

A Reception Analysis of a Development-Oriented Television
Programme by a Multi-Ethnic Society

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme study leading to the Award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my thesis

Signed

Journalial

Date _____

9 May 2000

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to find out how a multi-racial society interprets development-oriented television programmes. To ensure that this research is socially meaningful, the interpretation of the development-oriented television programmes was done within the framework of the social and cultural conditions of the Malaysian society where the study took place.

In order to understand this phenomenon better we have looked into the Reception Analysis Theory. This theory seeks to integrate Social Science perspectives and Humanistic perspectives by adopting empirical approach to audience research. The literature also suggested that Reception Analysis is a step closer to a better approach in studying media audiences because its methodology stresses that comparative empirical analysis must be carried out between the media discourses and the audience discourses.

In this study we also wanted to find out to what extent ethnic-income-based factors influence the members' decoding or meaning-making behaviours as they watch a selected development-oriented television programme. Such a relationship is expected to bear a set of meanings that could be interpreted as discursive and social. This is because these meanings are conceived as result of the members' dialogues with the programme text. In this respect, we have applied Parkin's Theory of Meaning Systems that suggests meanings could be categorized as dominant (sharing the dominant ideas), negotiated (partly sharing the dominant ideas) and oppositional (rejecting the dominant ideas). In each case, each meaning is 'read' in relation to the existing social conditions.

The study was conducted in three stages. The *first* stage was an 'exploratory study on the television programme' where we interviewed the television professionals for issues that might be of relevant as input to our structured questionnaire for the focus group sessions. The *second* stage was the 'focus group interviews' relating to the programme that was selected for them to watch. The *final* stage was where we conducted 'personal interviews' with people from the government and other related organizations, including those from the various political parties. The aim was to get their opinions on what they think about the programme and the rightful role of television in developing Malaysia.

From the findings it was found that the different ethnic groups make sense of the television programme content in complex and unexpected ways, thus resulting in the production of varied meanings. This concurred with the general notion of Reception Analysis that mass media audiences make sense of media contents in many different ways. For instance, some of the different ethnic groups were seen to be modifying the 'preferred meaning' of the text, and relocating these meanings for alternative ends.

The study also supported the notion that the interpretative meanings of the development-oriented programme were social and discursive. The socially bounded factors, such as the groups' organizational culture, working responsibility, educational sponsorships, and increased educational level among the less dominant groups were found to have contributed to the shaping of the respective groups' decoding behaviours.

Based on our findings, we are of the opinion that the Reception Analysis theory is a suitable theory in accounting for the different modes of decoding and interpreting media contents. Meaning making is not as simple as it may seem because the process involves not only the psychological aspects of the decoders but the interplay of other factors, such as, their socio-cultural discourses, the power relation experiences, as well as constraints caused by language rules and codes in the text.

The Parkin's theory was also used as our framework to define meanings made by the groups. The theory was primarily used in assigning the groups' decoding position by differentiating the positions into dominant, negotiated or oppositional. Nevertheless, the findings of this study showed that the three decoding positions delimited the probability of having more meanings to the programme content by the different ethnic groups. If not checked, it would naturally defeat the purpose of generating new insights from the study. As such, our study concluded that the original three decoding positions suggested by Parkin were insufficient to account for the complexity in decoding media messages.

At the same time, our study is also about communication development. We approached the subject of development from the communication viewpoint as opposed to the socio-economics approach. Our contention is that a subject like development could also be understood using communication models. In this particular respect, Malaysia's development strategies were being evaluated from the way respondents interpreted the development-oriented television programme called '*Miskin*' produced by TV3, a private television network in Malaysia.

The findings from our data revealed that the ethnic groups were very concerned about the fact that development policies and programmes are politically linked. For instance, the Malays (indigenous people) strongly believed that the government must take them out of poverty by whatever means. The Chinese (immigrant group) in our study were generally critical in their responses over the objectives of development in this country. Although it has been made known that the existing development policy was formulated with the intention of creating a 'balance' in the socio-economic experience, the Chinese in particular, could not get away from the idea that the activities were encroaching into their business territory. That had caused some forms of anxieties among the Chinese and is affecting the relationship between the Chinese and the Malays.

In conclusion, we believe that the theories selected for this study, i.e., to explain the phenomenon of reception of development-oriented television programme '*Miskin*' in the Malaysia society, were well supported. Because reception is associated with meaning-making at the receivers' end, the issue hence, could not be alienated from the socio-psychological and cultural factors that continue to impinge on the conduct of these receivers. Since our research framework has successfully examined this phenomenon, we would like to suggest that similar research duplicating our model to be carried out in other multi-ethnic societies in other parts of the world.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY

1.0 Introduction

The main concern of this study is to find out how a multi-racial society, like Malaysia, interprets development-oriented television programmes. Specifically, we are interested in knowing how the diverse people receive development-oriented messages aired through the television.

While the majority of media reception studies have dealt with television audiences in North European countries and the US, this study attempts to examine the television audiences from the eastern part of the globe, that is, Malaysia. It focuses on reception of a particular development-oriented television programme, entitled, "*Miskin*", meaning, poverty. This programme appeared in one of the episodes of "*Majalah 3*", the longest running public affairs magazine of TV3, a popular private television channel in Malaysia. Four ethnic groups were chosen to be the subjects of our analysis, namely, the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians and the Sarawakians. These groups will be our interpretive communities, whose 'meanings' when produced, are known as the interpretive meanings.

In this study we want to find out to what extent ethnic-income-based factors of our interpretive community influence the members' decoding or meaning-making behaviours as they watch the particular development-oriented television programme selected for this study. Such a relationship is expected to bear a set of meanings that could be interpreted as discursive and social. This is so because these meanings are conceived as a result of the members' dialogues with the programme text. To be socially significant, the application of Parkin's Theory of Meaning Systems (1972) that suggests meanings could be categorised as dominant (sharing the dominant ideas), negotiated (partly sharing the dominant ideas) and oppositional (rejecting the dominant ideas), is useful, in which case, each meaning is 'read' in relation to the existing social conditions.

The social premise of this thesis is that if we have the information of how the different ethnic television audiences in Malaysia use development-oriented television programmes, this information could then be used by television professionals as a guide in designing and strategising more effective programmes in line with the economic development of the country

To ensure that this study is socially meaningful, the interpretation of the development-oriented television programme was done within the framework of the social and cultural conditions of the Malaysian society where the study took place. In other words, the meanings that the groups produced were analysed in the context of a bigger social and cultural conditions of the Malaysian society, which had virtually influence endlessly the lives of these different ethnic groups. This inevitably form the trust of the Reception Analysis theory which stresses that the socio-cultural factors do condition the reception behaviours of the audiences

1.1 Rationale for the study

1.1.1 Why audience reception ?

What is crucial in reception analysis studies, is the audiences' interpretation or decoding of media contents in this case, how the different ethnic groups 'make sense' of the selected programme text. Audience members acquire different experiences in life, and this ultimately helps to build up their different social discourses. Reception studies tradition assumes that meanings vary widely and these variations are determined by none other than the audiences' own social discourses. Although differences in meaning is a normal phenomenon in media reception, but in cases where the texts are known to be highly-loaded with some political ideologies, meanings that vary from the dominant meanings may render a special treatment and attention from any researcher.

'Differences in meaning' in this study and all other reception studies, imply the use of complementarity and non-complementarity of codes in the interpretation work. In Parkin's term, complementarity in codes reflects a dominant meaning and therefore, implies an acceptance of the dominant ideology. On the other hand, non-complementarity reflects either negotiated or oppositional meaning and

hence, indicating a form of resistance towards the dominant ideology. In the Malaysian society, any form of resistance could be regarded, within the dominant message-system, as politically harmful, and practically forming a stumbling block to achieving the goals of the present development policy.

