th anniversary of Merdeka, perhaps only this much could be said with some certainty about current political struggles in Malaysia: the divides and dissent in society and politics endured, not as ossified fixtures but in contingent forms that were dynamically reconfigured as historical conditions and the composition of protagonists changed.

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### Postscript<sup>8)</sup>

Between the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018, when the manuscript of this Special Issue was accepted for publication, the opposing sides in the political system made their preparations to contest in the 14th General Election (GE14). There was intensive campaigning even before Parliament was dissolved or the date of GE14 was announced. In the event GE14, that covered the elections for Parliament and the Legislative Assembly in all states except Sarawak, was held on May 9, 2018. There was considerable excitement in GE14 as a new unified opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan (Harapan, or Pact of Hope) led by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad mobilized to challenge the incumbent Barisan Nasional (BN, or National Front) headed by Prime Minister Najib Razak. The latter expected to win comfortably. Its advantages were obvious: the powers of incumbency, newly passed electoral re-delineation that heavily

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8) Written on October 6, 2018.

favored BN's dominant partner, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), and the refusal of the opposition party, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS, or Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), to cooperate with Harapan. The outcome of GE14, known late in the evening of May 9, registered tremendous shock around the world: the two-year old Harapan had won and its 92-year old leader, Mahathir, became the "7th Prime Minister," having been the "4th Prime Minister" from 1981 to 2003.

One must resist passing off hindsight as prescience. Even so one might say with reference to the theme of this volume of essays that Malaysia's "divides and dissent" had culminated via GE14 in "regime change" for the first time in 61 years after Merdeka. How might the analyses in this volume guide an understanding of post-GE14 society and politics? Some pointers may be considered here.

First, a superficial review of the post-GE14 distribution of representation and power suggests that the divides of ethnicity and class persist but in modified forms. In Peninsular Malaysia, Harapan's staunchest support at the national level lay in the urban non-Malay-majority and ethnically-mixed constituencies. While it won a number of rural Malay seats once steadfastly loyal to UMNO Harapan could not match the influence of UMNO and PAS in constituencies with very large Malay majorities. At the state level, Harapan swept the ethnically mixed, highly urbanized, and economically developed west coast from Kedah in the north to Johor in the south. But four predominantly rural Malay states were split between PAS and UMNO. The former retained Kelantan and won Terengganu on the east coast. The latter held onto Perlis, the smallest and northernmost state, and Pahang, the largest and central-eastern state. The post-GE14 balance of power bears a resemblance to the situation after the first Malayan general election of 1959 when the Alliance (BN's predecessor) won all states except Kelantan and Terengganu which were taken by PAS. To some extent, GE14 has reproduced an old rural-urban divide that overlapped with demographic divisions between Malays and non-Malays, and economic differences between less developed and more prosperous communities. But GE14 brought peaceful regime change with no trace of the interethnic tensions that led to violence after the general election of May 1969. Ethnicity and class remain salient but altered sites of social divides (see Abdul Rahman Embong in this volume). Whether and how they serve as sources of dissent towards the new regime will depend, among others, on how all political parties in power or opposition grapple with the ethnic-class implications of GE14 not for their political strategies alone but also policies.

Second, another version of a regional divide—between the peninsula, and Sabah and Sarawak—remains but again it has been modified by GE14. Sabah re-enacted the theme of a "strongman-led" state government seeking balance with a peninsula-dominated federal government (see Faisal Hazis in this volume). This time Shafie Apdal led a new regionalist Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan, or Sabah Heritage Party) (see Khoo Boo Teik, Chapter 9, in this volume) to form a coalition government with smaller parties. For GE14 Warisan and Harapan were allies. Harapan won some parliamentary seats against BN but stayed away from state contests. Thus, Harapan accepted the old regionalist refrain of "Sabah for Sabahans" that was revived by Warisan's mobilization. For its part, Warisan committed its parliamentarians to the Harapan-headed federal government. In Sarawak, BN's constellation of state-based parties held a majority of the parliamentary seats against several Harapan gains. But when national defeat cast them as the opposition, Sarawak's BN parties abandoned the BN framework. They now form a loose "Sarawak only" coalition that rules Sarawak since there was no state election in 2018. After an eventual state election, probably to be held within two years, a formal coalition will emerge to re-negotiate Sarawak's relationship with the peninsula. Meanwhile Harapan has indicated its willingness to review key provisions that governed the original merger of Sabah and Sarawak with Malaya to form Malaysia in 1963.

