Building integration platforms in multiethnic Malaysia: A tribute to ideas and contributions of Professor Ruediger Korff

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A tribute: In lieu of an introduction

Professor Ruediger Korff was Professor for Development Sciences from 1998-2000 at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM, or The National University of Malaysia). However, I have known him and his work from way back in 1988, when I was briefly a Volkswagen Stiftung post-doctoral fellow at Bielefeld University, Germany. Then, Professor Korff was completing his PhD field research on urbanization in Bangkok, Thailand. We share an outstanding mentor, the renown German sociologist Professor Hans-Dieter Evers, who remains until today the *sifu* he is to many others and indeed a permanent academic patron to us researchers at UKM.

It is, should I say, the 'Evers Network' that forms the umbrella within and under which numerous influential ideas, concepts, and analytical tools have been generated in the last 40 years or so, led by Professor Evers and expanded and elaborated by his student researchers and colleagues. Ideas such as social reproduction, strategic groups, urbanism and social space, knowledge governance, and many more have emerged from this network since the 1970s. They have been influential as analytical tools in making sense of the 'society, state, and market nexus' – a sociological nexus I developed as a heuristic teaching device – in particular applied to the societies of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The publications resulting from the 40 years of effort by the 'Evers Network' are too many to list here. Nonetheless, a quick googling of the CVs of both Professor Hans-Dieter Evers and Professor Ruediger Korff would reveal the richness, breadth, and depth of the academic endeavour of the 'Evers Network'.

I am fortunate to be associated with academics who belonged to a 'strategic group' academic study that has scholars from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, and I benefitted greatly from their commitment in an intellectual endeavour that has produced many fruitful contributions. Being an anthropologist, I share many interests with Professor Korff, for example, his 'local and global continuum' interest, in particular his article "Local Enclosures of Globalization: The Power of Locality" (*Dialectical Anthropology*, 27(1)

2003: 1-18). My work has always been about 'Malaysia in the village, simultaneously the village in Malaysia', that is, how the global and local become socially woven, in the context of the 'Society, State and Market Nexus.'

I have learnt about and experimented with ideas and concepts developed by the Germany-based 'strategic group' academic study in the last thirty years. I have used them to try to make sense of the complex, inter-ethnic, Malaysian society and its ability to build and sustain a resilient cohesive whole, which, despite imperfections, has managed to thrive over the last seventy years. I contend that it is less challenging to explain why conflict has occurred and violence has broken out in Malaysia; the harder task is actually explaining why it hasn't happened for 50 years, when most observers, local and foreign, have predicted that the 'ethnic time bomb' shall explode anytime.

The brief essay that follows is an attempt to explain how Malaysia has sustained an admirable level of peace and stability for a long time and, indeed, with improved economic conditions has enabled the people to reject violence altogether. Social mobility has improved and poverty considerably declined. Social safety nets are contributing to this harmonious state of existence in Malaysia. I present this essay to a colleague and friend who has my utmost respect, Professor Ruediger Korff.

Introduction

Of the many, Malaysia is the only emerging country that had a general election in 2018 without violence and bloodshed. It had one 50 years ago on 13th May 1969. Since then, among the developing countries, Malaysia has been perceived by the World Bank and IMF as a model of peace and stability due to its relatively democratic practice, positive economic growth, improved quality of life, and increased social mobility opportunities.

The question often asked by observers is how Malaysia has been able to manage its multiculturalism, to be more exact, its complex multi-ethnicity. What is the integration approach it has successfully adopted and implemented for the last 50 years? This is a conceptual question of policy, implementation, and practice as well as an empirical one. This essay narrates and analyses the evolution of Malaysian society from the end of the Second World War until recently – from social conflict, to stable tension, to social cohesion.

It begins with a brief historical account of why Malaysia chose integration and not assimilation, as in Indonesia, in managing its diversity. There are historical and demographic reasons for making the choice, but it has rarely been explained and has often been taken for granted by scholars and researchers. Then the essay elaborates on the different stages of this evolution and the content of each stage, with empirical evidence. Integration platforms are the key, whereby the efforts involved in building integration platforms are implemented top-down and bottom-up as well as horizontally among the grassroots.

