

IBN KHALDUN'S THEORY OF '*ASABIYYAH* AND
'*UMRAN*: THE CASE OF THE DECLINING POLITICAL
POWER OF THE UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL
ORGANIZATION (UMNO)

BY

SYED HAMID BIN SYED JAAFAR ALBAR

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the decline and erosion of UMNO as a dominant political party of Malaysia through the perspective of Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran*. It uses the qualitative method of data collection from Ibn Khaldun's original works. After discussing Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran*, UMNO's *'umranic* contributions and erosion of Malay *'asabiyyah* are discussed in detail. The study outlines how *'asabiyyah* led to UMNO's rise to prominence, gain of political power, bringing of progress and development of Malaysia to an *'umranic* stage before it started to decline and erode in accordance with the five stages of Ibn Khaldun's theory of rise and fall of civilizations. The study finds that the early leaders of UMNO played a significant role in fostering group feeling and solidarity of the Malays (*'asabiyyah*). *'Asabiyyah* was the engine that propelled UMNO to acquire *mulk* and transform the Malays and Malaysia into an *'umranic* society. The study also concludes that the later leaders of UMNO contributed to the weakening of the Malay *'asabiyyah* and the fall of UMNO from power in the 14th General Elections in 2018. The process of UMNO's decline and erosion of political power is primarily caused by the leaders' failures and shortcomings. The study, among others, recommends that for UMNO to be relevant again in the current political landscape, it must initiate new and serious approaches and initiatives to change itself and must focus on good governance and rule of law in a multi-ethnic Malaysian society.

ملخص البحث

يبحث هذا البحث في تراجع وتآكل UMNO كحزب سياسي مهيم في ماليزيا من خلال نظرية يتناول البحث تراجع هيمنة حزب UMNO السياسي وتآكلها في ماليزيا من خلال النظرية الخلدونية عن العصبية والعمران، وقد أتبع الباحث المنهج النوعي لجمع البيانات من أعمال ابن خلدون الأصيلة، ومن خلال مناقشة نظريته في العصبية والعمران؛ ناقش إسهامات الحزب العمرانية، وتراجع العصبية الملايوية، لبيّن ما كان لهذه العصبية من مكانة في وصول الحزب إلى الصدارة، واكتسابه القوة السياسية، وتحقيقه التقدم والتنمية في ماليزيا؛ للوصول إلى مرحلة عمرانية متقدمة قبل أن تتراجع هيمنته وتآكل، وذلك كله يتفق مع المراحل الخمس للنظرية الخلدونية في نشوء الحضارات وسقوطها، وقد أظهرت النتائج أن لقادة الحزب مكانة مهمة في تعزيز التضامن مع العصبية الملايوية التي كانت المحرك الذي مهّد للحزب تحويل الملايو وماليزيا إلى مجتمع عمراني، وأن هؤلاء القادة لما أسهموا في إضعاف العصبية الملايوية أسقطوا الحزب من السلطة السياسية في دورة الانتخابات العامة الرابعة عشرة عام 2018؛ أي إن فشل الحزب من فشل قاداته، وعليه؛ يوصي الباحث بأن يكون حزب UMNO ذات صلة بالمشهد السياسي مجدداً، وأن يبدأ مناهج ومبادرات جديدة جادة للتغيير، مع التركيز على الحكم الرشيد وسيادة القانون في المجتمع الماليزي كثير الأعراق.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Political Science).

.....
Syed Arabi Idid
Supervisor

.....
Wahabuddin Ra'ees
Co-Supervisor

.....
Hazizan Bin Md. Noon
Co-Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Political Science).

.....
Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid
Examiner

.....
Tunku Mohar Mokhtar
Examiner

This thesis was submitted to the Department of Political Science and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Political Science).

.....
Rabi'ah Binti Aminudin
Head, Department of Political
Science

This thesis was submitted to the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Political Science).

