

# RHETORIC OF RACIAL HARMONY



ZURAIDI ISHAK

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**ZURAI DI ISHAK**

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak  
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## PREFACE

Prior to the 1955 Federal Election of Malaya, the Malay-based UMNO, the Chinese-based MCA, and the Indian-based MIC joined forces to form a coalition called the Alliance which later became Barisan Nasional or National Front. Tunku Abdul Rahman the leader of UMNO, Tan (MCA), and Sambanthan (MIC) cooperated under the banner of the Alliance Party was to fulfil a precondition set by the British government stating it would not grant independence to Malaya until the emergence of one or more responsible parties commanding broad support from all major races in the country. This book discusses the public discourse of each of the multiracial leaders delivered at the Annual General Assemblies of their respective racially-based parties from 1955 to 1957.

In their struggle for Malayan independence, the three leaders were facing two different political agendas. The first agenda indicated their commitment to the Alliance Party's objective of uniting the various races in Malaya for the attainment of the country's independence. The second agenda connoted their commitment to protect the rights of their respective racial communities through their respective racially-based parties. With this simultaneous unification and disassociation occurring, the author examine the development of fantasy themes and rhetorical visions of the three leaders which centered upon the contrasting political agendas. The analysis was conducted the application of Ernest Bormann's fantasy theme analysis method of rhetorical criticism. This method was chosen because it provided the book the means for identifying and isolating the shared world view of a group of rhetors.

This book was inspired by Bormann's studies on Abraham Lincoln's rhetorical vision after the trial of the Civil War which emphasized unifying a nation during in time of troubles by Bormann's studies provided a conceptual understanding of how to apply the fantasy theme analysis method to examine Tunku, Tan and Sambanthan's tasks of unifying a racially divided society of Malaya in critical historical circumstances. He indicated the following procedures for conducting fantasy theme analysis: (1) the identification of fantasy themes; (2) the examination of the dramatis personae and plans of action in the fantasy

themes; (3) the reconstruction of the resultant rhetorical visions; and (4) the overall assessment of the rhetorical visions.

Some of the questions that were analysed include: (a) What were the major fantasy themes developed by Tunku, Tan, and Sambanthan in their presidential addresses on the issues of racial harmony and national independence of Malaya; How were their fantasy themes similar to each other; and what was the function of this similarity?

(b) What type of dramatis personae and plans of action were formulated by these political rhetors are used in their fantasy themes?; (i) How were their dramatis personae and plans of action similar to each other?; and (ii) What was the function of this similarity?

(c) What was the resultant rhetorical vision that can be reconstructed from their fantasy themes?

In addition, an assessment was made to examine the short and long-term implications of the Tunku, Tan and Sambanthan rhetorical visions on the development of interracial harmony in Malaya.

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## INTRODUCTION

Malaya was colonized by the British in the middle of the 18th century. After the Second World War, it became one of the few Asian countries to remain under direct colonial power. All neighbouring countries such as Burma, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, India, and Pakistan had achieved their independence. The main factors that delayed --- the granting of Malay's independence by the British was the country rich natural resources and the continuing racial<sup>1</sup> antagonism between the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. In the country in order to maintain their control over the rich natural resources of Malaya, while at the same time trying to show their concerns about the racial problems, the British outlined what they thought to be an impossible precondition to Malayan political leaders. The precondition stated that Malaya would be granted independence only if the various racial groups in the country could cooperate in harmony (Bedlington, 1978). Due to the continuing antagonism between the Malays and Chinese in the country, the British were confident that the two races would not be able to cooperate in harmony. However, Malayan leaders' responses toward the precondition were beyond the British expectation. One of the interesting outcomes of this precondition was the formation of the Alliance Party, which was a multiracial political coalition between the Malay-based United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Chinese-based Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), and the Indian-based Malayan Indian Congress (MIC).