In this study, the media is seen as a means of control by the ruling class. Media is usually owned by members of the dominant class who will use it in their interest. Economic ownership usually determines how messages are to be produced and disseminated to the public. In Malaysia, while economic ownership of the media is directly linked to message production and dissemination behaviour, centralised regulations under the Ministry of Information controls the media and thus, the extent of the media's reproduction work on the dominant ideologies. It is a common practice for Malaysian's private television stations, therefore, to work in consonance with the practice of the government-owned television stations, by supporting the policies of the government. So, any form of resistance in interpreting development-oriented television programme, could be read as 'difficult', because it may also imply a form of resistance to the existing hegemonic ideologies. From the communication point of view, failing to get a favourable support from the audiences is similar to being ineffective, lacking the power in defending and hence, maintaining the existing hegemonic ideologies. As such, media power is indeed a research item in media reception analysis.

The nation's agenda is currently building Malaysia into a fully developed nation by the year 2020. The agenda was a result of the launching of the new development-oriented vision for the country, the **Vision 2020**. The process of nation building in Malaysia is inevitably politicised because the government has to intervene in the way the nation's wealth is to be distributed among the different ethnic groups. Equal distribution of wealth among the different ethnic groups in this country is indeed a national issue.

Apparently, the construction of the present national development policy and its programmes was much influenced by the historical experience the country has gone through, in particular the 1969 riot, which erupted as a result of socio-economic-based inter-ethnic tensions. Specifically, the Malays (the dominant group) were unhappy with their socio-economic status, which was lagging behind those of the other races. That problem is only the tip of the iceberg. After about

twenty seven years (since Independence) of social re-engineering work, the different segments of the society in general are still being identified and known by their personal cultures and work orientations. The Vision 2020 is actually a strategy of the government to deflect the attention of the people from the long standing inter-ethnic conflict, so that they could now focus on the more useful determinants of nation-building, such as, improving one's economic status for a better quality of life.

However, it was noticed that the reactions from the Non-Bumiputra (immigrant) groups towards the social reformation programme, took many different forms. This study hopes to analyse the bases on which these differences were made and consequently measure the strength of each response, favourable or otherwise, using the suggested by Parkin (1972). Knowledge on these should be able to give us directions, including the future for reception analysis studies in Malaysia and in other multi-ethnic countries with similar political structures.

1.1.2 Why Malaysia?

Malaysia was chosen because of the multi-ethnic nature of its society. This study will mark the first of its kind in terms of analysing reception of a locally produced development-oriented television text in a multi-ethnic situation. Beyond the ethnic segmentation, the Malaysian society is also characterised by the dichotomous 'dominant-subordinate' relationship of the population, which breeds a form of power struggle among them, each grasping for a certain kind of identity, socially, economically and politically. A genuine inter-ethnic relationship was never in existence, according to Mahathir (1970), because much of what is happening today, the seemingly inter-ethnic relationship, was built on a political census over a conference table for the sake of getting an independence from the British. Equally significant, is the fact that citizenship for the emigrants was mainly determined by and achieved through a political bargain or a forced compliance rather than a process of acculturation.

The politics of this study deserves a mention too. It has also been our intention to break the monopoly of this field by the western scholars in order to provide an opportunity for the Third world countries to participate in knowledge and theory.

building about media and effects and to eventually benefit from the successes of such studies

1 1 3 Why Reception Analysis theory?

Reception Analysis theory was chosen in this study because we believed that it has the potential of explaining the meaning-making behaviour of our interpretive communities. In addition to that, Reception Analysis also has the capability of generating new insights into television uses and consumption in context of the existing socio-cultural conditions that influence

Because Reception Analysis theory had gone beyond the established notion that television consumption is psychologically-based, as in Uses and Gratifications theory, it is therefore regarded as a better alternative methodologically as far as reception behaviours are concerned. Its social characteristics would have a far greater potential in explaining the varied behaviours of the multi-ethnically layered society as they relate themselves to a certain media content. This theory engages both, the discursive nature of television viewing, which is determined mainly by the discursive character of the texts, as well as the social nature of the decoders' discourses. It ensures that the interaction is social. Previous research also suggested that Reception Analysis should be able to offer a far more satisfying research results.

1 2 Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to analyse the reception of the different ethnic groups, namely the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians, and the Sarawak indigenous people, towards a particular development-oriented television programme. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- i) to examine the *range of meanings* produced by the respondents (the different ethnic groups) and what *causes* them to vary,
- ii) to construct a *decoding pattern* out of those meanings,

- iii) to find out what is the nature or description of 'fit' between the income-level-based codes and the ethnic-based codes in influencing meaning production of the respondents
- iv) to identify the point of 'contact' between the respondents and the particular television programme text, in terms of the most common and salient *issue* that might emerged from the interactions,
- v) to find out what are the *attitudes* of the respondents towards this particular issue (as iv above) and consequently to *plot* a pattern of their responses,
- vi) to identify the strategies or interpretative *codes* used by those groups that produce the 'anti-dominant' meanings,
- vii) to examine the *relationships* between the pro and anti dominant decoding of the respondents and the relevant 'challenge of the Vision 2020'

1.3 Organisation of thesis

The structure of this thesis is presented schematically in **Figure 1**

Chapter One sets the background to the present research, including the focus, rationales and objectives of the study

Chapter Two describes Malaysia as the setting for the study, relating to its historical-political development and the multi-ethnic and cultural perspectives of its population. It also provides a background to the television broadcasting systems in Malaysia, describing the various television channels and the regulating body that takes charge of monitoring and regulating the broadcasting media. A brief account of the national development policies and the Vision 2020 is also presented.

Chapter Three focuses on the reviews of the related literature, basically the works of various reception studies reported in academic and research journals from all over the world. This chapter also acknowledges critiques made on reception works in the past.

Chapter Four offers the theoretical aspect that will guide this study and subsequently, the way the data are to be analysed. It touches on the different theories that underpin the present study. Concluding the chapter is the research framework, which is also meant to guide the empirical investigation.

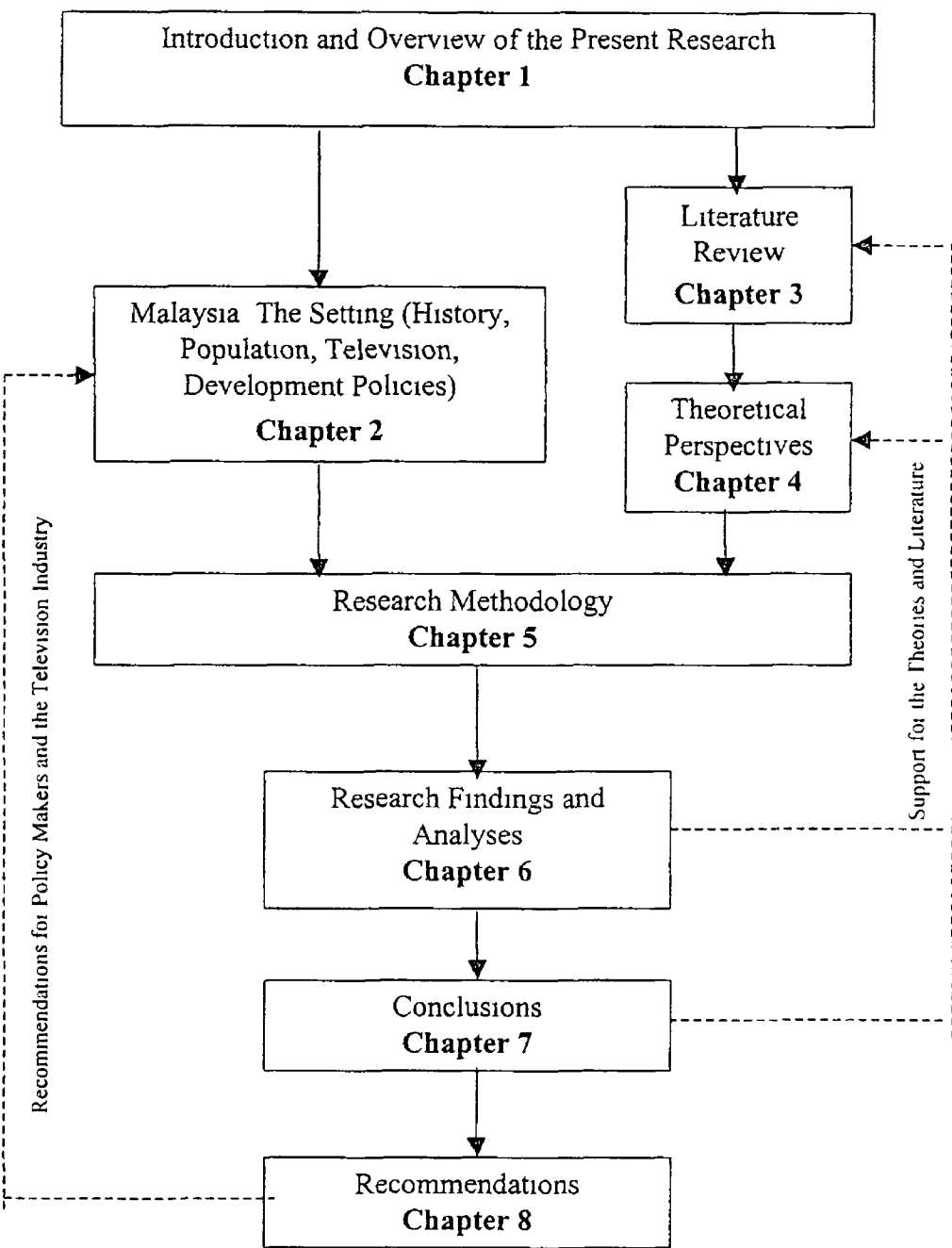
Chapter Five specifically discusses the methodology of this study, highlighting the important methodological considerations and the research design.