.....
Shukran Bin Abd Rahman
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic
Revealed Knowledge and Human
Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1MDB	One Malaysian Development Berhad
Amanah	National Trust Party (Malaysian Parti Amanah Negara)
BA	Alternative Front (Barisan Alternative)
Bersatu	Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia)
BN	National Front (Barisan Nasional)
DAP	Democratic Action Party
DPM	Deputy Prime Minister
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
GE	General Election
IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
IMP	Independent Malayan Party
ITM	ITM Institute of Technology MARA (Institut Teknologi MARA)
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MIC	Malaysia Indian Congress
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army
MRSM	Junior Science College MARA (Maktab Rendah Sains MARA)
MU	Malayan Union
NEP	New Economic Policy
NOC	National Operations Council
PAP	People Action Party
PAS	Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia)
PH	Alliance of Hope (Pakatan Harapan)
PKR	People's Justice Party (Parti Keadilan Rakyat)
PM	Prime Minister
PMSJ	Peninsular Malay Movement of Johore (Pergerakan Melayu Semenanjung Johor)
PNM	Malaysian Nationalist Party (Parti Negara Malaya)
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UITM	University of Technology MARA (Universiti Teknologi MARA)
UKM	National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation (Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu)
WW II	World War Two

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), a Malay-ethnic based political party was founded on 11 May 1946. UMNO has been the dominant driving force in the politics of Malaya under Parti Perikatan (Alliance Party) since the independence of Malaya in 1957 until 1974. After the formation of Malaysia on 16th September 1963 it continued to govern the country within the framework of National Front or Barisan Nasional (BN) until it lost power on May 8 2018. UMNO from the time of its establishment struggled to champion the rights of the ethnic Malays through several policy initiatives such as the New Economic Policy (NEP), sustaining the constitutional rights and privileges of the Malays within the context of the ‘social contract’. The government has largely been successful in transforming the rural-based Malay community into a modern civic ethnic community. UMNO was the only political party at the time of the struggle for independence acceptable to the British, the Malay Rulers, the aristocrats and the Malay masses to represent them. Other Malay ethnic-based political parties such as Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia or Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu), Parti Islam Se-Malaysia or Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), and Parti Keadilan Rakyat or People’s Justice Party (PKR) are in fact the offshoots of UMNO except for the Malaysian Parti Amanah Negara or the National Trust Party (Amanah), which was the offshoot of PAS. UMNO’s leadership has been able to garner the support of other major ethnic groups through the politics of coalition and compromise. UMNO, while championing the rights of the Malay ethnic

community, adopted a policy of moderation towards other races. Therefore, it has been instrumental to deliver economic development of Malaysia and maintaining peace and racial harmony. UMNO enjoyed strong popularity among the Malays until the 1999 10th GE

But, in the 9 May 2018 General Election (GE), UMNO's 61-year rule abruptly came to an end. The regime change in that election through the democratic ballot box in Malaysia was radical and phenomenal, hence, should be critically examined by analysing the general election results from the period of 2008 to 2018. This will allow us to comprehend the factors contributing to the rise and decline of the political power of UMNO as a political force in Malaysian politics. For this purpose the researcher will apply the political theories of 14th century Muslim philosopher and historian Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'umran* (science of civilisation/culture) and *'asabiyyah* (social solidarity/group feeling). It was clear that UMNO suffered a decline in the support of the Malay voters due to the issues of governance and corruption, and financial scandals coupled with the disintegration of group feeling and or solidarity (i.e. *'asabiyyah*). Viewing it from the perspective of Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah*, one could suggest alternative ways of reinstating group feeling for UMNO members and a sense of confidence to regain their solidarity and cohesion and restore the people's (*rakyat*'s) confidence on the party leadership. The Malay community who are Muslims faces many challenges and problems at the state and national levels. The Malays need strong and credible party leaders to lead them under UMNO, to prevent further decline of their power and regain their popularity and strength. Therefore, there are many examples and lessons from Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* that can be applied to arrest the downhill slide of political power of UMNO since the 2008 GE up until its removal from power in 2018.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The 61-year rule of UMNO came to an end on 9 May 2018. Many questions have been raised about the nature and causes of the decline of political power of UMNO in Malaysia after the GE 14 on 9 May 2018. Malay voters' political support for UMNO had eroded and their feeling as part of the imagined community disappeared due to the transformation of Malay society from rural based to urban based. Living in a highly urbanised and developed state with sprawling towns and cities had caused changes of their social and traditional values. Therefore, UMNO today faces challenges from within the party as well as challenges emanating from Malaysia's socio-political fabric. The challenges UMNO faces from within are issues of weak leadership(s), such as moral degradation, money politics, corruption, over centralisation of party matters to the headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, conflicts and disunity. There were also issues of coalition partners in the BN. Since the GE 10, the social media becomes a significant instrument in forming public opinion on leaders and government. On top of that the state has achieved an *'umrani* status from urbanisation, which caused the changing of social and traditional values. These internal and external issues resulted in the loss of trust and confidence in the BN government led by UMNO among Malay urban and young voters as well as the non-Malay voters. There was a serious Malay leadership credibility and confidence gap in a new urbanised environment, which decapitated voters' (Malays and non-Malays) support since within BN itself group feelings and cohesion has weakened i.e. sense of *'asabiyyah* towards UMNO as the leader of the BN has disappeared with it. Hence there is a need to explore, examine and redefine the applicability of the concept of *'asabiyyah* expounded by Ibn Khaldun. On this rationale, it is inevitable that an extensive expository research needs to be conducted to explain the determinants, nature, and causes of the decline of

UMNO based on current realities and new paradigms in the political landscapes prevailing in Malaysia today. What measures can be taken to correct the erosion of political powers and dominance of UMNO?