The study's main concern is to examine how Tunku Abdul Rahman (UMNO president), Tan Cheng Lock (MCA president), and V.T. Sambanthan (MIC president), as the multiracial leaders of the Alliance Party, managed to unify the racially divided Malayan society in their attempt to fulfil the precondition set

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<sup>1</sup> The term "racial" or "race" is used in this study because scholars more often use these terms rather than the term "ethnic" in their academic and on-academic researches about Malaya. The usage of these terms, according to Rabshka (1973), reflects "the fact that all Malays prefer to call their country multiracial rather than multiethnic" (p.3)

by the British. Due to the existence of some serious racial problems prior to and during the period under study (1955-1957). It is important to examine the various efforts and strategies made by the multiracial leaders in construction a rhetorical vision pertinent to the issues of racial unity and national independence of Malaya.

In their attempts to fulfil the precondition set by the British, the three leaders managed to put aside the tensions that were caused by the strong and continuing communal antagonisms between the Malays and the non-Malays. This was largely due to the compromise reached between them and other leaders of UMNO, MCA, and MIC which operated under the banner of the Alliance Party. The significance of this compromise lies in the fact that they were sharing a common objective of liberating Malaya from the colonial power, while at the same time were committed to their original goal of protecting the interests of their respective racial communities. The common objective of attaining independence for Malaya was shared at the Alliance Party level; on the other hand, the interests of their respective level. With these kinds of commonality and differences occurring among them, it is important to examine how the idea of national integration was formulated and shared by the multiracial leaders who were at the same time committed to their tasks of protecting and preserving the rights and interests of their respective racial communities.

This book also examines the leaders shared and unshared fantasy themes and rhetorical vision that were formulated in the presidential addresses of their respective racially-based parties from 1955 to 1957. The selected presidential addresses are listed below:

### **Presidential addresses of 1955**

- (1) Presidential address of Tunku Abdul Rahman at the General Assembly of UMNO on December 25, 1955 in Kuala Lumpur;
- (2) Tan Cheng Lock's presidential address at the General Committee Meeting of MCA on January 15, 1955 in Kuala Lumpur; and,
- (3) V.T. Sambanthan's presidential address at the Annual Conference of MIC on May 21, 1955 in Teluk Anson, Perak.

### **Presidential addresses of 1956**

- (1) Presidential address of Tunku Abdul Rahman at the General Assembly of UMNO on May 17, 1956 in Kuala Lumpur;
- (2) Presidential address of Tan Cheng Lock at the General Committee Meeting of MCA on May 20, 1956 in Kuala Lumpur; and,
- (3) Presidential address of V.T. Sambanthan at the Annual Conference of MIC on May 12, 1956 in Kuala Lumpur.

### **Presidential addresses of 1957**

- (1) Presidential address of Tunku Abdul Rahman at the General Assembly of UMNO on March 28, 1957 in Kuala Lumpur;
- (2) Presidential address of Tan Cheng Lock at the General Committee Meeting of MCA on May 2, 1957 in Kuala Lumpur; and,
- (3) Presidential address of V.T. Sambanthan at the Annual Conference of MIC on July 12, 1957 in Kuala Lumpur.

The examination of their rhetorical vision was conducted using Bormann's fantasy theme analysis method. This method was chosen because it was developed "to provide insights into the shared world view of a group of rhetors" (Foss 1989, 289). Furthermore, a comparison of the "unshared world view" of the rhetors could also be used as a means of analysis.

The remaining parts of this chapter deal with the following information: (a) the background of the three multiracial leaders of the Alliance Party; (b) the background of the Alliance Party and its members namely, UMNO, MCA, and MIC; (c) the historical development of the racial situation in Malaya; and (d) the dramatic situations faced by the three leaders in accomplishing their goals of unifying the various racial communities in Malaya.

## **THE POLITICAL PARTIES**

### **The Three Leaders**

#### ***Tunku Abdul Rahman***

Tunku was born in Alor Star, Kedah on February 8, 1902. He was the seventh child of Sultan Abdul Hamid, the Sultan of Kedah at the time. After returning from England with a law degree in 1949, he worked briefly in the Kedah Legal Department, before joining the Federation Legal Department in Kuala Lumpur (Sullivan 1963). In 1951, he was elected President of UMNO to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Dato' Onn from the party. At the beginning of his political career, he adopted a narrow racial policy (Funston 1980). This was apparent when he presented his vision of Malay nationalism in his first presidential address at the 1951 General Assembly of UMNO: "This is a Malay country... The Malays will decide who the 'Malayans' should be" (Miller 1965, 186). This idea remained prominent theme in his speeches until he realized that the British Government would only grant Malaya independence if the Malays, Chinese, and Indians races were united. The significant change occurred at the UMNO 1953 General Assembly when Tunku began to focus his presidential address on the advancement of unity among various races in Malaya. It was his first effort to swing the Malays away from narrow communal thinking. He pointed out that unity was a salient requirement imposed by the British before granting independence to Malaya. To fulfil this requirement the Chinese and other communities "must be offered something more than the status of subject people" if they were to "feel Malayan" (Miller 1965, 187). It was at this point that Tunku forged the political coalition between UMNO and MCA, from which the Alliance Party was originated.

