

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN FACE OF CONCURRENT DISRUPTION

“The Dilemma of Consociational Politics in Malaysia”

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INTRODUCTION

Humanities and social sciences in face of concurrent disruption is an interesting theme to talk especially under the current circumstances, however before we move further let us dive deeper into the meaning of disruption.

In general disruption means a major disturbance, something that changes your plans or interrupts some event or process. It is always perceived to be negative. However it not always negative for example in technology there is a term - known as disruptive technology. A technology that affects the way businesses, consumers, or industries function. It displaces a well-established product or technology, creating a new industry or market. It is also generally attracts a limited audience, and sometimes may lead to performance issues, and unproven practical application.

These technologies may not be able to fulfil the demands of the high-end market initially, but they exceed market expectations when it appears to be profitable. Disruptive technologies are generally originated from start-ups and young companies rather than the leading companies. For example internet of things, e-commerce, artificial intelligence and so on. So the key words here are disruption creates an opportunity.

While disruptions in business are continuous, a threat that cannot be fully prevented, therefore proper planning should be taken to ensure the least possible fallout from such a situation. So disruption has created the mentality of being proactive in guarding one interest. For example, the natural disasters such as earthquake and tsunami or also pandemic Covid 19 also may cause obvious immediate effects on business operations. Even if a business isn't physically affected by an earthquake or tsunami, its employees or operations can be. So the key words here are disruption creates an opportunity.

On human disruption it is always associated to disruption of the eco system, such as the impact of pollution since the Industrial Revolution, the atmospheric release of carbon dioxide and the decrease of protective ozone layer due to release of certain chemicals such as CCl₄. It is also sometimes related to the explosive growth of human population and the pressing need to provide the basic necessities required. This has caused the encroachment of the reserved forest areas which in direct conflict with other living creatures such as animal, bird, fish and plants.

The current disruption the world is undoubtedly due to pandemic caused by Covid 19 virus. This pandemic has affected almost all spheres of our life- even the theme of this conference includes the pandemic flavor. Even though this is a health matter, its highly infectiousness

severely affects our daily activities. Instead of face-to-face meetings now we must meet in virtual. Almost all activities that previously were done face to face or in close proximity now must be done virtually or must adhere to strict SOP to some extent is cumbersome and nauseating. Virtual teaching in schools and universities with some areas severely affected by poor internet connections even some sought to be at the treetop for better coverage. The limit of people movement within the border as well as across the borders has caused the collapse of tourism industries as well travelling related industries, you may hear the story of a pilot selling burger and spaghetti.

. According to a survey by World Health Organization (WHO) from 155 countries, the fight against COVID-19 has severely disrupted services to prevent and treat cancer, diabetes, hypertension and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which kill more than 40 million people each year. The health services have been partially or completely disrupted in many countries and the most common reasons for discontinuing or reducing these services were cancellations of planned treatments, a decrease in public transport available and a lack of staff because health workers had been reassigned to support COVID19 services. Besides, one of the main reasons for discontinuing services was a shortage of medicines, diagnostics and other technologies.

Before I touch on the issue of how this pandemic has affected the Malaysian politics, here I briefly summarize on the virus has spread around the globe from Wuhan China which has caused devastating effect to economic and social life.. Beginning in December 2019, this disease spread rapidly among the residents of Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. This was an unusual situation, with pneumonia cases of unknown cause being reported. The Chinese government reported the virus to the WHO on December 31, 2019. However, on January 20, 2020, the Chinese authorities identified a novel coronavirus (nCoV) as the cause of this severe pneumonia disease, and the identification of nCoV was confirmed by the WHO on January 12, 2020 (Secon et al., 2020; Abdullah, 2020a). Several studies have strongly suggested that bats were the main host of this nCoV, since there were 96% identical to bat coronavirus (Li et al., 2020).