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study answers the following questions:

1. How was UMNO political dominance weakened?
2. What are the factors behind the decline and erosion of the political power and dominance of UMNO?
3. Can Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* explain the decline of UMNO's political power and dominance in Malaysia and how to overcome it?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse how UMNO's political power and dominance has weakened over the period of 2008-2018.
2. To discuss the causes of the decline of support among the Malays and erosion of UMNO's political power.
3. To discuss Ibn Khaldun's theory *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* and their application to UMNO's decline of political power, how to overcome the decline of UMNO's political power.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are a number of rationales for this study. Firstly, this research examines the unique theory of Ibn Khaldun's *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* in the contemporary period in relation to the erosion of political power and dominance of UMNO in the Malaysian political scene. The theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* have been studied and researched extensively by scholars and academics from differing perspectives to show they are similar or different from contemporary theories of history, politics and sociology.

However, in this research the issue of examination is not in the generalities but specifically focused on the social transformation brought by *'umran*, hence the loosening of solidarity or *'asabiyyah* within the Malay Muslim society that impacted UMNO. Contemporary scholars have agreed that Ibn Khaldun's theories of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* are applicable to the past, present and possibly future rise and decline of societies and states. There is a resurgence of interest of contemporary scholars to study the nature and causes of the changes of societies and civilisations as discussed in the *Muqaddimah* though the numbers are still small. Hence, this research could add value to the corpus of knowledge and fill the gap on the applicability of Ibn Khaldun's political theory to the UMNO dilemma.

Secondly, most of the writings on Ibn Khaldun were comparative studies with contemporary western political and social theories be it modern or medieval times. As the term *'asabiyyah* is controversial and very much associated with the pre-Islamic tribal practice in Arabia, which was condemned by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and resonates a negative connotation among Muslim Malaysians (includes non-Malay Muslims), the research would show that the natural *'asabiyyah* in the *Muqaddimah* is not inconsistent with Islam and its teachings in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Scholars like

Caksu (2007), Kayapinar (2006: 88) Alatas (2006: 782-795), Goodman (1972: 250-270) and Gibb (1933: 23-31) among others dealt with the theological and religious aspects of *'asabiyyah*.

Thirdly, it is significant in understanding the operationalisation of Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* to the decline of political power and dominance of UMNO and its leaderships of Malaysia from the GE 12 in 2008 until GE 14 in 2018. UMNO could not sustain the hegemony of the Malay community or even the imagined communities from the aspects of state parochialism, Islam and nationalism (Benedict Anderson, 1983: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin & spread of nationalism*, London, Verso). This theory of imagined communities could be implied to be applicable to the birth of Malay nationalism led by UMNO. This research would examine whether Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* would be relevant to UMNO today and how it could be applied. Therefore, the significance of the research would be examining the factors for the decline of UMNO and how it could be overcome to answer the questions raised in this research.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many studies which focus on Ibn Khaldun's biography, theory of state, *'umran* or culture/civilisation, *'asabiyyah* (group feeling), education, law, personality development and spirituality. There are also studies that attempt to apply Ibn Khaldun's theory to specific events and happenings. There are also studies though scarce and slowly emerging, which discuss the decline and erosion of UMNO's political power. However, there is no study as it will become clear through the following discussion that explains the decline and erosion political power of UMNO through Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran*. Ibn Khaldun crystallised his

experiences and observations into concepts and theories, and *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* were borne out of this analysis. Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena in English) was an introduction to his "*Kitab Al-'Ibar*", "the Book of Lessons". It has attracted a lot of discussions and debates among scholars and commentators searching for relevancy, significance and comparative analysis to relate it to the notion of social or political change not only during his period but also in the present time (scholars like A. Caksu, (2017), Syed Farid Alatas, (2014), M. Akif Kayapinar, (2008) have discussed on this subject.