Building 'integration to platforms' to deal with diversity

The central sociological instrument that has held Malaysia together so far is known as an integration platform. It is an abstract and physical space where differences among the complex multiethnic community find spaces of convergence at various levels of society. Integration platforms have been created in the political, economic, social, and education spheres, all intricately linked through Malaysia's development planning, consisting of five-year development plans, a policy document, and a governance framework for budget and implementation purposes. In a sense, ideologically, economic development was given priority over nation building. This development had a tremendous all-round impact: on poverty eradication, on the increase of general literacy and education performance, on basic infrastructure improvement, and on providing new opportunities to improve the quality of life and subsequently the chances of social mobility. However, not all is rosy and sweet in Malaysia.

The most challenging task over the years has been building viable integration platforms in the nation-building sphere. In other words, sustaining unity in diversity is most challenging because full national unity is yet to be achieved; the country swings between moments of unit and moments of difference. What has been achieved so far, however, is a strong overall national cohesion. Nevertheless, a number of social deficits have yet to be overcome. What is needed is a thorough multi-level national reconciliation guided by the principles of bargaining.

The evolutionary path: From social conflicts to stable tension to social cohesion

Since 1969, Malaysia has been predicted as having the potential to suffer from serious, bloody, ethnic conflicts every time an economic crisis occurs in Asia. This viewpoint was widely entertained by local and foreign analysts after Malaysia experienced an open, bloody, ethnic conflict on May 13, 1969; a conflict that was attributed, officially and unofficially, to unresolved economic problems within the country. Indeed, the introduction of the New Economic Policy, 1971-1990, to redress the economic roots of the inter-ethnic problem only reaffirmed this viewpoint.

However, to the surprise of many, especially to the 'prophets of dooms', after experiencing a series of economic crises in the last five decades, namely, the 1986-87, the 1997-98 and the recent 2009-10 economic crises, Malaysia remains politically stable and indeed is enjoying a positive economic growth. Admittedly, localized skirmishes, some inter-ethnic and others between social groups, have occurred during this period. However, they have not led to major bloody conflict outbreaks of a proportion comparable those experienced in Sri Lanka or in some Central African countries, where countrywide violent conflicts have dominated the everyday life of the whole population. In short, the general population in those countries lives in constant fear because of the frequency of the perpetrated violence.

However, this relative peace didn't stop Malaysia's own political prophet of doom, Mr. Lim Kit Siang, from republishing his book ten years ago entitled *Time Bombs in Ma-*

laysia: 30th Anniversary Edition (2009, original 1978) as if Malaysia had just had its 30th bloody ethnic riot of the May 13th 1969 magnitude. What many have failed to realize is that all the predictions of the prophets of doom, based on a conflict approach, have not come about. Instead, since the major ethnic riot in May 13th 1969, there has been a consistent, long, peaceful period, punctuated once or twice by ethnic skirmishes. Instead, all the riots and conflict, recently, have been happening in the North, in the once famous peaceful Thailand. This year, Malaysia remembers the 13th May 1969 incident after 50 years in a sober and peaceful manner.

Why hasn't the expected conflict taken place in Malaysia? This has also to be explained.

Perhaps, I wish to argue, it is useful to approach this issue sociologically from a cohesion approach with the assumption that the Malaysian plural society has been, generally, in a state of stable tension; it has been surviving in a situation dominated by major societal contradictions but, nonetheless, longitudinally, remains generally cohesive. In other words, there is some level of social cohesion within these societies, but the journey has not been plain sailing. Often the social cohesion has been punctuated by skirmishes, which were resolved quickly.

In other words, if we were to emphasize the negative aspects of the diversity, which usually involve a small percentage of the population, we are then giving a disproportionate focus to one aspect of social reality. As a result, we miss the larger portion of the positive aspect of diversity that the general population is enjoying. The moot question is how we shall redress this analytical myopia. Perhaps we should study the experience and empirical evidence from Malaysia.

The evolution: A brief outline

I wish to present a brief evolution of Malaysia's socio-political experience, in general, and its inter-ethnic relations, in particular since after the Second World War (SWW), which ended in 1945. In short, Malaysia's experience of unity in diversity.

The conflict-ridden era in Malaysia (1948-1960)

It is inevitable to begin looking at Malaysia from the conflict perspective. The first decade after the SWW was a turbulent period. This critical period was characterized by two opposing trends.