The first COVID-19 case outside China was reported in Thailand on January 13, 2020, This case, then led to more stringent screening processes for passengers with a fever at airports in Thailand, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore. On January 20, 2020, the first case was reported in the United States, in a person with a history of returning from Wuhan, and followed by Sweden and Spain, Russia and the United Kingdom. Hence end of Jan 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak as a Global Public Health Emergency (Secon et al., 2020; WHO, 2020c; Worldometer, 2020). Whereas, overall, reported cases in Malaysia, as at March 31, 2020, can be divided into three waves. The first wave was successfully handled by February 27, 2020, with all 22 previously reported cases being discharged from hospital. Most cases reported in the first wave were imported cases from China and their contacts. Only two cases were found to have resulted from local transmission.

According to the early stage of the epidemic, the outbreak started in China and gradually increased its web and captured more than 150 countries by March 2020.2 Initially, many of the countries did not take serious actions to control the outbreak in their own countries by thinking it a 'Chinese virus'. Now governments and organisations are scrambling to manage the disaster caused by COVID-19. Europe and America are paying a high price for their initial

ignorance, where America is facing the worst ever medical disaster in their history. The table below shows the top 10 countries with the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases at April 11, 2021, with the total cases almost touching 143 millions. (guna data baharu)

#	Country, Other	Total Cases	New Cases	Total Deaths	New Deaths	Total Recovered
	World	142,706,917	+14,822	3,043,219	+356	121,433,933
1	USA	32,475,043		581,542		25,043,463
2	India	15,314,714		180,550		13,103,220
3	Brazil	13,977,713		375,049		12,460,712
4	France	5,296,222		101,180		4,150,842
5	Russia	4,710,690		105,928		4,333,598
6	UK	4,390,783		127,274		4,156,135
7	Turkey	4,323,596		36,267		3,736,537
8	Italy	3,878,994		117,243		3,268,262
9	Spain	3,428,354		77,102		3,144,353
10	Germany	3,164,447		80,774		2,803,600

Actions taken by the Government of Malaysia and Ministry of Health to overcome COVID-19

Malaysian citizens did not initially realize how deadly the virus is, till second wave of COVID-19 cases spiked on 27 February 2020, and later in mid-March 2020. Therefore, the government had to imposed a 2-week movement control order (MCO) starting from 18 to 31 March, which was extended to 14 April and then to 28 April. The main purpose of this MCO was to flatten the curve of new cases.

Due to the implementation of prohibition of movement and mass assembly included religious, business, education, sports, culture and social activities except for supermarkets, public markets, grocery stores, the outbreak of COVID-19 not only caused health concerns but also had severe impact on the Malaysian economy. The public, from entrepreneurs to farmers, from fishermen to those paid daily wages, are concerned about their finances. Thus, the government allocated a special package of RM 10 billion for small and medium-sized enterprises to ease the burden of small and medium enterprises.

Around the globe, this pandemic caused severe impacts on the education systems. To reduce the delays in education progress, the educational institutes were encouraged to start home-based learning using online classes and other innovative teaching practices. In the future, this can help to develop online educational platforms. Many universities also showed significant initiatives in taking on social responsibilities by providing food and other necessities to local and international students.

Covid 19 and politics in Malaysia

Ladies and Gentleman

The bulwark of Malaysian political stability since independence has been based on consociational politics, whereby a broad coalition is represented by several ethnic based parties. When BN lost in the 14 general election the position of consociational politics that are centered on ethnic based political parties has been in limbo whereby MCA only won one seat and MIC only managed to win two seats. This is a tectonic shift in Malaysian politics which never being experienced before and later we will see how the virus has caused the compounding effects to the consociational politics.

What is consociational politics and its elements?

Ladies and gentleman, before we discuss the relevancy of CP under the current circumstances let us briefly look at the historical back ground on the implementation in this country and other countries so that we could appreciate better of what is happening now and since this approach has brought peace in our country for almost 60 years even though it has been dotted with minor ethnic clashes.

Consociational politics is an approach through which it promotes power sharing with a specific kind of promises for a democratic solution to societies confronted by political conflict and ethnic division". It has been put forward by Lijphart (1977), and his model could facilitate the much needed cooperation among the different ethnic communities in a democratic country.