Franz Rosenthal, the first scholar to translate the entire *Muqaddimah* into English, interprets *'asabiyyah* as 'group feeling' is considered by some academics like Hodgson, (See Hodgson- *The Venture of Islam*, pp.481-482 and B.H. Garrison (M.A Thesis, University of Denver, 2012) – it was regarded that Franz Rosenthal's translation of Ibn Khaldun's *Prolegomena* (1958) was vague and unsatisfactory (Ibid, p.35). Whilst another scholar Ernest Gellner interprets *'asabiyyah* by linking it to Durkheim's theory of organic and mechanical solidarities and Allen Fromherz takes the same view as Durkheim's concept of solidarity, by translating it to 'tribal solidarity'.

In addition, many both on theoretical and practical levels have studied Ibn Khaldun's dynamic study of history. Muhsin Mahdi (2006) eloquently discusses Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'asabiyyah* and *'umran* and argues that for Ibn Khaldun, *'asabiyyah* was instrumental in the development and rise and fall of *'umran*. It is interesting to note that Mahdi argues that in Ibn Khaldun's theory of *'umran*, political power and state institutions were central. Yet, power and state were heavily dependent on the result and role of *'asabiyyah*. However, Wahabuddin Ra'ees (2004) argues that in Ibn Khaldun's thought state in pursuit of its purposes of justice, equality, order and

equity must put some safeguards to protect *'asabiyyah* from drifting into decadence. In Ibn Khaldun's view, *'asabiyyah* should always be placed under the purview of the religion of Islam.

Ra'ees (2013) argues that Ibn Khaldun's theory of state is dynamic and its application viable to all situations, universal and specific. He applies Ibn Khaldun's theory of state to explain the shift in the strategy of the ruling political parties in Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey. Robert Irwin (2018) discusses the intellectual biography of Ibn Khaldun, focusing on turbulent socio-political conditions of the 14th century Muslim in Spain and North Africa that gave rise to Ibn Khaldun's political thought and his analysis of politics of the Muslim state and society. For Irwin, Ibn Khaldun was the most misunderstood scholar of the Muslim World. Allen James Fromherz (2011) joins Irwin in discussing the politics and social conditions in which Ibn Khaldun lived. Fromherz argues that Ibn Khaldun was a very strong critique of blind trust in the tradition that challenged innovation and creativity. In fact, it was this blind imitation of tradition that contributed among others to the decline and decadence of Islamic culture and civilisation. Fromherz explains that even though Ibn Khaldun was a strong opponent of blind trust in tradition, he would subject every human activity to approval of Prophetic traditions, leaving not much room for individual free will. Many would not agree with Fromherz's view as such (examples, F. Rosenthal, Syed Farid Alatas).

Yumna Ozer (2017) translates Ibn Khaldun's response to the heated debate of his time about the role of the Sufi orders in the development of personality. Ibn Khaldun found it necessary to engage in the discussion of necessity of the teachings of Sufi masters. Ahmad Zaid (2003) provides interesting discussion of Ibn Khaldun's source of writing of history and his classification of knowledge into religious and

rational sciences. Zaid's discussion on the subject explains Ibn Khaldun's writings on the relationship between revealed knowledge and acquired knowledge. Zaid also discusses the role of Arabic Language and Literature in scholarly writings concerned with development of human institutions. Aziz Azmeh (2003) re-reads Ibn Khaldun and argues that he has provided systematic and scientific explanation to the medieval North African and Medieval and modern Arab-Islamic culture and traditions. Azmeh argues that Ibn Khaldun was ahead of his time. According to him, his theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of Muslim socio-political culture have universal application and validity. However none of the above arguments applies to Ibn Khaldun's theory to the political developments and specifically for the discussion on the eroding power of UMNO.

Much of the writing concerning Malaysian politics touched on the declining role of UMNO which focused on factors of its decline. Bridget Welsh (2018) highlights a piece on the decline of UMNO. Contributors to Welsh's work are mainly from Malaysian academics and political activists. The writings collectively warned of crisis within UMNO due to corruption and mismanagement of power and authority. The authors spoke of UMNO misdeeds and the Malay political dynamics that began to push UMNO adrift and rejection by the *rakyat* (citizens). The works also presents a comparative study of UMNO of 1957 and UMNO of 2016 and concluded that the latter has lost credibility and trust of the Malays. They argue that UMNO can regain its legitimacy if it regains its 1957 spirit and sagacity. The authors claim that the declining UMNO's legitimacy in the eyes of the Malays encouraged even the non-Malays to raise their dissatisfaction about this Malay-dominant institution and the UMNO-led state institutions. Welsh (2018) says that what moved UMNO away from its grassroots foundation was that it became "a more elitist, centralised and inward-

looking institution without the same level of connectivity with Malaysian society” and the Malay ethnic community. She argues that the UMNO recent leadership(s) and their inability to reform UMNO were the main cause of the decline of this fallen hero (Welsh, 2018: 214-215).