Chapter Six presents the analytical work in an attempt to 'read' the data. It describes the cases through the different levels of analysis. The first three levels focus on the 'micro' analysis, while the last one focuses on the 'macro' analysis. The 'micro' elaborates the intimate relationships between the respondents and the programme texts, while the 'macro' examines the respondents' decoding in relation to the most relevant development challenge of the Vision 2020.

Chapter Seven discusses the conclusions of this study. The aim is to answer the objectives set for this study.

Finally, **Chapter Eight** discusses some of the issues that have emerged from the study and also suggesting recommendations both at the theoretical and methodological levels of the study. This chapter also describes the need to continue the reception analysis traditions in order to strengthen the establishment of the theory. Finally, it also highlights the possibility of replicating the same theoretical framework that has been developed for this study into other reception research, possibly in a multi-ethnic society or other societies having a similar background as Malaysia.

Figure 1 Organisation of the Thesis



CHAPTER TWO

MALAYSIA-THE SETTING

2 0 Introduction

This chapter intends to provide a background information on Malaysia, the country where the study took place. Its multi-ethnic community, in one way or another, influenced as well as constrained our work. Without a firm understanding of the study community, readers would be at a disadvantage in judging the meaning of what has been done and of what has been found out of this study.

The **first section** describes the historical, multi-ethnic and cultural perspectives of Malaysia. One of the main determinants of the present Malaysia social system is the British Colonial Policy which allowed emigrants to settle in this country. This has been a common practice of the Western colonial powers in governing their colonial territories all over the world. In our case, such a policy and practice had resulted in the birth of a multi-races society. The **second section** will look into the political set up as well as the structure of the Malaysian media systems. The relationships between the government and the media will also be discussed because the government had loudly expressed its needs in taking on the responsibility of ensuring that the media practices are in line with the nation's socio-economic policy as well as the other national policies and interests. The **third section** will examine the most important variable of the study, that is, development policies adopted by Malaysia since the independence.

2 1 Malaysia historical, multi-ethnic, and cultural perspectives

2 1 1 Historical development

The historical development of the inhabitants of Malaysia began around the first century BC with the establishment of regular trading contacts with the world beyond Southeast Asia, specifically China and the continent of India. Although Chinese contacts started much earlier than those of the Indians, it was the Hindu

and Buddhist elements of the Indian culture which made the major impact on the region. Over a period of a thousand years these influences gradually made themselves felt, and have left their mark in language, literature and social customs of the Malaysian society.

1) Islamic influences

The Hindu-Buddhist period of Malaysian history started to come to an end with the penetration of Islam into the area, brought primarily by Indian and Arab traders. There was an evidence of the presence of the new religion Islam in the region as early as the thirteenth century. After 1400 Islam became a major influence especially with the conversion of the Malay-Hindu rulers of Melaka. Since then, Islam was established as the religion of the Malays, profoundly affecting that society and its way of life.

11) British penetration

The British began to make inroads into what is now Peninsular Malaysia in 1786 when the East India Company occupied the island of Penang. The company expanded its influence to Singapore in 1819 and to Melaka in 1824. In 1867 the three territories were transferred to the British Colonial Office to constitute the crown colony of the Straits Settlements. Seven years later, in 1874, the British took the first steps towards bringing the Peninsular States under their direct supervision when they imposed the Pangkor Treaty on the local Malay rulers.

Meanwhile in the island of Borneo, Sarawak's colonial history began with the English adventurer, James Brooke. In return for his intercession in a rebellion against the Sultan of Brunei, he was ceded part of west Sarawak and installed as 'Raja' of Sarawak in 1841. In the case of Sabah, colonial rule began with the formation of the British North Borneo Company in 1881. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, British interest in Malaysia surged. Taking different forms in different sections of Malaysia, British penetration between 1867 and 1942 evolved into essentially five administrative patterns as follows.

- a) **The Straits Settlements** British crown colony, headed by a British Governor and based in Singapore, consisting of Singapore, Melaka, Penang Island, Labuan, the Cocos Isles and Christmas Isle
- b) **The Federated Malay States** British protectorate, headed by a British High Commissioner and based in Kuala Lumpur, consisting of Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak and Selangor
- c) **The Unfederated Malay States** British protectorate under the tutelage of a British Advisor in each state (responsible to the British High Commissioner) and based in Kuala Lumpur, consisting of Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Trengganu
- d) **Sarawak** British protectorate, ruled by the Brooke family based in Kuching
- e) **Sabah** British protectorate, ruled by the Chartered Company of British North Borneo based in Kota Kinabalu (formerly Jesselton) (Information Malaysia Yearbook, 1992/3)

iii) World War II

In December 1941, Japanese troops landed on the Northeast of Peninsular Malaysia near Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Unprepared Malay, Chinese, Indian, British and Australian defenders were unable to stem the rapid Japanese advances. The British retreated to Singapore, where they surrendered on February 15, 1942. Meanwhile the Japanese had captured the whole of Northern Borneo by January 1942. In 70 days, all of the present-day Malaysia fell to the Japanese, who remained in control for two and a half years.

Although all Malaysian ethnic groups suffered severe hardships during the Japanese occupation, no one group suffered more extensively from the systematic

Japanese control than the Chinese. In consequence, a part of the Chinese community organised an effective resistance movement. Many of the Chinese fighters were communists and they were under the leadership of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). After the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, a chaotic month-long interregnum ensued before the return of the British and the Australian troops in September 1945. Britain reclaimed a Malaysia different from the one it had been forced to leave at gun point. The British role in each part of present-day Malaysia had been that of a protector. Britain's defeat in Malaysia this time damaged pre-war prestige. The war's end found Malaysian racial tensions at an all-time high.

iv) Post-war reorganisation

From September 1945 until mid-1946, a British military administration governed Malaysia. During this tumultuous period, the British government worked out proposals for a reorganised governance in Malaysia. The solutions for Sabah and Sarawak were the easiest and first to be executed. In July 1946, Sabah moved directly from the British military administration to the status of a British crown colony. At the same time, the third Raja of the Brooke family decided to cede Sarawak to the British crown too.