Generally, this approach consists of four elements starting with the need to establish a **grand coalition** which emphasis on the participation of elite group from all the ethnic groups so that this cooperation will translate into all-encompassing ethnic groups which could form a majority block in a parliamentary system. The block could decide the important appointments such the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the House. The focus here is not to create a cohesive working alliance, more importantly to get the elite groups that represent their respective ethnic.

Second is the **mutual veto** or informal minority veto, a kind of reset button that could be used by any groups especially the minority groups should they feel threaten or be at the

disadvantage position due to any decision made especially by the bigger groups and with this provision all the decisions should be based on broad consensus.

The third element is **proportionality** which means the size of the parliamentary representative is based on the size of the ethnic group population. Sometimes this distribution is also applied in other important appointments such as in civil service. However, the process of making the decisions again is hampered by the threat of mutual veto power as in the case of Greek and Turkish Cypriot (Schneckener 2002).

The fourth element is the **segmental autonomy** which refers to each segment of the society or every ethnic community is given the right to manage and make decision that is related to their respective ethnic communities such as religious affair, education system including the language and cultural issues (Lijphart 1977; 1985). Normally, segmental autonomy groups prefer to protect their group identity, and the evidence of consociational experiences in Kenya, showed the action of the kikuyu ethnic group in defending their rights during President Kenyatta's leadership.

The effectiveness of this approach in solving the problem of national unity in multi ethnic countries has been subjected to critics based on two issues.

First since it emphasizes strongly on forming a broad coalition, there will be less competition which is the main element in a democratic process or the presence of opposition among minorities outside the coalition is insignificant to make the process of check and balance meaningful. This was the case in Cyprus, where the Greek Cypriots majority was responsible for the breakdown of consociational arrangements. A similar case can be seen in Northern Ireland with a population dominated by Christian Protestants (Lijphart 1985).

Second, due to the distribution of top post appointment based on agreed allocation, the most capable individuals which are important for an efficient administration, may be side-lined.

Among the causes of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1989) was because of the political power that favoured the Christian ethnic group with more of the dominant members in 1943 and not based on the size of the population in the 1970s, this situation has provoked the Muslims especially the Shia who was the largest sectarian group at that time. Besides, since the concept takes full recognition of the role of each ethnic community, it may indirectly enhance the ethnic sentiment and this is supplemented by the implementation of several activities or programs under the segmental autonomy. Furthermore, certain ethnic group may seek help from their fellow ethnic from other countries. In Cyprus, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are more loyal to their patron states which are Greece and Turkey respectively than to their own country (Darby 2001).

According to Lijphart (2004; 1977; 1985), even though this concept may not be able to bridge the ethnic schism, however it could create a relatively stable multi-ethnic democratic country as can be seen in Netherlands, Switzerland, Northern Ireland and India. For example, Switzerland, that is composed of three major ethnic groups, which are German, French and Italian, and profess two major religions, Catholic and Protestant, have enjoyed the long period of peace and continuous practice of consociationalism (McCrackan 1970).

Due to the complexity of a multi ethnic society, Bormanny (2011), suggested that before the concept can be implemented, the country prevailing political system has to be understood first and a neutral consultative body represented by all the ethnic groups and religious organization have to be established to facilitate the implementation process. This also includes discussions with the nationalist groups to ask for their cooperation and those who are working in the government as well as private sectors. The advantage of consociational politics in term of equality of rights and privilege to all the citizen regardless of their ethnicity should entice them to be more cooperative, enhance inter-ethnic cooperation for the good of the country as well as everybody. This will indirectly improve the country stability.

Consociational Approach in Malaysia

Ladies and gentleman,

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country with three main ethnics namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians and with demographic distribution of approximately 55 %, 25% and 7 % respectively (Husin 2012). The Malays are the original inhabitants of the land whereas the Chinese and Indian were the recent immigrants brought into Malaya during British colonization to serve the later economic interests. These three ethnics have noticeable different physical outlook, cultural heritage which includes religions and languages. Since the country is a democratic country, consociational politics is the only option available with the emphasis based on consensus in reaching collective decisions with the inclusion of segmental autonomy in safeguarding each ethnic cultural heritage such as language, religion and education system Lijphart (2004).