According to Miller (1965), Tunku made two important contributions to the Malayans' struggle for independence: "He persuaded the Malays and Chinese, the two predominant races in Malaya, to ... live together in political harmony, ... and [convinced] the British Government that Malaya was able to govern itself, and therefore deserved independence" (p. viii).

### ***Tan Cheng Lock***

Tan was born in Malacca on April 5, 1883. He was one of the founding members of the MCA and the party first president. Throughout his career in the public services of Malaya, he advocated the “One Country, One People, One Government” political system for the country (Tan 1955, 4). This was evident in his presidential address at the first General Committee Meeting of the MCA in 1949 when he stated that “one of the basic aims of MCA is to help, in cooperation with the Malays and other communities, the development of the process of making the whole Malaya one country, one people and one government” (Tan 1955, 4). He strongly believed that although the different racial groups in Malaya were “culturally and intellectually independent,” they could be politically welded into one nation “by living peacefully in a mutually cooperative spirit under one government” (p.5). It was based on this awareness that he led MCA to cooperate with UMNO under the banner of the Alliance Party in 1953. According to Tan, the future of the Chinese community in Malaya depended on “the effective and fruitful collaboration with the Malays” (p.5).

Because of his continuing efforts in fostering racial harmony in Malaya, Malcolm MacDonald – a former British High Commissioner to Malaya, considered Tan as “a far seeing leader of the Malayan people in general and the Malayan Chinese in particular throughout a very historic period of the country... Perhaps [he was] the most wisely prophetic statesman of his time about the independent Malayan nation-to-be...” (Tan 1955, 22). Tan died on December 13, 1960.

### ***V.T. Sambanthan***

Sambanthan was born in Sungai Siput, Perak on June 16, 1919. After obtaining his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Annamalai University in South India 1942, Sambanthan worked at his family-owned rubber plantation (Ponnusamy 1989). When he was elected President of MIC in 1955, he led the party to join the UMNO-MCA alliance, marking the official establishment of the Alliance Party (Arasaratnam 1979). Because of his commitment to the advancement of racial harmony in Malaya, he was criticized by some sectors in the Indian community for compromising too much with his Malay and Chinese partners in the Alliance Party. However, he never paid any attention to those criticisms because he believed

that the only way for Malaya to be independent was through the development and maintenance of the spirits of goodwill, harmony and brotherhood among the Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Although the Indians were only a minority group in Malaya, Sambathan believed that they could be the harmonizing factor of the country (Ponnusamy 1989).

The most important factor that allowed Tunku, Tan, and Sambathan to cooperate in harmony was the common background they shared. Gagliano (1967) maintained that leaders of the Alliance Party comprise the most educated, westernized, secularized, and urbanized elements in the country (p.36). In this sense, the three leaders were able to work closely because they shared a common English-language schooling experience, a mutual fear of communism, and an affinity for western political beliefs and capitalistic practices.

## **THE ALLIANCE PARTY**

The Alliance Party originated from the experimental alliance between Kuala Lumpur UMNO branch and Selangor state MCA while they were preparing for the 1952 Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council Election. This election was part of the advances made by the British Government in preparing Malaya for self-government. The colonial administrator strongly believed that the introduction of the elected municipal councils in the country would provide its political leaders with sufficient training in local self-government before they could advance to the state and federal governments (Mills 1958). In the 1952 election, the UMNO-MCA alliance had convincingly defeated its opponent, the Independence of Malaya Party (IMP), by winning nine of the 12 seats contested. Subsequently, the success of this experimental alliance led to the formalization of the Alliance Party a year later, followed by the incorporation of the Indian-based MIC into the party in 1955. With this move, the Alliance Party embraced all three major racial communities in the country within its organization (Mazy 1983). What follows is a brief historical development of UMNO, MCA, and MIC in the Malayan political scene.