Britain's *Malayan Union* plan for Peninsular Malaysia required the Malay sultans to transfer sovereignty to the British crown. The proposal provoked several local Malay associations to form in 1946 the *United Malay Nationalist Organisation* (UMNO) to defend the sovereignty of the sultans and to condemn the Malayan Union plan. When UMNO persisted in vigorous opposition, the British Labour government finally agreed to negotiate a more acceptable constitution. After discussions, a new plan for a Federation of Malaya emerged, which returned state sovereignty to the sultans. It provided for a strong central government headed by a crown-appointed High Commissioner. A Council of Rulers (the sultans) was established, with whom the High Commissioner was required to consult on policy questions. Special provisions were included to protect the 'special position of the Malays', and citizenship provisions given to the emigrants were restricted in concession to Malay fears of Chinese dominance. The federation of Malaya was inaugurated on February 1, 1948.

Just months after the new peninsular government was formed, it was forced to deal with an armed Communist bid for power. The MCP sought to lead a popular revolt in favour of a Communist People's Republic of Malaya. The revolt failed, but it cost Malaya thousands of lives and millions of dollars. The federation government's declaration of a 'State of Emergency' in June 1948 was extended to 12 years, until its ceremonial termination on 31 July 1960.

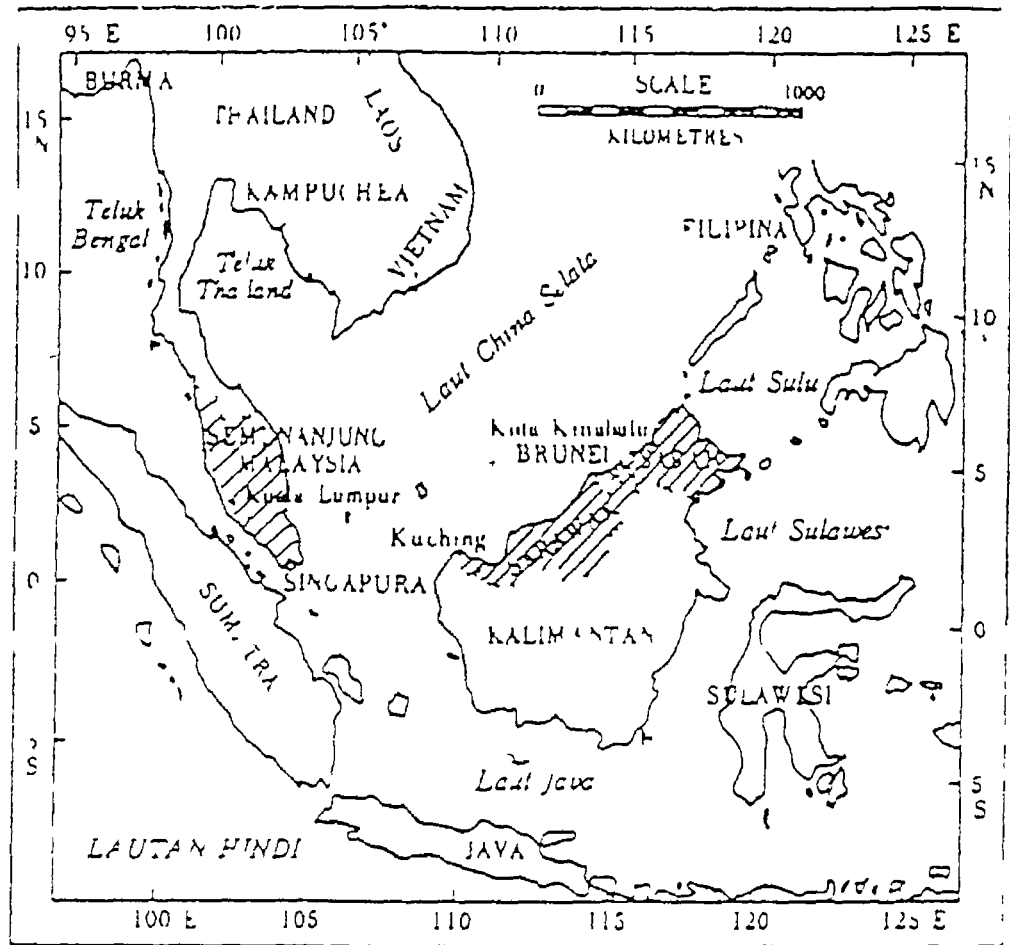
v) Independence

With the easing of guerrilla-war tensions, the peninsula's federation government moved toward independence. In Malaya's first local election, UMNO formed an Alliance Party with the new Malayan Chinese Association (MCA). Under the leadership of the late Tunku (prince) Abdul Rahman, the Alliance proved a winning combination, and it emerged from the first series of state elections in 1954 as the federation's most effective political organisation. Malaya's first general elections were scheduled for July 1955. The Alliance, now further strengthened by the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), campaigned on a program of *Merdeka* (freedom) and won 51 out of 52 seats contested. The Alliance then pressed the British for a stepped-up schedule for full independence by 1957. On 31 August 1957, Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman declared the Federation of Malaya, independent.

vi) The creation of Malaysia

The independent Federation of Malaya lasted six years. It then became the framework for a larger federation of Malaysia incorporating Singapore and the Borneo states of Sarawak and Sabah. Britain, Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah agreed to inaugurate the new 14-state federation on 31 August 1963. Hostility to the Malaysia plan by Indonesia and the Philippines forced delay of the schedule until 16 September 1963. On that day the Federation of Malaysia was proclaimed a sovereign and independent country within the Commonwealth of Nations. On 9th August 1965, severe internal conflict resulted in Singapore's separation from the Malaysian federation. The island became an independent republic, and Malaysia became a 13-state federation. **Figure 2(a)** indicates the position of Malaysia in South East Asia.

Figure 2 (a) Map of Malaysia in South East Asia



2 1 2 Population components

The population of Malaysia is about 22.5 million people (est. 1998). The multi-ethnic character of Malaysia's population has come into being over the last hundred and fifty years, the beginning of which was marked mainly by the migration of Chinese from South China and Indians from South India during the British rule in the Peninsular Malaya. Diversity is Malaysia's dominant population feature. With that, Malaysia's population can be classified into four main communal categories: **Malays, Chinese, Indians and Indigenous people**. These four groups could be further sub-divided into a more complex categories by their religious differences, linguistic divisions, social affinities, political allegiances and economic specialisation which roughly coincide with the ethnic components.

Another way of classifying the population is by dividing them into two groups, those with cultural affinities indigenous to the region and to one another, who are called **Bumiputra**, which literally means 'Son of the Soil', and those whose cultural affinities lie outside of the region, called **Non-Bumiputra**. By this classification, the Malays and the Indigenous peoples are considered to be Bumiputra, while the emigrant groups of the Chinese, Indians and others are known as the Non-Bumiputra.

1) The Malays

The Malays make up about 49% of the Malaysia's population and form the largest (Bumiputra) ethnic group (59%) in the country (Encyclopaedia Americana, 1990). The Malay stock are the brown-skinned descendants of migrants from the interior of Asia before the Christian era. Later migrations of this Malay stock from Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and other Indonesia islands before the Independence, were also absorbed.

Before modernisation, most of the Malays were concentrated in the rural areas with agriculture as their main vocation. Being Muslims, their focal points were mainly the mosques. As their economic standards were being lifted, many of the Malays of today have started to migrate to urban areas to participate in the economic development projects carried out by the government or to hold some general or professional posts in the public and private sectors. Indeed, Malay

modernisation owes much to the colonial bureaucracy as a prime carrier of modernity, where members of the Malay elite were given the training to become successful Malay leaders. Nevertheless, it is without question that English education has provided a route to prestige and employment to members of all of the ethnic groups (Lee, 1992)

11) The Chinese

The Chinese comprise about 32% of the Malaysian population, and almost all are Malaysian born. Most of the Chinese are found in the tin and rubber belt on the West coast of the Peninsula, and are markedly urban. The Chinese in Sabah and Sarawak are also coastal and urban (Encyclopaedia Americana, 1990). By virtue of their important roles in trade, business and finance, they started to monopolise the business sectors and later on this led to the possession of a considerable amount of economic power, enough to cause alarm among the other ethnic groups especially the dominant Malays.