On the one side, there was a near anarchy situation as a result of the war-torn conditions and other negative consequences that developed in turn. On the other, the British colonial state was feverishly trying to rebuild the economy and society through various means, some of which were coercive. Finding a middle path between anarchy and harmony was indeed the most difficult task during this period.

What were the major challenges during this period? What were the solutions? Answers to both questions provide us with some ideas of attempts made to weld some form of multiethnic integration as constructed and maintained in Malaysia. Some of the institutional structures are still here today.

The four major challenges

The four major challenges to multiethnic integration that the British colonial government and the new multiethnic self-government had to deal with in the first decade after the war (1945-55) were the following: ethnic strife, labour unrest, insurgency and terrorism, opposition to a new system of governance.

Ethnic strife was bloody and tragic, as one could imagine. It went on throughout almost the whole of the first decade after the war, occurring sporadically in different parts of the country. The most severe of the ethnic clashes took place just after the war ended, in August 1945, hardly a week after the Japanese had officially surrendered, and the senseless killing went on non-stop for about two weeks in many parts of the country. Initially, it was between the Malays, who sided with the Japanese, and the Chinese, who fought against the Japanese. Later, the ethnic clashes spread to involve Malays and Chinese who neither supported nor opposed the Japanese. However, subsequent clashes were not as severe and widespread, albeit enough to create similar destabilising effects within the country.

Labour unrest, in the form of strikes and rallies, became a common event, too, after the war, particularly in the first half of 1946. The height of the protests was in early 1947 when there was a countrywide strike and demonstration by the rubber plantation workers union, which was demanding better wages. Increasing violence, especially against European planters, was worrying the colonial government to the extent that it had to impose rules that substantially curbed trade union activities in the country. The protesters were mainly Chinese and Indian workers because they formed the majority of the working class in Malaysia then, with the Malays mostly in the peasant sector.

Insurgency and terrorism were behind the labour protests, led by the illegal Malayan Communist Party (MCP), a largely Chinese-dominated organisation. It had a strong influence within the trade union but changed its political strategy when the unions were reduced almost to welfare associations by the colonial government. The MCP then encouraged the unions to lead the workers "to the road of violent action". Murders and attacks on European estate managers and pro-management workers increased alarmingly such that the colonial government was forced to proclaim a State of Emergency throughout Malaya on 18 June 1948. The Emergency lasted for 12 years, until 31 July 1960. Needless to say, the economy was badly affected during the initial Emergency period, especially the modern rural agricultural sector, namely, the large rubber plantations and numerous tin mines all over the country. The ethnic harmony, especially the Malay-Chinese relationship, was tested to breaking point. Sanity prevailed when the majority of the Chinese decided to support the government anti-terrorism campaign. That is why the claim can be made that fighting terrorism is not new in Malaysia, especially in the context of the September 11 event.

The new governance option, unitary vs. federalism: In 1946, the colonial government introduced the idea of a Malayan Union, a constitutional union on the Malay Peninsula, excluding Singapore, which proposed to confer a common citizenship on her peoples, irrespective of race and origin. This political project was opposed by the indigenous peoples, especially Malays, as a program that would have benefited the immigrant population. Malaysia was threatened yet again by a political conflict. The unitary-state

concept of the Malayan Union project was aborted. It was replaced, in February 1948, by a federalism-based governance called the Federation of Malaya scheme.

In short, for more than a decade just after the war, Malaysia had its share of ethnic strife, near anarchy situations, and socio-political instability. This strife was not dissimilar to the situation experienced by Sri Lanka or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

What was done to bring back the stability and how has it been maintained until today? I offer here my opinions in the form of an explanation about the "three pillars of multiethnic integration" that have successfully held Malaysia together until today.

The three pillars of development & growth

The British efforts at reconstructing the economy and restoring stability could be categorized into three types: to restore peace and security, to create an environment suitable for ethnic relations, to introduce planned change through a five-year plan program. Integration platforms became the instrument that allowed these three pillars to be consolidated and bring about positive impacts.

These initiatives necessitated establishing new administrative instrumentalities. To operationalize most of these efforts, the British felt it was necessary to introduce a number of legislations, not only as bureaucratic guidelines but also to regulate society and defuse any opposition that could destabilise the country. Let us examine each of these efforts in turn beginning with those carried out to create peace and security in the country.