### ***United Malays National Organization (U.M.N.O.)***

UMNO was formed in 1946 as a result of the strong opposition made from the Malays on the British's decision to enforce the Malayan Union treaty

in Malaya. The treaty was perceived by the Malays as an assault upon their race because it would deprive them of their special rights and privileges as the people in their own country. Consequently, after the Malays and UMNO were successful in forcing the British to replace the treaty with a pro-Malay federation constitution (the 1948 Federation of Malaya Agreement), the party's leadership began to focus their struggles on "promoting the political, social, cultural and economic advancement of the [Malays]; maintaining the excellence of the religion of Islam ... and striving for the establishment of an independent Malaya" (Funson 1980, 87). The first President of UMNO was Dato' Onn Jaafar, the first Malay leader to realize that the strength of the Malay community in Malaya depended on its unity. However, Dato' Onn's tenure as president did not last long because he left the party in 1951 to form a new multiracial party (the IMP) after the Malays rejected his plan of converting UMNO into a non-communal organization. The common fear of the Malays about regarding Dato's Onn's plan was that he "was exposing them to the enterprise and economic power of the Chinese and the Indians when they were unprepared for it. To them the inevitable result would be a non-Malay takeover of their country" (Vasil 1980, 72). After his resignation, the Malays elected Tunku Abdul Rahman as the new President of UMNO. On the very same day that Dato' Onn left UMNO, Tunku and the General Assembly of UMNO adopted a resolution asserting that the party should remain an essentially Malay political body, would look after the interests and privileges of the Malays (Vasil 1980, 75).

### ***Malayan Chinese Association (M.C.A.)***

MCA was formed on February 27, 1949 as an alternative to the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) whose members were mainly Chinese. In addition, the founder of the party, Tan Cheng Lock, also outlined three other objectives of MCA: (1) to protect Chinese political and economic interests; (2) to promote interracial harmony; and (3) to attain self-government for Malaya (Heng 1988). In actuality, however, "the overriding concern of the party was to protect the economically privileged position of the Chinese community through political action" (Heng, p.57). The first president of MCA was Tan Cheng Lock, who headed the party from 1949 to 1958. In his inaugural address on February 27, 1949, Tan stated that the party was formed "with the twin fundamental objectives of bringing about cohesion and unity among the Malayan Chinese of all classes and promoting interracial goodwill, harmony, and cooperation ... particularly

between the Malays and the Chinese” (Strait Times, Feb. 28, 1949, p. 1 and 5). Subsequently, when the British Government announced in 1952 that Malaya would be granted independence only if the various racial groups could live and work together in harmony, the MCA’s leadership began to search for a Malay political partner. They decided to cooperate with UMNO not only because it was the most dominant party within the Malay community, but also because of the common ground that they shared between the UMNO leadership (Von Vorvys 1975).

### ***Malayan Indian Congress (M.I.C.)***

MIC was formed in August 1946 “with the aim of protecting Indian interests and erasing the image of the Malayan Indian as a compliant labourer” (Mauzy 1983, 11). The following objectives were listed in the constitution of the party: “(1) to promote and safeguard the political, social and economic interests of the Indians in Malaya, (2) to represent, express and give effect to Indian public opinion, and (3) to promote political advancement of Malaya in cooperation with other communities” (Mahajani 1960, 220).

At the beginning of its political years, the MIC faced some problems in its relationship with the Malays because it had openly opposed UMNO’s objective of restoring the special rights and positions of the Malays. For this reason, it became the strongest supporter of the IMP, a party which opposed the UMNO-MCA experimental alliance in the 1952 Kuala Lumpur Municipal Election. However, when the IMP ceased to function after its defeat in the election, MIC found itself politically isolated. By then, the party’s leadership came to realize that they “had continuously been backing the wrong horse in Malayan politics” (Arasaratnam 1979, 120). In addition, the majority of the Indian community in Malaya, especially the Tamil Hindus, were unhappy with the party leadership, especially the first three presidents of the party, who they claimed, did not understand their needs and aspirations. Eventually, in 1952, a campaign was conducted by the Tamil Hindus to elect a president from their group. After two years of serious campaigns, the MIC leadership was finally Tamilized when the Indians elected V.T. Sambanthan as the fourth president of the party in its 1954 Annual Conference (Arasaratnam 1979).