Although they have been settled in Malaysia for a few hundred years, customarily the Chinese are still very much of their own, speaking the various Chinese dialects like *Cantonese*, *Hakka*, *Hokkien*, and *Toecheu*. Those educated in Chinese could also speak *Mandarin*. The Chinese use the Malay language only when communicating with the Malays and the other ethnic groups. The same is true of their relationship with Indians. The Malay language has longed been regarded as the 'lingua franca' in the Malay Archipelago since history started. With the introduction of the National Education System which uses Bahasa Malaysia (the official language with Malay language base) as the primary language of instruction in schools, the younger Chinese have excelled themselves in the usage of Bahasa Malaysia.

However, middle-aged Chinese, especially those who have had English education, or been involved in business or holding professional posts, use more of English than Bahasa Malaysia. It is also important to mention here that, across ethnic and cultural divisions, the educated middle-aged group which represents the middle-class stratum in the social structure, uses more of English than Bahasa because of the association of the language to modernity, an ideology transferred by the West to the local people.

In religion, the Chinese are chiefly Confucian, but there are Buddhists, Taoists, Christians, and Muslims as well. Most Malaysian Chinese fall into the Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, or Teochew groups. Today, the youngsters especially are slowly detaching themselves from the practices of the old customs inherited from the motherland China, and adhering to a new emergent culture of the New Malaysians (which will be examined under the topic Culture, in this chapter)

iii) The Indians

The Indians, tracing their origins to the Indian subcontinent in India, compose about 8% of the Malaysian population. Together with the Chinese, they migrated to Malaysia in the 19th century to participate in the economic expansion programme of the British Colonial Government in Peninsular Malaya. Nearly all of them concentrated in the rubber-planted western coasts of the Peninsular to work as agricultural labourers. Today, those who have had good academic qualifications are holding some of the important professional posts as doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. though many are still associating themselves with the lower class jobs or working in the agricultural estates.

Over 75% of the Malaysian Indians are Hindu and most of the remainder are Muslims. The majority of the Indian migrants are Tamils and therefore they speak the Tamil language, while the rest, speak either Telugu, Malayalam, Punjabi, Bengali or Sindhi. Indian linguistic groups differ in custom with place of origin in India, and to a marked extent, with place of residence and occupation in Malaysia. Those with origins in the Northern part of the Indian subcontinent tend to be urban residents, merchants, and professionals, while members of the larger southern Indian group (80%) tend to be manual labourers.

iv) The Indigenous people

Malaysia's indigenous people make up 11% of the total population of Malaysia. They are distributed widely in the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak. The Semang, Senoi and the Jakuns are a minority of less than 1%. The Semang group are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of the mainland. Those living in the Peninsula speak languages related to Malay. A good proportion has either converted to Islam or Christianity, while the rest still believes in animism.

In the land of Borneo, the Malaysia's indigenous groups are represented by the Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, Murut (found mainly in Sarawak), Kadazan, and Bajau (found mainly in Sabah). In Sarawak, the indigenous group represents 49% of the total population, while the rest is a mixture of Malays and Chinese. In Sabah, the indigenous group takes a majority of 83%, and the rest consists of Malays and Chinese mainly.

Religion wise, most of them are still practising animism although some have taken Islam or Christianity as their new religion. By virtue of being British protectorates before joining the Peninsula to become the Federation of Malaysia, the indigenous people and the rest of the population were exposed to an English system of education. The educated ones speak English as an addition to the mother language. With the introduction of the National Education System into Sarawak and Sabah, the present generation who are at schools and the institutes of higher learning, are now able to use Bahasa Malaysia in addition to the other languages that they have acquired in the past.

2.2 Malaysian societal system: political and media structures

2.2.1 Political system

1) Political Structure

Malaysia's political system is based upon an adaption of the British model of parliamentary democracy. There is the Senate (*Dewan Negara*) comprising of 58 members and the Lower House also known as the House of Representatives (*Dewan Rakyat*). Elections to the Lower House are held every five years on the basis of universal adult suffrage, each constituency returning one member. The Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister are of members of the legislature and is collectively responsible to Parliament. As a constitutional monarchy, Malaysia is headed by a Paramount Ruler (the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*), who is elected for a five-year term by the heads of the 13 states from among the nine hereditary royal rulers.

Since the formation of Malaysia, ten general elections have taken place (the most recent being in November, 1999). The ruling coalition of political parties,

formerly the Alliance, but expanded in 1971 to become the National Front (Barisan Nasional), has easily retained its majority in parliament. As of 1990, the National Front consisted of 13 political parties, while the opposition parties totalled 24.

The broad aim of the government in the early 70s was the fulfilment of the New Economic Policy which was designed to **eradicate poverty regardless of race, and to eliminate the identification of occupation with race**. Economic prosperity since the 70s enabled the administration of Tun Abdul Razak, who succeeded Tunku Abdul Rahman as premier in 1970, and Tun Hussein Onn who took over on the death of Tun Razak in 1976, to make considerable progress towards these ends. During that period, Malaysia established a more independent foreign policy, helping found the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), recognising Communist China in 1974, and became a member of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The present Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad took over in 1981 and was faced with new political directions and economic challenges. His administration saw the search for new sources of support and development like the Look East Policy, the initiation of a bold policy of heavy industrialisation (the national car project, the steel industry and oil refineries) and an aggressive foreign policy asserting the interests of the underdeveloped South versus those of the developed nations of the North. On 28 February 1991, Prime Minister Mahathir announced Malaysia's strategic plan to become a fully developed nation by the year 2020. Calling it the **Vision 2020**, he said, it requires concerted development in all areas economic, social, political, spiritual, psychological and cultural. This new development, encompassing both its people and the environment, certainly needs to focus strongly in science and technology (Information Malaysia Yearbook, 1992/3).

ii) The 'special position' of the Malays under the Constitution

The Malay race earned a significant mention in the Constitution. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong is empowered to safeguard the special position of the Malays and, since the Malaysia Day (1963), of the natives of Borneo. The following clause is important to the Non-Malays when it states that 'equal responsibility

rests on the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to safeguard the legitimate rights of other communities'

Protective provisions were written into the Malaysian Constitution not with the intention of cutting or pulling back the advancements of the non-indigenous people, notably the Chinese who have been far ahead of the Malay and the Indian ethnic groups in business and the economy, but with the intention of 'securing the advancement of the indigenous people who, through no fault of their own, were and are educationally, socially, and economically less advanced' (Information Malaysia Yearbook, 1992/3). However, it is important to point out that the leaders of the non-indigenous people (Chinese and Indians) consented to these provisions in return for generous citizenship terms. A large number of these emigrants refused to return to their land of origins, and instead, opted to become citizens by a stroke of the pen.