Security was of primary importance because the period immediately after the war was rather unstable in both Malaysia and the region. Indeed, in Malaysia, there was racial strife, labour unrest, and insurgency. A number of draconian regulations were introduced to maintain 'law and order' and hence 'peace and stability', such as the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the introduction of a 'pin number'-like a system known more simply as the 'identity card'. The whole 'security' effort and paraphernalia were built around and anchored in the Emergency of 1948-60. It is significant that Malaysia achieved its independence during the Emergency, that is, in 1957. Instead of the military, it was the police force (uniformed and non-uniformed) that was the central instrument in the overall 'security' strategy.

Ethnic bargaining was critical to maintaining some measure of socio-political stability within the multiethnic society. This was conducted mainly through a modern electoral process using an umbrella-like coalition model. We have ethnic-based parties, but from day one the British ensured that the major ethnic parties got together to form a team, hence the birth of the UMNO-MCA Alliance party, which was later joined by MIC. The Alliance, later known as the National Front, has been ruling the country since 1955. This coalition model was also adopted by the opposition political parties, such as by the non-Malay-dominated Labour Party and the Malay-dominated Socialist Party, which formed the Socialist Front in the 1960s. Other loosely-organised political party coalitions emerged in the 1980s.

Development planning, a kind of planned change or social engineering strategy, not unlike the Marshall Plan, was introduced by the British mainly then for the purpose of economic reconstruction and management of war-torn Malaysia. It began with

the Draft Development Plan, 1950-55. Since then, 'development planning' through implementing a series of five-year plans has become a permanent feature in Malaysia's attempt to achieve economic development and create a nation. So, we have had nine five-year plans since 1955. The effort to create each of these five-year plans became an important platform for the 'economic bargain' amongst the different ethnic groups, hence the allocation of resources. Most of the plans were financed by the World Bank and the IMF plus funds borrowed from other sources.

It has been the successful combination of these three important elements that has helped Malaysia tremendously to achieve what it has realized so far in its modernization push, but not without its problems. We are aware of the problems and have to work hard continuously to solve all of them amicably.

Malaysia, a nation in the state of 'stable tension' (1969-2008)

On May 13, 1969, an open and bloody ethnic conflict broke out in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. Ethnic violence also occurred in a few other locations but away from Kuala Lumpur. Although the conflict was localized and successfully contained, the aftermath was felt throughout the country. It was the severest test of ethnic relations in post-Merdeka (post-Independence) Malaysia. It became a watershed event in the political and sociological analyses of Malaysian society, and in the consciousness of individual Malaysians, because it was so traumatic. It conscientized people and most importantly, it redefined the perceptions of our ethnic relations in our country and changed their dynamics.

Ordinary Malaysians were rudely awakened to the fact that the ethnic harmony they had enjoyed since Merdeka could no longer be taken for granted. The government was quick to mobilize all its resources to find immediate remedies and long-term solutions, both economic and political.

The government declared a national Emergency, and democracy was suspended. A National Consultative Council was set up to seek solutions palatable to all the ethnic groups, especially the Malays. The country was governed by a National Operations Council. A Department of National Unity was established in 1969 as a bureaucratic instrument to keep watch over the state of ethnic relations in Malaysia; in 1972, it became a full Ministry of National Unity.

The New Economic Policy was introduced in 1971 to address, in the short and long term, the intra- and inter-ethnic socio-economic differences resulting from the complex of diversities in the country – ethnic, cultural, religious, regional, political orientation, and economic activity. The *Rukunegara* (National Charter) was created as an ideology to be embraced by Malaysians from all walks of life. The fact remains, however, that ethnic diversity is significantly complicated by other forms of diversities, namely, cultural, religious, regional, political orientation, and economic activity.

Malaysia has since been in a state of stable tension, which means that we have been living in a society dominated by many contradictions but have managed to solve most of them through a continuous process of consensus-seeking, negotiation, bargaining, and mediation. Sometimes the process itself became a solution.

The downside of these on-going negotiation between ethnic interest groups in Malaysia is that the potentially negative and divisive ethnic fault lines, based on significant differences in religion, language, dress, and diet, have become highlighted more so than ever before. To the prophets of doom, notably foreign journalists, Malaysia has been perceived as a society facing an imminent break down for the slightest of reasons.