Third, much of Harapan's electoral mobilization had drawn on converging streams of popular dissent over quotidian hardships, high-level corruption, institutional degradation, diminished civil liberties, and so on (see Khoo Boo Teik, Chapter 9, in this volume). Mahathir's Cabinet, mostly constituted of

experienced dissidents, responded to mass expectations of reform. It would take longer to overcome economic hardship but the extremely unpopular Goods and Services Tax was abolished. Within days of GE14, a full royal pardon was secured that released Anwar Ibrahim from prison with all charges against him officially erased. Then came an anti-authoritarian turn true to Harapan's promise of a democratic environment with free media and respect for civil liberties. Reform was swiftly conducted in law and the judiciary that had previously been abused for repression (see Azmi Sharom in this volume): politically motivated suits against dissidents were withdrawn; unjust verdicts against oppositionists were overturned; reputable untainted figures were appointed to the offices of Attorney-General, Chief Justice of the Federal Court, and Speaker of the Parliament. The work of repealing notoriously repressive laws was begun. Where the previous regime was suspected of covering up corruption, the new regime legally attacked impunity for high corruption, above all by resuming the official investigation of the 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) financial scandal (see Khoo Boo Teik, Chapter 9, in this volume) with the cooperation of foreign jurisdictions. At the time of writing, Najib Razak has been charged with 32 counts of criminal breach, corrupt abuse of power, and money laundering, many traceable to 1MDB. His wife, Rosmah Mansor, faces 17 counts of money laundering and tax evasion. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has frozen 408 individual and/or corporate bank accounts (some belonging to UMNO and BN parties) suspected of receiving money originating in 1MDB. Mahathir acted to reform the civil service. Many high-ranking public officials resigned or were effectively dismissed. The most prominent of them were the Attorney-General, the Chief Justice, the President of the Court of Appeal, the Director of MACC, the Governor of Bank Negara (the central bank), the Secretary-General of the Treasury, and an assortment of senior officials of government-linked corporations. Moreover, the regime terminated 17,000 "political appointments" and closed some agencies as part of conducting institutional cleansing and rationalization on a scale not seen before.

Fourth, it is not only pre-GE14 dissent that matters. Post-GE14 dissent is obviously present. For the time being its principal expressions come from a defeated UMNO and an unvanquished PAS. The principal leaders of the two parties try to erect an ideological "Malay first and Islamist" defense of "race, religion and (Malay) rulers." This politicization of ethno-religious tenets and anxieties (see Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid in this volume) occasionally creates controversies over such matters as sexuality, child marriage, appointments (of non-Malays or non-Muslims) to senior public office, the use of non-Malay languages in public communications, and so on. The ethno-religious attacks on Harapan have not made much headway. The regime's leaders are mostly Malay-Muslim, and Prime Minister Mahathir is iconic of the Malay-led multi-ethnic leadership and "progressive Islam" of his time. In two recent post-GE14 bye-elections (occasioned by the death through illness of the incumbents), UMNO and PAS, which took turns to contest while publicly espousing their alliance, were both defeated by Harapan candidates.

Finally, political economy will surely have an influence over the transition to "New Malaysia," Harapan and its supporters characterize the post-GE14 situation. The defeat of UMNO and the anti-corruption campaign that targets its leaders and their allies have severely diminished the material resources that they once took for granted. As a political party, UMNO is financially strapped as it had never been before. An example is the virtually bankrupt position of *Utusan Malaysia*, UMNO's Malay-language daily newspaper; its financial losses cannot be offset by fresh infusions of money from either UMNO or the government. Yet one must assume that the ranks of UMNO-associated businesses used to many forms of rent-seeking before (see Jeff Tan in this volume) must harbor grievances that can be readily expressed as political dissent if the economy falters or if they are unable to re-negotiate their way in a milieu where business is largely separated from politics, that being the goal of a good portion of the Harapan leadership that wants to see "good governance, transparency, and accountability."

It is infeasible to cover divides and dissent in many other areas. It is hoped that the Introduction and the Postscript can server as a guide to how the theme may be explored beyond this Special Issue.