M. Moniruzzaman *et. al.*, (2018) argue that the decline of UMNO and the erosion of the Malay dominance began in 1999 when the spat between Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar Ibrahim came into the open. This was the time when he sacked his then DPM and successor-designate, Anwar Ibrahim. According to the authors, in 1999, the Malays became permanently divided and UMNO gave birth to yet another Malay-dominated multi-ethnic political party, PKR. This, according to the writers, challenged the dominance of UMNO. They did not discuss other factors that caused or influenced the decline of UMNO. Scott Edwards (2018) seemingly follows the same line of argument as Moniruzzaman that the erosion of UMNO’s legitimacy had started some two decades ago. However, according to Edwards, the factors that contributed to declining legitimacy of UMNO’s political power and dominance were people’s awareness of the extent of the corruption scandals of Najib Razak involving the One Malaysian Development Berhad (1MDB) and SRC International (SRC). He says five factors were fundamental in raising awareness of the public. These were: “the scale of corruption; the scale of personal enrichment of the political leaders; a stagnation in quality of living and unpopular economic policies; the international dimension and the potential role of foreign money; and the role of social media in propagating these issues” (Edwards, 2018: 2).

UMNO was one of the longest surviving dominant parties in the world ruling Malaya/Malaysia until the GE 14 when it was brought down by a new coalition known as Pakatan Harapan (PH). Many political writers and observers within and

outside the country have described UMNO's defeat in the GE14 as a political tsunami or earthquake. This could be more appropriately described as a Malaysian Tsunami, because the wave was brought about by discontented voters cutting across ethnic lines which led to the defeat of the ruling party BN in the GE14. This conclusion was made mainly based on the GE14 results without comparing it to any previous elections (Researchers from Monash University Dr Jason Ng Wie Jian, Phung Yet Chin working together with John Rangel , a senior lecturer in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) made a study to compare the election results of GE13 & GE14 and concluded there was a Malaysian Tsunami. In addition to the national swing against the BN, there was a significant change in the voting of the Malay electorates in GE14). It would be right to say there was an urban Tsunami in the GE14 (2019 published by Monash University, Kuala Lumpur).

Can the fall of UMNO be described as a Tsunami or an earthquake? After all it had been in power for the last 61 years and it had brought dignity to the Malays, restored the position of the Malay Rulers, it accommodated and compromised with other ethnic groups to achieve independence. UMNO took the leadership role from the beginning to bring solidarity and unity of all races in Malaya. The government of the Alliance Party and after the formation of Malaysia, in 1963, the government under BN transformed the country from an agro-based economy to an industrial one, or from rural to sedentary. The research intends to examine what went wrong from a party with a sterling success record to a party out of power.

The researcher gives a short historical overview from the time UMNO was formed in Chapter Three. The formation of UMNO was a strong reaction to the British scheme to make Malaya and the Straits Settlement as a British colony after World War II (WW II). They were certain the Malays would never rise or be united.

Albeit the divide and rule policy, and importing migrant ethnic groups as workers, would in the British view minimise the possible rise of political consciousness in the Malay States. On top of that the British inculcated ‘state consciousness or loyalty to the state’ (*semangat kenegerian*), so that the Malays would not be united as one national group. Thus, the introduction of the Malayan Union Constitution (MU) was a perfect solution to give them absolute power over Malaya. At the same time, they sought solutions on how to overcome their problems on what to do with the two million migrants they brought into the country on a temporary basis. Cleverly under duress, the British managed to get all the Sultans to sign in an agreement to the proposed colonial arrangement. Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali (2012: 15) (see original text in Bahasa Malaysia in footnote)¹ said “in 1946 the British government decided to introduce the MU in the Federation of Malaya after Sir Harold MacMichael obtained the signatures of all the Malay Rulers consenting to it”. Hence, the colonial government did not expect any opposition from the Malay population. However, they underestimated the reaction of the Malays as said by Abdullah that: “The introduction of the MU provoked opposition from the Malay population. They were dissatisfied with the granting of citizenship to the foreigners (non-Malays) on very flexible terms, the loss of power of the Malay Rulers, who were left with the responsibility of controlling matters of Malay customs and Islamic religion only” (see original text in Bahasa Malaysia in the footnote).²

The British had totally misread the Malay feelings on the issues of citizenships, and the position of the Malay Rulers and how they interpreted the British action to the

¹ “Kemudiannya pada tahun 1946 kerajaan British memperkenalkan Malayan Union di Tanah Melayu, setelah Sir Harold MacMichael mendapat tandatangan daripada semua Raja-Raja Melayu”.