After this change, the new leadership of MIC made a turning point in the

history of the party by moving closer to the UMNO-MCA alliance. Subsequently, in 1955, MIC officially joined the Alliance Party.

## **THE UNSTABLE POLITICAL AND RACIAL SITUATIONS**

This section reviews the historical development of the unstable political and racial situations in Malaya. This information is essential because it deals with the political setting in which Tunku, Tan, and Sambanthan worked out their strategies to formulate the fantasy themes and rhetorical vision that would help them plan the future of a united and independent Malayan nation.

The 1952 Census of Malaya indicated that the population of the country consisted of 2.75 million Malays, 2.1 million Chinese, and 641,000 Indians (Sington 1953, 19). This multiracial composition was a historical outcome of the British colonial policy which began in 1874 when it started to intervene directly in the economic and political affairs of the Malay states. It represented the beginning of a great influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants to Malaya, fostered by the expanding economic development of British rubber and tin industries in the country. These immigrants made up new Chinese and Indian communities in Malaya, in addition to the indigenous Malay community. With these immigrants settling in Malaya, the country became a pluralistic society composed of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Each group of this racial group maintained its identity under the British rule (Hagiwara 1972).

In order to maintain “peace and order” between the indigenous Malays and the newly arrived Chinese and Indians, the British implemented the “divide and rule” policy in the country. Through this policy, the British colonial government encouraged separate functioning of the country’s population based on racial classifications. The policy affected the population distribution of the country in such a way that each racial group was concentrated in a particular region of the country. It also perpetuated a specialization of economic activities along racial lines, in which a racial group was often identified with an economic function. Based on this concentration and specialization, most Malays lived in the rural areas and worked as traditional farmers or fisherman. On the other hand most Chinese lived in the urban centers and engaged in trade and commerce or in the mining industries, while most Indians lived and worked in the British-owned rubber plantations (Hashim 1983). In addition, the British continued to divide

the population along racial line by introducing education to the Malays, Chinese and Indians. By developing separate vernacular schools without a unified or Malayan-oriented curriculum, the various racial communities were “not only physically separated ... but were also intellectually and spiritually separated. These Chinese remained oriented to China and the Indians to India” (Kassim 1971, 15). It is clearly evident that the policy led to a minimal interaction between the Chinese and Indian immigrants and the Malays.

There is another important element of the divide and rule policy that needs to be discussed here. Although, the policy seemed to put the Malays in an economically disadvantaged position, it put the Malays in a politically superior position (Comber 1983). Through a series of agreements between the British and Malay rulers (“Sultan”), the British acknowledged the Malays as “sons of the soil” (“Bumiputra”) of Malaya and the Chinese and Indians as immigrants. In line with these agreements, Sir Hugh Clifford, the British Commissioner to Malay, stated in 1927 that “there could be no yielding to the demands of immigrant groups for democracy even though they had a majority, as this would represent a betrayal of the Malays” (Emerson 1966, 17). This principle largely dominated the British policy in Malaya from 1874 until the commencement of the Second World War. After the outbreak of the Second World War, Malaya fell under the Japanese military administration in 1942. The Japanese occupation had widened the gaps between the Malays and the Chinese in the country. For instance some Malay leaders, especially those from the anti-British *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (The Union of Malay Youth), worked closely with the Japanese military administration, the Chinese-dominated Malayan Communist Party (MCP), on the other hand, organized the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) to cooperate with the British in resisting the Japanese occupation in Malaya.