In general, Malaysians remain more optimistic and believe that they have learnt the bitter lesson that nobody gains from an open ethnic conflict manifesting in violence. But they remain sociologically vigilant and chose consensus, not conflict, as the path for the future. Even though each ethnic group espouses a particular form of 'nation-of-intent', the overwhelming majority seems to have accepted Vision 2020, introduced by Mahathir in 1991, with its aim of establishing a 'united Malaysian nation' or *Bangsa Malaysia* by the year 2020. This remains the main official nation-of-intent.

Nevertheless, Malaysians also realize that sweeping things under the carpet is not the solution. Indeed, they have become acutely aware that contestation between the different ethnic groups will not simply disappear and cannot be ignored.

So, instead of choosing street violence as a solution to settle their differences, they decided that the only rational and reasonable avenue left for them was in the realm of public discourse. Nonetheless, Malaysians do sometimes engage themselves in peaceful street demonstrations. Whenever the authorities have felt that the public discourse on ethnic differences, articulated at times in the form of street demonstrations, was slowly getting out-of-hand, they have been swift to dampen the tinder before it breaks into a fire.

As a result, the public discourse on ethnic differences amongst Malaysians since the burst of public demonstrations in the 2008 and 2013 general elections has become highly sensible and has been handled with great sensitivity. The discourse thus far has been a healthy one, whether it is through traditional mass media platforms or through the channels of the more recent electronic media, such as the internet, blogs, SMS, WhatsApps or Instagram.

Social cohesion: The only option for Malaysia and Malaysians (2008 onwards)

The result of the 12th Malaysian General Elections in March 2008 was another watershed in Malaysian post-independence history. The ruling coalition, the National Front (NF) suffered its worst result in the history of Malaysia's general elections. It lost most of its support, losing for the first time ever its two-third's majority in the Lower House of Parliament. This defeat was partly owed to the NF's decision to unlock the door to openness. It was initiated by the Prime Minister of the time, Abdullah Badawi.

Malaysians rushed out in huge waves to the new-founded openness. In the process, Abdullah got trampled and the NF mangled. If the UMNO, the dominant Malay party within the NF, had just now been released from the emergency ward, then the MCA and MIC would still be in intensive care. The new Prime Minister, Najib Razak, had only two years 11 months left to climb the proverbial perpendicular and slippery political wall in order to reach the victorious top in the 13th General Election in March 2013. For him,

failure was not an option. Pragmatism was the only vehicle available to him to ascend to the top.

Najib introduced the '1Malaysia concept' and the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) in April 2009. The same month he took the nation's helm and announced, in July 2009, six National Key Result Areas (NKRAs), in efforts to tackle matters of concern to the people. These were integration platforms he saw fit to be introduced and implemented for the country.

'1Malaysia' was eventually elaborated as a concept in a booklet distributed to the public and also made available on-line. Though similar in spirit and intention with many of the previous top-down concepts, informed by the reality of unity in diversity, this one, in the Malaysian context, is truly Najib's choice. Like other '1Something' slogan around the world, its application in Malaysia fits into and certainly provides the much-needed rhetorical umbrella for the overall pragmatic approach he adopted to survive past March 2013.

Literally, everyone could relate to 1Malaysia, many with hope, some with scepticism, others with cynicism; a few reject it totally, and one or two are just happy to ridicule it. In short, 1Malaysia is a contested concept. As a much-needed PR exercise, 1Malaysia, despite being a contested concept, has successfully occupied the national mass media space, almost daily, hence the all-important rakyat's mind, too. Later, the appearance of slogans such as 'Middle Malaysia', said to have been introduced to rival '1Malaysia', has given further political mileage to the latter.

In January 2010, to give substance to his pragmatic approach based on the 1Malaysia slogan, Najib finally launched the GTP with each of the six NKRAs elaborated.

The NKRAs were reducing crime, combating corruption, improving academic performance, raising the living standards of low-income households, upgrading rural basic infrastructure, and improving urban public transportation. Although, in the long term, the GTP was aimed at realising the Vision 2020 set by Mahathir, everybody knew that the short-term and pragmatic objective was to deliver victory to the Barisan Nasional government in the next general election, due in 2013, and ensure that Najib's position was secure.

However, what was absent in the GTP launch exhibition was the elaboration of the 7th NKRA – '1Malaysia and Unity' – which should have been the outcome of the deliberation conducted non-stop for six weeks in Lab No. 7. Perhaps the issue of '1Malaysia and Unity' was not, in the first instance, seen by the Malaysian public as a problem like crime or corruption or urban public transportation.