² “Pengenalan Malayan Union ini mencetuskan tentangan daripada orang Melayu. Mereka tidak puas hati terhadap kerakyatan yang longgar diberikan kepada orang asing, dan kehilangan kuasa raja Melayu, yang hanya berkuasa dalam adat dan agama Islam sahaja”.

question of sovereignty of the country and status of the Malay rulers. The Malays revolted against the British because it was considered as an affront to their dignity and sovereignty. The narrative of this feeling is encapsulated in the Malay saying and slogan '*Mendaulatkan Martabat Bangsa*' (giving sovereignty to the dignity of the Malays). The Malays can be passive, tolerant and considerate but not when it affected their honour and dignity. The Malay ethos were clearly expressed as "the customs of being kith and kin, their position must be defended; the tradition of living in the same village, the village must be protected; the prerequisite of being of the same race, unity must be given priority" (see original text in Bahasa Malaysia in footnote)³.

This was the battle cry for unity and acted for a common cause to defend the dignity and sovereignty of the country. UMNO was formed when the British interfered with this dignity and sovereignty of the Malays as a race and original people of the land. The introduction of MU had the reverse affect as it brought the spirit of group feelings. In this regard, it can be said the Malay battle cry can be associated with an imagined community moving together to reinstate their dignity and sovereignty. The introduction of MU, according to the write up on "*Sejarah Penubuhan UMNO*", was contrary to what was agreed by the British to sustain a pro-Malay policy consistent with the recognition that Malaya was a Malay country. As stated in the same article that: "The pro-Malay policy before the Second World War is going to be abandoned contemporaneously, and the Malays as the indigenous people will have to compete at par with the migrant races" (see original text in Bahasa

³ "Adat bersaudara, saudara di pertahankan; adat berkampung kampung di jaga; adat berbangsa, perpaduan bangsa di utamakan".

Malaysia in footnote)⁴. The MU therefore was seen as intending to change the *status quo*.

Wan Hashim Wan Teh (2017) in his article “*Fasa pertama perjuangan UMNO penuh berani*” (the First Phase of UMNO’s Struggle was with Courage) says during the first phase of UMNO’s struggle from 1946 to 1951 under the leadership of Dato’ Onn Jaafar the unity of the Malays was strong when different organisations at the state and district levels were vocal and courageous in opposing the MU. He writes: “With unity and solidarity of the Malays, the associations and organisations at the state and district levels decided to merge, even before UMNO was officially formed as a political party, forcefully and courageously voicing their opposition to the MU scheme that the British government wanted to introduce upon returning after the war to make Malaya a full-fledged colony of Britain from just being protectorates” (see original text in Bahasa Malaysia in the footnote).⁵

The MU scheme brought about nationalism and unity of the Malays. The Malays set aside their individual positions and were united to fight against the unjust action of the British. The Malay associations, organisations and movements of divergent philosophies and ideologies throughout Malaya held The Malay Congress of Malaya (*Kongres Melayu Se Malaya*) from the 1 to 4 March 1946, and 41 Malay organisations who attended the meeting agreed to merge and dissolve themselves to form into one political party under one body called UMNO for the sake of survival of the Malays. With this, they possessed a common platform and shared values. It was

⁴ “Dasar pro Melayu sebelum perang akan di rombak sekaligus, dan orang Melayu sebagai penduduk asal negara ini terpaksa bersaing dengan orang-orang mendatang”.

⁵ “Dengan kesatuan yang kukuh dalam kalangan orang Melayu yang bergabung melalui pertubuhan masing-masing di peringkat negeri dan daerah, orang Melayu ketika UMNO belum lagi lahir secara rasmi sebagai sebuah pertubuhan politik, bersuara lantang dengan penuh keberanian menentang gagasan Malayan Union yang cuba di perkenal oleh Inggeris yang datang semula untuk menjadikan Semenanjung Tanah Melayu sebagai tanah jajahannya dengan secara mutlak”.