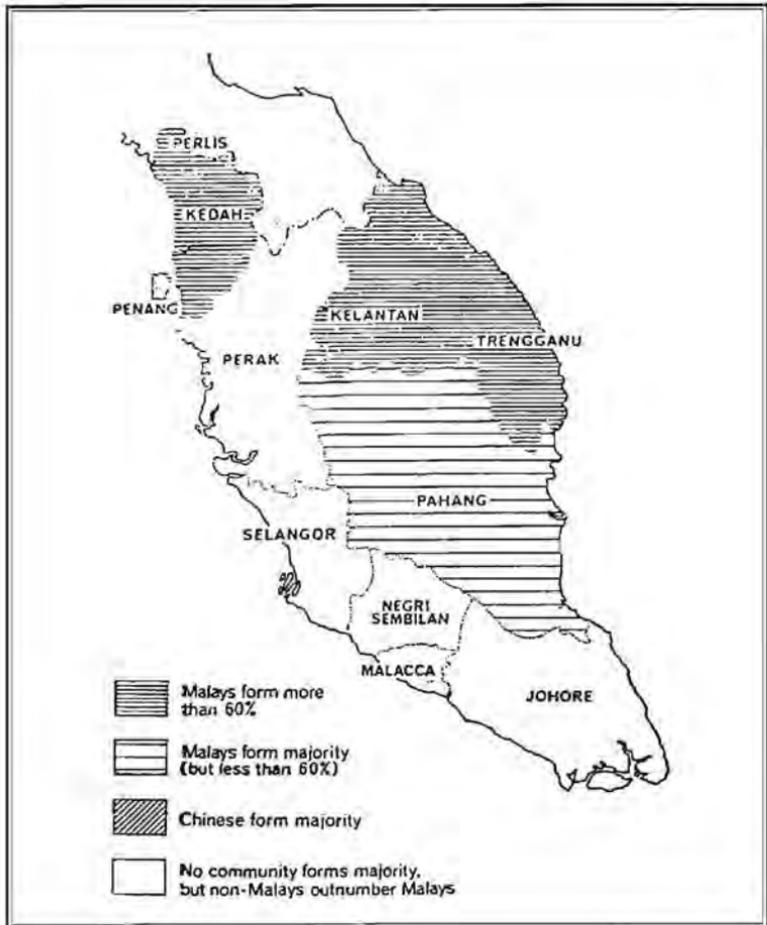
These gaps were further widened after the Japanese surrendered to the British in 1945. This was due to the infamous Malayan Union treaty which the British attempted to enforce in Malaya in 1946. The treaty stated that all eleven states in Malaya were to be integrated into a new union called a Crown Colony and all Malay rulers were to surrender their jurisdiction to the British government. The most important feature of the treaty which had exacerbated the gaps between the Malays and the non-Malays was the principle of *jus soli*,

which granted a common citizenship to all races. This principle was considered by the Malays as an insult to their racial pride because it denied their status as “a nation and Malaya as belonging to them” (Hashim 1983, 47). On the other hand, the non-Malays, especially the Chinese, supported the treaty because of the legal status of citizenship and the accompanying political rights it conferred on the Chinese and Indian immigrants. This aroused strong antagonism between the Malays and the non-Malays (Hashim 1983).

Strong protests and pressures from the Malays, along with solid support from former British civil servants who had earlier served in Malaya, spurred the replacement of the Malayan Union treaty with a new constitution called the Federation of Malaya Agreement in 1948. The new constitution marked the British administration’s return to its pre-Second World War pro-Malay policy. It held that the British would be responsible for safeguarding the special position of the Malays and the restoration of the sovereignty of the Malay rulers. The principle of *jus soli* was dropped and replaced by a citizenship in the Federation. However, the requirements for citizenship were much more strict than the ones in the Malayan Union treaty (Von Vorys 1975). Retrospectively, the Federation of Malaya Agreement revealed an important reality which would be vital for the future of Malaya: It officially recognized the presence of the non-Malays in Malaya and their increasingly active participation in local politics. In other words, the agreement indicated that both Malay and non-Malay communities were to be consulted in the governing of Malaya from then on.