The democratic system in Malaysia is based on cooperation and consensus that emphasis on high level of tolerance which is an important factor in strengthening the country solidarity and unity. The country political system and background have almost similar attributes to that articulated by Lijphart (1968) in which the ethnic communities are very much separated and competing with each other through their respective ethnic-based platforms. This prevailing condition has influenced their political activities such as the need to constantly be reminded on the importance of solidarity and unity through power sharing. This ethno-centric phenomenon is not only due to the inherent cultural attachment, it was reinforced previously by the colonial policy of 'divide and rule'. The consequences of this ethnic consciousness resulted in the formation of ethnic based political parties and organizations.

The formation of the Alliance was seen as the bulwark in promoting cooperation between the main parties from the Malays, Chinese and Indian ethnic communities (Lijphart 1968). This warm relationship between the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) in 1952 and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) accepted as a third partner in 1954, indicated a successful formation grand coalition known as Alliance and it received huge support across ethnic communities (Chee 1991). Alliance was also successful in persuading the people to vote for whichever Alliance candidate that was nominated for that district, irrespective of the background of the candidate. This is called as the 'vote pooling' which refers to the exchange of vote across ethnic or racial lines, normally as a result of agreements between parties for the exchange of electoral support.

Even though the concept of power sharing, consensus and the spirit of cooperation had successfully led to the Independence of the Federation of Malaya in 1957, however, after the independence was obtained the concept of power sharing and cooperation had lost its compass that resulted in a violent conflict on 13 May 1969. It was almost a smack on the face to the leaders who had been galvanizing for inter-ethnic cooperation for the country solidarity and unity and the riot had shaken the Malay community recognized as the sons of the soil (Abdul Rahman 1969). There were political scientists who attributed the principle of power sharing and tolerance advocated by the Malay leaders had subjected the Malay community to the abuses by the non-Malays communities by stoking provocations especially during the demonstrations and parades. The high level of tolerance displayed by the Malay leaders had caused anger among the Malays and as a result, after the hegemony under the leadership of Tun Razak Hussein with quasi democracy in order to stamp out inter-ethnic acrimonious environment.

3.1 Consociational Politics in Malaysia Post-Conflict 13th May 1969

After the riot that caused 196 deaths the concept of consociational politics was under spotlight of its effectiveness and according to Marshall & Juliet (2014) it shows the failure of the elite groups to convince their respective ethnic community as a whole to be united under MCA leadership. The Chinese community was more inclined to support other Chinese dominated parties which were outside the grand coalition such as Democratic Action Party (DAP) and *Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia* (Gerakan). Both parties were accused of fanning the racial sentiment (Abdul Rahman, 1969). The inability of the grand coalition headed by the Alliance to satisfy the competing demands by every segments including by the Malay's group on their demand of better distribution of the country economic cake since they were far behind the Chinese and Indian communities putting a strain on the coalition. However the concept continued to be the preferred choice and to sustain the coalition they created (Asna 1996), several enactments to pacify this tense relationship such as Sedition Act 1948 to prevent any parties from questioning several sensitive issues pertaining to the foundations of the country such as the special privileges of the Malays, the position of the Malay rulers, the citizenship of the non-Malays and the position of the Malay Language as the sole official language. Other Acts enacted include Official Secrets Act 1972, Internal Security Act 1960 and University and College Act 1971 (Ishak, 2000). Even though these acts have curtailed some features of democratic principles, it has brought some stability and until now the segment autonomy remains, in fact it is better managed than certain countries such as Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia and Africa (Kartini et al 2013).

3.2 Grand coalition

Grand coalition was first started when the people of Malaya was looking for an independent from the British. A rudimentary work was initiated between the Malays under UMNO, the Chinese under MCA and the Indian under MIC. Initially this grand coalition was so successful and during the first election the coalition secured 53 seats out of 55 seats contested. With the inclusion of several other parties the coalition was renamed as National front (Pritti 2012).