These 'special privileges' also include the reservation of quotas for Malays and Bor-nean natives in the public services and in institutions of higher learning, along with quotas for occupational positions and licences in commerce-without, however, affecting the rights of others already holding these positions or licences. Land reservations, special development projects and financial concessions, form the other aspects of this policy (Information Malaysia Yearbook, 1992/3). It is important to note here that the above items contained in the Constitution have a considerable relevance to this study because they have direct effects on the planning as well as the implementation of development programmes in Malaysia, and indirect effects on inter-ethnic relations. These provisions were clearly spelled in the New Economic Plan (NEP) that lapsed after 1990, but then were replaced immediately by the National Development Plan (NDP).

iii) Bumiputraisim

The introduction of the New Economic Plan (NEP) aimed at correcting the imbalance in the distribution of wealth among the various ethnic groups in the country, required the government, for convenience in identification, to classify the population into two main categories: a) the Bumiputra, and b) the NonBumiputra. Since then, the term has been used particularly for the purpose of development in the social, economic and political areas. The notion of "Bumiputraisim" is linked

to the process of development and as such, influences the interrelations among the various ethnic groups

a) Bumiputra groups

Literary, Bumiputra means ‘the son of the soil’, and refers to the ethnic groups that have their origins in the surrounding region historically called, the Malay Archipelago. This ethnic stock basically speaks various versions of the Malay language and shares a similar culture. The Bumiputra group is differentiated into three broad categories, the aborigines (*orang asli*), the Malays, and Malay-related. The *orang asli* represents the oldest group, mainly found in the Peninsula. Today, the Malays are all Muslims, while the other two bumiputra groups are believing in many different religions including Islam, Christianity, and Paganism.

b) Non-Bumiputra Group

The Non-Bumiputra group refers to the immigrants who mostly gained their citizenship at the time of Independence. These groups consist primarily of the Chinese and the Indians, with smaller communities made up of Arabs, Eurasians and Europeans. Immigration into the Peninsula and Borneo remained unrestricted until 1931 when the impact of the Great Depression forced the imposition of control. This rapidly reduced the immigration but resulted in expanding local-born Chinese and Indians communities. The status of these Chinese and Indians together with the other minorities of the non-Bumiputra group, was legitimised with Independence.

iv) Malay hegemony in Malaysia’s system of governance

The presence of ‘Malay Hegemony’ in the Malaysian system of governance was felt as early as the beginning of the 16th century when Melaka was seized by the Portuguese. This marked the downfall of, not only the glorious Melaka Sultanates but Malay hegemony too because Malay sultanate is the original symbol of the Malay power. Apparently, the seizure of Melaka as a strategic port on the spice

trade route, brought the Malay world into direct contact with the West. The Portuguese rule over Melaka lasted for about 130 years until the time when they were ousted by the Dutch in 1641. Melaka once again fell into a foreign rule when the state was superseded by the British in 1795.

The period of British colonialism in Southeast Asia, particularly the “British Forward Movement” in the mid 19th century is crucial in the history of Malay hegemony and Malay sovereignty. The European hegemony in the Malay Peninsula during those years failed to eradicate the power of the local rulers, who remained submissive to the power of the colonial sovereignty. The local rulers, through treaties and negotiations had to give commercial rights to the British. This gave birth to the plural Malaysian society. The consequences of that event are still running high even among the people of today as entrenched ethnic divisions affect all aspects of Malaysian life (Lee, 1992).

During the process of the political integration of the Malay states, the local rulers were consulted and negotiated. This took place in the First Conference of Rulers in 1897. Over the years, this event led to the formation of the Federated Malay States in 1948- a consolidated effort of the British to exercise its political and economic power.

As the supremacy of the British colonial government increases in the 1920s and 1930s, and as the power of the Malay rulers grew weaker, Malay Nationalism crept into the Malay population. The outburst of the nationalist movement was the fight against the formation of the Malayan Union, a new policy of the British colonial government to consolidate power over the Malay states after recovery from its downfall in Singapore due to the Japanese conquest and occupation in the Malay peninsula. The formation of the Federated Malay States was indeed a replacement of the Malay Union and this event eventually lifted the position of the Malay Rulers to its original status. More importantly it laid the foundation for a new dominant Malay political power.

The Federation was based upon negotiations between the UMNO, the Malay Rulers, representatives from the other ethnic groups and the British government. One of the outcomes was the formulation of the **Malaysian Constitution**. Under **Article 153** of the Constitution, the Conference of Rulers carries the

responsibility to protect the special rights of the Bumiputra and the general rights of all Malaysians. In light of the new Federated Malay States, the monarchy was established as a symbol of Malay hegemony (Information Malaysia Yearbook, 1992/3)

While UMNO became the main structure of the Malay political system, the Rulers were given the responsibility over matters relating to their positions, Malay identity and rights, special privileges, and the safeguarding of Islam as the religion of the Malays. Upon Independence, it was inevitable that UMNO took the lead in giving justice to the non-Malay ethnic groups and invited them to participate in the formation of the new government. The non-Malay participation was led by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). In return for the non-Malay co-operative attitude, citizenship rights were given.

On the verge of Independence, Malay hegemony became more apparent when the Malayan Administrative Service (MAS), the junior arm of the white-dominant Malayan Civil Service (MCS), turned the Malay elite to be *pseudo-white bureaucrats* (Khasnor, 1984). They were the 'mover' in the nationalist movement that helped to elevate the power of the Malays and later replace the colonial government. The equivalent of MCS today is the Public Service Department (PSD) which is manned mostly by the Malays who handle the recruitment of staff in the public sector.

2.2.2 Television broadcasting in Malaysia

Malaysia's media system is a mixture of government-sponsored and private enterprise structure. This is particularly true in the world of broadcasting whereas the press in Malaysia is mainly handled by private enterprises, though actively regulated. In broadcasting, there are four television networks currently in operation: TV1, TV2, TV3 and Metro Vision. The first two (TV1 and TV2) are the networks of Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM), which is the government's broadcasting institution that operates under the supervision of the Department of Broadcasting of the Ministry of Information. RTM also operates radio services nation-wide. TV3 is a private television channel operated by a company known

as Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad Metro Vision is also a private television station operated by City Television, which began broadcasting in July 1995

Malaysia had its first experience of the 'open sky' television when a satellite known as the Malaysian and East Asian Satellite 1 (MEASAT 1) was launched in early 1996 With the launching of MEASAT 11 last November, Malaysia now has an extra television network ASTRO with an unlimited excess to world of information, making Malaysia now as an encoder rather than a decoder of the world news However, to regulate the television stations in the country, the Ministry has to intervene by exercising a special censorship programme, whereby only certain programmes which the government believes carry no harm to the society are allowed to pass through the Malaysian television sets These include programmes that do not violate Islamic values, affect the sensitivity of the different races, and devalue the local culture and traditions

All government mass media are operated and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Information through its three departments, namely, the Department of Broadcasting, the Department of Information, and Filem Negara Malaysia (Malaysia National Film) The Ministry also covers a wide area of media related subjects such as the monitoring of broadcasting stations, issuing and inspecting radio and television licenses, and regulation of commercial broadcasting These related areas are operated and co-ordinated through the Ministry's Divisions

With regards to 'government' and 'television' relationships in Malaysia, Karthigesu (1988) claims that televisions in Malaysia has served and propagated mainly the policies of the ruling government, never allowing any other views to be expressed in its broadcasts This critique centres on how the population is deprived of the freedom of information which is often championed by the western media

The history of the Barisan Nasional very much determined the responsibility of the media in Malaysia As an after-effect of the 1969 racial disturbances, at which the government felt a loss of confidence and authority, the government moved to tighten all controls on national affairs in the broadcast media (Karthigesu, 1988)

The objective of these controls was two pronged *first, to explain in depth and in the widest possible coverage, the policies and programmes of the government, in order to ensure maximum understanding by the public, and secondly, to stimulate public interests and opinions in order to achieve changes in line with the requirement of the government* With that, opposition political parties therefore, would never be able to gain access to TV Malaysia However, during the period prior to a general election, the government does allow a limited time to the opposition for party broadcasts

Currently, there are two non-government operated channels, TV3 and Metro Vision They are run by private enterprises but ownership is widely known to be linked to UMNO Such a government stronghold in television invites criticisms about the way in which television is serving the interests of the general public But the government thinks that it is crucial for the broadcast media in this country to go and conform to national policies and interests for the sake development