**Figure 1.1**

**The Distribution of Population by Race in Malaya in the 1950s**



## **ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECHES**

### **PRE-INDEPENDANCE MALAYA**

The three-year period (1955-57) prior to the independence of Malaya was vital for Tunku, Tan, and Sambanthan because it represented the period of planning and organizing of the strategies for the independence of Malaya. The focus of their planning and organizing was on the issues of interracial political cooperation among the Malays and the non-Malays. This was essential because Malaya was politically unstable due to the problems created by complex racial issues and communism. Because of their successes in overcoming the racial tensions among the Malays, Chinese, and Indians, the Alliance Party was considered the most workable power-sharing formula in advancing interracial political cooperation in Malaya. It symbolized the starting point from which Malayan political leaders seriously voiced their interests in gaining racial harmony for the purpose of attaining the independence of Malaya. Mauzy (1983), in her discussion of the importance of the Alliance Party in integrating the Malays and the non-Malays contends:

It was not until the formation of the [Alliance] Party, comprising the three major [racial] parties... that the idea of interracial cooperation at the elite level became institutionalized (p.4).

The importance of the Alliance Party in the initial planning and organizing stages of attaining Malaya's independence indicates the need for a rhetorical analysis which focuses on the shared rhetorical vision of its multi-racial leaders on the future of an independent Malaya. Taking into consideration the dramatic situations in Malaya in the 1950s, this book is essential because it examines the social realities created by Tunku, Tan, and Sambanthan in influencing the racially divided masses in Malaya to support their independence movement and in building favourable images for their party in the eye of the British administrators. This book is also important in examining the similarities among the fantasy themes formulated and constructed by the three leaders. The

comparison is necessary to find out the extent to which issues of racial harmony were stressed and shared by the three leaders.

In the general assessment of the rhetorical vision, this study examines the short and long term implications of the leaders' visions to the overall development of racial harmony in Malaya. This is essential in order to examine the contributions made by their rhetorical visions in building a united and independent Malayan nation.

## **FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS**

Based on the dramatic events that occurred in Malaya in the 1950s, this study examines the rhetorical visions developed by Tunku, Tan, and Sambanthan in their presidential addresses delivered at their racially-based political parties. It is important to mention that these presidential addresses focus on the issues of racial harmony and national independence of Malaya. By using the method of fantasy theme analysis, this study examines the strategies used by the three leaders to integrate the racially divided Malayan masses for the ultimate purpose of attaining the independence of Malaya.

The study focuses on the following three areas:

- (1) The development of fantasy themes in the presidential addresses of Tunku, Tan, and Sambanthan at the General Assembly of UMNO, the General Committee Meeting of MCA, and the Annual Conference of MIC from 1955 to 1957, respectively, focussed on issues of racial harmony and the independence of Malaya;
- (2) The formulation of the dramatis personae and the plans of actions by the three leaders in their fantasy themes; and,
- (3) The reconstruction of their resultant rhetorical visions from their fantasy themes, dramatis personae, and plan of actions.

The method of fantasy theme analysis was developed by Bormann (1972) in his study on the American Puritan rhetorical visions. A major source for Bormann's initial ideas on this method was Robert Bales' (1970) study on how groups function as participants in a drama as they act out fantasy events. He

used Bales' category of "group dramatizing" (p.136) to develop his own ideas about the fantasy theme analysis approach. Bormann contends that it can lead to the discovery of group fantasy events that can be identified by considering the content of the group discussion. With reference to small group communication, Bormann (1972) asserts that the application of the term "dramatizes" consisting of "characters, real or fictitious, playing out dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the here-and-now transactions" (p.397). This means that the group discussion becomes "temporally and spatially dislocated, giving rise to the formulation of a fantasy theme" (p.397). Thus, in the context of small group communication, Bormann defines fantasy theme as "a recollection of something that happened to the group in the past or a dream of what the group members might do in the future" (p.198). The formulation of the fantasy theme, however, depends very much on the responses of the group members to the dramatic statement will determine whether or not it becomes a fantasy theme within the group. If the group accepts or responds emotionally to the dramatic statement, it will be chained out among its members indicating their participation in the drama. The chaining out process is characterized by the group members' reactions towards the dramatic statements. The characteristics of these reactions are presented by Bormann (1972) as follows:

The tempo of the conversation would pick up. People grow excited, interrupt one another, blush, laugh, forget their self-consciousness. The tone of the meeting, often quiet and tense immediately prior to the dramatizing, would become lively, animated and boisterous, the chaining process involving both verbal and non-verbal communication, indication participation in the drama (Bormann, 1972: 397).