This coalition won the subsequent election and the policies, rules and regulations enacted so far manage to ward off any untoward incidents of ethnic strife. In order to strengthen this fragile solidarity and unity, the government introduced social re-engineering and affirmative action programs formulated by National Operation Council, such as the New Economic Policy and National Principles (*Rukun Negara*). The acceptance of the above principles has resulted many political parties formed broad-based coalitions and for example there are 12 political parties comprising parties from peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak.

After 13 May 1969 riot many people doubted whether this grand coalition will remain as it is or it will evolve to become a more dynamic coalition (Cheah 2012). Several internal power squabbling within UMNO caused the splits and breakaway parties such as PAS, *Negara*, *Semangat 46*, *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR) and *Bersatu*. Some of these breakaway parties have formed a new coalition with the existing parties outside the UMNO led coalition or National Front such DAP and PAS to unseat the national Front. However, this new coalition suffered ideological differences especially between Islamist PAS and Chinese led liberal DAP which as a result the coalition collapsed (Segawa 2015).

3.3 Segmental Autonomy

Segmental autonomy has been the main feature in the practice of consociational politics in Malaysia. The special privilege of the Malays as the original inhabitant of the land, the recognition Islam as the official religion of the state and the Malay language as the sole national language. Other ethnics can freely practise their religions and their native languages and education systems are recognized as parts of national education system. To bridge the economic gap between the have and the have not, the main reason for the 13 May riot, the government introduced a new policy known as the new economic policy to economically empower the Malays (Faaland 1991). Even though the preservation of segmental autonomy could increase ethnic sentiment instead of national sentiment Lijphart (1977) opined the advantages is far outweigh the negative effects.

THE DILEMMA OF CONSOCIATIONAL POLITICS IN MALAYSIA

As I said before the bulwark of Malaysian political stability since independence has been based on consociational politics, whereby the broad coalition is represented by several ethnic based parties. When BN lost in the 14th general election the position of consociational politics has been in limbo whereby MCA only won one seat and MIC only managed to win two seats. This is a tectonic shift in Malaysian politics which never being experienced before. Under PH while all ethnics were represented in the cabinet, the ethnic based political parties such as MCA, UMNO and MIC were on the opposite side of the bench. Even though Bersatu represented Bumiputra ethnics under the leadership of Dr Mahathir Mohammad who took the premiership from the coalition, the majority of the seats came from non-ethnic based political parties such as DAP and PKR. Based on the smooth transfer of the power and calmness of the situation during the early part of PH administration, one might confidently induce that the people can do away with ethnic based political parties and off course Dr Mahathir is the most experience Prime Minister who could steer well the consociaotional politics that is not based or supported by ethnic based political parties which has never been tried or practiced in

Malaysia. After a year of relative peace under PH, a feud had started in PH on the calls by certain segments of party leaders within PH especially from PKR and Amanah to change the premiership something that never happened under BN ethnic based political parties consociational politics. However, these calls were strongly rebuked by leaders from Bersatu, Warisan and certain fraction from PKR. This call unfortunately had caused the unbridgeable schism within PH and this was followed a dramatic event that was the shock resignation of Dr Mahathir as the prime minister which had caused MPs from Bersatu and a fraction from PKR to withdrew their support to the PH government that caused it to collapse or sometimes fondly known as Sheraton move. During this chaotic and fluid political situation with UMNO leaders totally sidelined since they were beset with court cases and PH leaders were in the confusing state of mind either to vote for Dr Mahathir Mohamad or Anwar Ibrahim as the subsequent prime minister, Mahyuddin Yasin from Bersatu had garnered the highest votes and picked as the prime Minister to lead a rudimentary coalition known as PN. Even though there were talks of pushing for non-confidence motion against the prime minister soon in the parliament among the disgruntled PH leaders that was supposed to reconvene on 9 th of March 2020, however it was not materialized since the sitting was postpone to 18 May 2020 due to rising Covid cases amounting more than 200 daily. Then almost two weeks after being elected as the Prime Minister the country went for the first nation-wide lockdown from 18 March 2020 to 28 April 2020 and all the political talks of unseating the prime minister went to the back burner. When the parliament was reconvened on May 18, 2020 the agenda was surprisingly changed whereby the sitting was shorten to one day seating that would feature a royal address, followed by government motions and bills and Dr Mahathir's motion of non-confidence against the prime minister that was promised earlier was postponed again. At that time the Covid cases were hovering about 70 to 80 cases daily.