Malaysians probably should be happy that '1Malaysia and Unity' is not a problem but a concern, of a broader and deeper kind, ever present in our daily existence.

It clearly endorses the fact that Malaysian society, in general, has enjoyed cross-cutting social ties and existed in a state of social cohesion, sharing values, norms, and many other things for many decades.

But rational Malaysians also recognised that, while we enjoy a certain positive level of social cohesion, it is not all plain sailing. It has been punctuated by problems, contradictions, and conflicts of various kinds while being held together by the willingness to negotiate continuously to maintain consensus, peace, and stability. We know well that Malaysians have many grievances and are not afraid to air them publicly, whether

they originate from ethnic, class, religious, or many more roots. This publicity gives outsiders the impression that we are in a state of constant conflict.

But when we have moved around the country at any time of the day, everday and every year over the last 40 years, we could not help but notice that conflict is missing because everyone continues to conduct their everyday life, even in times of fierce competition, in a socially-cohesive manner, without being threatened by open ethnic conflict. Malaysians therefore "talk conflict, walk cohesion."

In this context, the '1Malaysia' concept views and accepts differences and grievances among Malaysians, especially its 'talk conflict' behaviour, as something based on a rational choice and not an emotional one. The same rational choice underpins the 'walk cohesion' behaviour pattern. Indeed, 1Malaysia is a reminder of sorts to all Malaysians that we are different in so many ways but had lived, crossed various social boundaries, and survived in a socially cohesive and unity mould much respected and admired by other countries.

The 14th General Election in May 2018 brought the biggest change in Malaysian political history when the NF, the ruling party for more than six decades, lost to Pakatan Harapan, a coalition opposition party led by Tun Mahathir, the 4th Prime Minister who helmed the NF government for 22 years. The loss surprised everyone in Malaysia and around the world. What was significant was the fact that the political transition was smooth without any sign of violence or open conflict. A credit to all Malaysians who saw that their future existence was based on bargaining, negotiation, and mediation with integration platforms continuing to be the vehicle.

It is now one year since the change of government. We have a strong open debate in the press and social media about the performance of the new government, which has been judged by many as failing in its promise to fulfil what was listed in its election manifesto. The public is becoming more critical of the government's performance as the cost of living rises and old problems remain unresolved. It is obvious not much could be achieved by a relatively new government in one year. But the advent of rising expectations before the election has become the rise of frustration afterwards. However, the ruling government is managing things, if with difficulty, reasonably well.

Conclusion

Through the case study of Malaysia, we could clearly see how the conflict situation of post-SWW has been transformed to one of a stable tension and, eventually, to a sustainable state of social cohesion. Theoretically, therefore, we have to be vigilant of the internal changes that have taken place over the years within Malaysian society. To make sense of the whole post-SWW Malaysia, it is not sufficient to remain theoretically conservative, indeed lazy, to apply only the conflict approach or worse still the time bomb perspective employed by the Malaysian opposition politician Mr. Lim Kit Siang. The conflict approach is too simplistic and distorts the empirical reality of Malaysia and renders the ethnically diverse Malaysian population an unthinking lot.

It is imperative for us, therefore, to be more analytically sensitive to the ontological circumstances and recognise that Malaysians can think and decide for themselves, de-

mocratically, what they prefer and the kind of political choices they are ready to make, as the 12th General Election of 8 March 2008 results began to show and the peaceful opposition takeover in the 14th General Election of 8 May 2018 have shown. The old and the new government seem to survive on building new integration platforms for macro and specific purposes.

There is always a need for analysts on Malaysia to adopt a theoretically and conceptually rigorous and up-to-date approach to provide true-to-the-situation analyses of Malaysia's unity in diversity experience. The danger facing scholars studying plural societies, such as the one in Malaysia, is the risk of the ethnicization of knowledge, meaning the promotion of a particular knowledge perspective not motivated by seeking truth but rather by the agenda of a particular ethnic group.

The imminent danger facing scholars studying plural societies, such as the one Malaysia, is the risk of the ethnicization of knowledge, meaning the promotion of a particular knowledge perspective not motivated by seeking truth but rather by the agenda of a particular ethnic group.

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