As the group members respond emotionally to the drama, they begin to establish a sense of cohesion and commonality themselves. This, in turn, provides the group members with a sense of security and purpose. The emotional response of the group members indicates participation in the fantasy theme. It provides them with a tool for persuading other group members to accept a commitment or an attitude favouring the fantasy theme being formulated. Bormann maintains that "when group members respond emotionally to the dramatic situation, they publicly proclaim commitment to an attitude. Indeed, in a spontaneous group dramatizing is a powerful tool for attitude change" (p.397). Through the "chaining out" process at the fantasy theme, "values and attitudes of many kinds

are tested and legitimized as common to the group” (p.398). These values and attitudes provide the group with an entire set of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and attitudes. Members who are not caught up or not involved in the “chaining out” process of the group’s dramatizing message do not become part of the group’s repertoire.

Once Bormann (1972) identifies and explains this process in small group communication, he turns to rhetorical criticism and claims that a similar process occurs in public discourse. According to him, the “chaining out” process of the dramatizing message in a small group will work into public speeches and into the mass media, spreading across larger publics. In this context, the fantasy theme will “serve to sustain the members’ sense of community, to impel them to action ... and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes” (p.398). Consequently, in doing this research, Bormann presents the similarity between the “chaining out” of the fantasy theme in small groups and the process which occurs in public discourse in the following way: “Just as fantasy themes chain out in the group culture, so do the fantasy dramas of a successful persuasive campaign chain out in public audiences to form rhetorical vision” (p.398).

In explaining the process of creating shared meaning among the members of the public, Bormann (1983) refers to the symbolic convergence theory. Symbolic convergence theory, he asserts, is based on the assumption that “symbols not only create reality for individuals but that individuals’ meaning for symbols can converge to create a shared reality for participants” (p.101). Convergence in this sense refers to “the way two or more private symbolic worlds incline toward each other, come more closely together, or even overlap during certain processes of communication” (p.102). It is also a “shared meaning, consensus, or general agreement on subjective meaning” (Foss 1989, 290). According to Bormann (1983), when the symbolic convergence process occurs in public, the following consequences will happen to the participants or members of the public:

[They] have jointly experienced the same emotions; they have developed the same attitudes and emotional responses to the personae of the drama; and they have integrated some aspects of their experience in the same way. They have thus achieved symbolic convergence about their common experience (p.130).

Thus, in the symbolic convergence theory, Bormann stresses the point that sharing the message among members of the public is seen as more significant than the message itself.

Bormann developed the method of fantasy theme analysis that can be applied not only to the study of small group communication, but also to various aspects of rhetorical events, such as “social movements, political campaigns, organizational communication, and other kinds of rhetoric” (Foss 1989, 209). As stated earlier, in small group communication, a fantasy theme is considered a symbolic formulation of social realities that allows the group to develop and legitimize group values and attitudes. What holds groups together is shared fantasies that have been “chained out” through the group – passed on from one member to another with appropriate embellishment as members respond emotionally to dramatic event. Through spontaneous dramatization, “groups rhetorically create a common symbolic reality revolving around certain fantasy themes” (Catchcart 1981, 99). In the larger society, on the other hand, “fantasy themes form part of the ongoing dialogue that produces movements and other forms of political and social change” (Catchcart 1981, 99). When a particular set of fantasy themes is worked into public speeches, disseminated by the mass media, and “chained out” through public audiences, it forms a rhetorical vision.

The foregoing discussion has thus indicated that the fantasy theme analysis was designed by Bormann “to provide insights into the shared world view of groups of rhetors” (Foss 1989, 289). In this instance, critics using the fantasy theme analysis are concerned with finding evidence that groups of people have shared a social reality developed in the process of advancing a rhetorical vision. They seek to explain how the rhetorical vision was manifested by identifying the fantasy themes inherent in the public discourse being examined (Bormann, 1972).

### **Fantasy Theme Analysis as a Humanistic Approach to Rhetorical Criticism**

According to Bormann (1985), “fantasy theme analysis is a humanistic approach to the rhetorical criticism of human communication” (p.3). In order to understand the relationship between the method of fantasy theme analysis with the humanistic approach to rhetorical criticism, it is important to outline the contemporary perspectives on humanistic approach in human communication