With Covid situation in the country was under control in mid Jun 2020 and probably inspired by the collapse PH government at the federal level and the ability of the PN government to ward off any motion of non-confidence, a political maneuvering was brewing in Sabah to bring down Warisan led government, an associate party to PH coalition. Unlike the previous political struggle for the control of Putrajaya which only involved the political leaders, the Sabah manoeuvring, somehow it went wrong and had descended to a fresh state-wide election. It was an UMNO stalwart that prodded the Warisan government to fall, however the outcome of the election indicates Bersatu is the real winner by holding the chief minister post and UMNO has to bitterly relent to it. During the camping, mixing people that were just about to appreciate the need for SOP during large gatherings has proven to be a good recipe to germinate another more potent and much bigger wave of Covid infection not only for Sabah but throughout the country which until now we are still experiencing it. Even though, several politicians themselves were down with Covid 19, fixated with the power, there are quarters in UMNO who are still calling for early general election for the whole country and buttress their calls with the threats of withdrawing their support to the present PN government as if this PN government was gyrating between majority and minority every alternate day. An initial attempt by the Prime Minister to stop this political quagmire in his coalition that was seen to compromise the effort of tackling the virus by proposing for an emergency when the cases were touching 1000 cases daily in late October 2020 was rejected by the Council of Rulers.

However, when the cases peaked to more than 2000 cases a day in early January 2021, The King relented to the Prime Minister request and the emergency was declared on 12 January

2021 with both Lower house and State assemblies are suspended, therefore politically there will not be any motion of no confidence against the government and the Prime Minister during this period.

Actually the indirect motion of non-confidence against the prime minister could be put to test when the parliament reconvened 2 November 2020 for budget approval, however the facture opposition did not manage to put up a united front to oppose the budget which indirectly means that the prime minister still enjoyed the support of the majority.

So far I have highlighted the nexus between the disruption caused by Covid virus and the fate of political parties. Certainly this pandemic disruption is an opportunity to certain parties and certainly it is great loss to certain parties and it is delusional to certain parties. Out of 4 elements of consociational politics, only two are applied in Malaysia which are the grand coalition and segmental autonomy and both PH and PN do not disturb the segmental autonomy inherited from BN government. Since the downfall of BN government in the last election, all coalitions either PH or PN recognize on the need to form a grand coalition and what is still uncertain is how important the purely ethnic based political party in the future grand coalition. UMNO has made a firm and resounding decision not to cooperate with Bersatu in the coming election. Even though UMNO and PAS have openly collaborated with each other under Maufakat Nasional, PAS has made the party stand known that they will not leave PN and now the coalition is building their own grand coalition by inviting Gerakan to represent the Chinese community. Surprisingly in April 2021, Mahyuddin Yassin the Chairman of PN and the president of Bersatu was invited to give a speech at MIC 74 Annual General Meeting and he vilely asked MIC to join his grand coalition. Since MCA has almost lost its lustre, in facing the coming 15 general election will UMNO form a new grand coalition with the only alternatives left, DAP and PKR? That is the question that we need to think about

Conclusion and Implications

Ladies and gentleman,

The implementation of consociational politics in Malaysia is only focused on grand coalition and partial segmental autonomy that could provide more room for the politicians or leaders to initiate for more flexible policies especially in bridging the divided communities. The grand coalition is not something casted in stone, whereby the member can leave the coalition and new members can join the coalition. In addition, the country does not practise the element of proportionality, except for the post of the King. The absence a strong ethnicity sentiment has made the implementation of consociational politics here to be more flexible unlike in Lebanon the consociational politics has enhanced the sectarian sentiments since it embraces proportionality and a rigid grand coalition that tied up with the important post appointments. This is further aggravated by the education system that is very much follow the sectarian line that could strengthen the sectarian nature of the society that may in turn be perpetually a divided nation.

That all of what I want to say today and thank you for your attention.