2 3 Development policies politics of nation-building

2 3 1 Historical perspective

Malaya (as it was then called) gained her independence from the British government on the 31 August 1957 The formation of Malaysia on the 16 September, 1963, came about with the inclusion of the two states of Sabah and Sarawak, both from the island of Borneo Like so many new nations, Malaysia aspires to be a united and peaceful country under a democratic system Twelve years later, on the 13 May, 1969, the country was caught in a frenzy of racial riots that rocked the foundations of its multi-racial and multi-religious population The fragile harmony of its different races and their multi-ethnic cultures, which had been instrumental in securing independence from the British, cracked under the pressure of rising ethnic tensions (Oo Yu Hock, 1991)

Malaysian displays a pot-pouri of cultural diversity which, in itself, is a microcosm of Malay Archipelago people, Asian, and European linkages Generally, these groups have remained characteristically distinct, in terms of their original heritage Despite efforts at national integration through government policies, Malaysians have remained Malays, Chinese, Indians, Eurasians,

Sarawakians and Sabahans All of them have continued to practice their respective religions quite liberally, although Islam is the official religion of the country

This study is based on the premise that ‘while Malaysians are now capable of living together harmoniously, their reactions to national unity seem to be as diverse as their racial and ethnic identities’ But since the country is now enjoying tremendous economic progress, there is an urgent need for an understanding of the populations’ orientation toward nation-building This study hopes to contribute to this irony Mahathir (1970) has argued that there was never a true racial harmony in Malaysia While there was a lack of interracial strife and only a certain amount of tolerance and accommodation, there was no harmony What was taken for harmony was an absence of open interracial strife Racial harmony was therefore, neither real nor deep-rooted

Malays and the Chinese may live as neighbours, meeting each other in their daily businesses and even socially But when they retire, they retire into their respective ethnic and cultural sanctum, neither of which has been truly breached by each other In order to understand the causes of racial tension, it is necessary to trace the relationship between the Malays and the non-Malays through history For discussion purposes, we can distinguish *four eras* that may be identified as watersheds in the history of Malaysia the period during the colonial times, the period from Malayan Union (1946) until independence in 1957, the period from independence until the 13 May racial riots in 1969, and the period of the New Economic Policy from the 13 May until 1990

1) The first era (during the Colonial rule)

The arrival of the Europeans greatly increased the influx of the non-Malays, especially the Chinese and Indians, into Malaya The impermanent character of their stay in Malaya, made them ‘people apart’, never really coming in contact with the locals This lack of contact indeed minimised conflict, although towards the later part of the British rule the Malays became more and more conscious of the danger the Chinese and Indians posed to their political power in the country A majority of the Malays lived in the country side and hardly meet any Chinese or Indians from the towns There were no racial clashes, but Mahathir (1970)

argued, it is wrong to infer that there was racial harmony or even tolerance. He commented that if there was no conflict, it was because there was no occasion for confrontation.

During a brief Japanese occupation in the Second World War, the Japanese served to separate the Malays from the Chinese even more. Most of the Malays at that time were not anti-Japanese, and some were even known to have assisted the Japanese. The Chinese were naturally discriminated against by the Japanese, while the Indians identified themselves with the struggle to liberate India. When the British returned after the war, they were confronted by the communists (mostly Chinese) who tried to set up a Government for each of the Malay states. There were clashes between the Malays and the Chinese and it would have developed into racial war, but, the arrival of the British under their new administration known as the British Military Administration (BMA), with the full backing of the British Armed Forces, saved it all. The communists were not successful in their attempt to gain powers and the Malays were looking forward towards a new relationship with the British. In 1946, a year after the world war, the Malays were soon disillusioned when the British proposed to give the Chinese and Indians equal rights in a new Malayan Union. Once again the Sino-Malay antagonism was heightened, but this time it was rationalised and sustained by the conscious support of the Malay masses. Since that time, Sino-Malay attitudes became national politics.

ii) The second era (the Malayan Union till Independence in 1957)

As mentioned earlier, the proposal for a new Malayan Union by the British did not go through. However, the effects on the Malay and non-Malay relationships began to widen more. One significant event happening at that time was the setting up of a new national party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) by the Malays, led by Dato Onn Jaafar. Malay antagonism towards the non-Malays increased. Dato Onn tried to calm down the Malays but he was finally forced out of the party by the people because he proposed to corporate with the non-Malays. A young Malay prince, Tunku Abdul Rahman from the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia replaced him. Under Tunku, UMNO experimented with Sino-Malay co-operation in the Kuala Lumpur Municipality elections of 1952. The result was sufficiently encouraging to make the Malays forget some of

their misgivings. The experiment was again tried on a larger scale in the 1955 general elections, and the success of this resulted in the British agreeing to grant independence to Malaya in 1957.

iii) The third era (from Independence until the racial riot of 1969)

After gaining Independence, the atmosphere was full of hope for everybody. The government of the newly independent Malaya (at that time) had the backing of the great majority of the population. The Alliance Party comprising of the three major racial partners were aware of the historical conflict and were careful not to cause any racial conflict. But power corrupts, and the near-absolute power that the Alliance obtained corrupted the thinking of the leaders almost absolutely (Mahathir, 1970). Mahathir argued that UMNO, the mainstay of the Alliance, held more power and therefore, had to accept the major share of responsibility for the decay which gradually affected the Alliance government almost as soon as Independence was achieved. By the time the 1969 elections came up, all sections of the community were disenchanted with the Government. The Malays were not happy because to them the Government continually favoured the Chinese for helping the country gain independence and had failed to correct the real imbalance in the wealth and progress of the races. At the same time, the Chinese were demanding more from the Government. Over and above these racial reactions indicated the sharply declining faith in the ability of the Alliance government to rule the country.

The Election results of 1969 were a shock to the Alliance Party and the Government. The stage was so set for an inter-ethnic conflict. The catalyst came in the form of a mammoth victory procession to celebrate the gains of the Chinese-based opposition party. The rally triggered off violent rioting in the Federal Capital, Kuala Lumpur. Other incidents of lesser magnitude were also recorded in Penang. The frenzied blood bath that ensued, and the state of emergency that was declared, had made the 13th of May 1969, the darkest day in the history of Malaysia.

The nation was in a state of profound shock. Parliamentary democracy was suspended as the leadership searched for a quick end to the national tragedy. The National Operation Council (NOC) was established as a caretaker for the

government to restore the country to normalcy. The Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak resigned and was succeeded by his deputy, Abdul Razak, who became the country's second Prime Minister in September 1970.

- iv) The fourth era (the period of the New Economic Policy from 1970 to 1990)

The leadership of Abdul Razak ushered in a new era marked by the promulgation and implementation of a national development policy known as the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was introduced, following the restoration of parliamentary democracy on 23 February 1971. The NEP had a two-pronged objective of eradicating poverty and restructuring society. Underlying these objectives, of course, was the ultimate aim of fostering national unity among the diverse races in the country.

The NEP covers the duration of the Second (1971-1975), Third (1976-1980), Fourth (1981-1985), and Fifth (1986-1990) Malaysia Plans. The late Abdul Razak and his deputy premier set about the tasks of achieving the policy goals and targets in various development programmes that were designed especially to eradicate poverty and reduce disparities in income and capital ownership. More discussion on the NEP will be presented in the next section together with a description of the National Development Policy (NDP), a new economic policy succeeding the NEP.

2.3.2 National development policies

The Malaysian government initiated two long-term policies immediately after the racial riot of 1969 for reasons described earlier on. The first long-term policy is known as The First Outline Perspective (OPP1). It was introduced in 1971 and sets sectoral growth targets for two decades (1971 - 1990). Under the OPP1, there were four short-term plans known as the Five-Year Plan. After the expiry of the OPP1 in 1990, the government introduced the second long term policy known as the Second Outline Perspective (OPP2). Introduced in 1991, the OPP2 sets sectoral growth targets for the rest of this decade (1991 -2000). There will be two short-term Five-Year Plans in the OPP2. The development plan carried out

during the OPPI was called the New Economic Plan (NEP), while that which was introduced in the OPP2 was called the New Development Plan (NDP)

i) The New Economic Policy

The New Economic Policy (NEP) was aimed, firstly, at eradicating poverty by raising income levels and, increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians irrespective of race, and secondly, at accelerating the process of restructuring Malaysian society to correct the economic imbalance so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic functions. Under the second prong, rural life was to be modernised while a Malay commercial and industrial community in all categories and at all levels of operation of urban activities was to be created so that Malays and other indigenous people (Bumiputra) would become full partners in all aspects of the economic life of the nation. Based on the expectation that the economy would continue to expand rapidly, thereby offering additional resources for development, the Government would ensure that no one particular ethnic group would experience any loss or feel any sense of deprivation.

Mechanisms established to achieve the second objective of the NEP included the setting up of public corporations and statutory bodies and, the reservation of places in the universities, especially in fields like medicine, engineering and the sciences, for the Malays. Malay graduates in these fields were clearly needed if the NEP was to achieve its goals.

ii) The New Development Policy

Introduced in July 1991, the National Development Policy (NDP) replaces the expired NEP. Unlike the former NEP, the NDP contains no numeric targets for restructuring capital holdings to favour the Bumiputra. The NDP continues to stress the acceleration of the process of eradicating poverty, and restructuring society so as to correct social and economic imbalances. The policy provides a broader framework for achieving these socio-economic objectives in the next ten years, within the context of a rapidly expanding economy.

National unity remains the ultimate goal of socio-economic development because a united society is thought to be fundamental to the promotion of social and political stability, and sustained development. The development strategies under the NDP take strong cognisance of the diversities of Malaysians, in terms of their ethnic identity, language, culture and religion, so that a harmonious, tolerant and dynamic society could be created. Continued social and political stability as well as the efficient management of the economy are factors crucial in the realisation of its goals and objectives.

iii) The Vision 2020

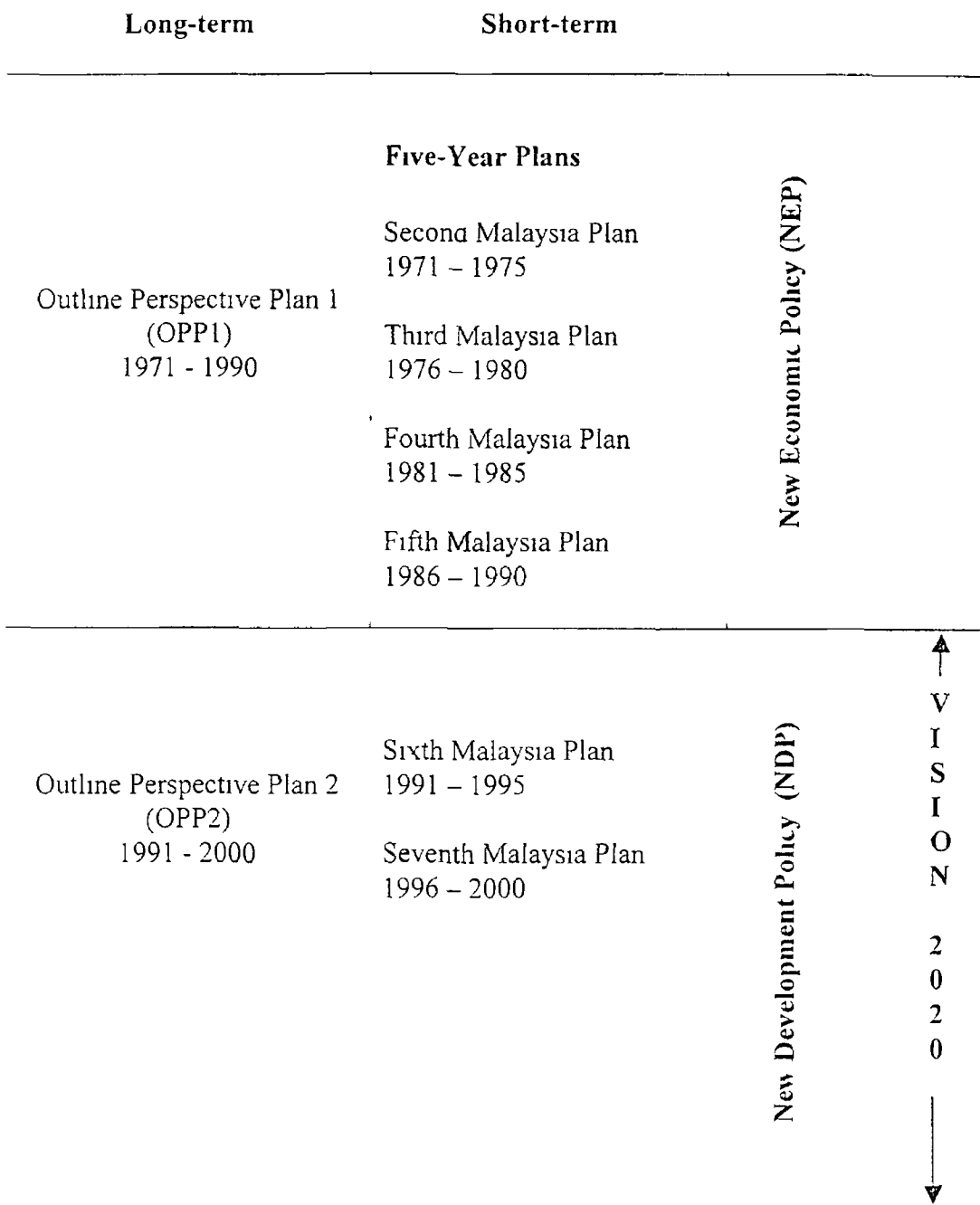
A complementary planning guide introduced as part of the OPP2 is the VISION 2020. The vision was announced by the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad on the 28th February, 1991 in his speech entitled, "**Malaysia The Way Forward**", to the Malaysian Business Council. In that famous speech, Dr Mahathir outlined the framework to develop Malaysia into a fully developed and an industrialised nation by the year 2020. He was quick to define what he meant by "a fully developed country" by saying that Malaysia should be a developed nation in its own mould and not necessarily duplicating the current 19 developed countries of the world. According to him, Malaysia should be developed not only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically, and culturally. Mahathir said,

By the year 2020, Malaysia can be a united nation, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a society that is democratic, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous, and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient"

(Mahathir, 1991 p 21-22)

An account on the series of the Malaysian National Development Policy (1971-2000) and the Vision 2020 era is shown in **Figure 2(b)**

Figure 2(b) Malaysian National Development Policies (1971 – 2020)



CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

3 0 Introduction

Reception Analysis is not really a new endeavour. Its history is as old as the history of the media itself. The emergence of a new type of audience studies led by Morley's work on the "*Nationwide*" audience (1980), pitted two major conceptions of communication against each other: the Humanities with its qualitative tradition, and the Social Sciences with its quantitative tradition. Since then, much of the writings about reception analysis focused on the debate between the qualitative and the quantitative methods in an attempt to understand how audiences 'read' media contents.

Morley's work denotes the reconstruction of concepts in audience studies, implying the social and discursive aspects of communication theory. Following his path, several studies have been carried out in the last decade (Radway, 1984, Ang, 1985). At the same time lots of articles pertaining to suitable approaches to analysing reception have been published (Ang, 1989, Becker, 1984, Bennett, 1982, Carragee, 1990, Evan, 1990, Jensen, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, Jensen and Rosengren, 1990, Lewis, 1985, Lewis, 1992, Lindlof, 1988, Lull, 1980, Morley, 1983, 1993, Radway, 1988, Schroder, 1994, Wren-Lewis, 1983).

This section intends to summarise some of the most significant research in new audience studies and social-discursive reception studies, from which this study has gained its inspiration. The most significant ones are found in relation to the factual area, the entertainment area, and the ethnic, sub-ethnic and sub-cultural contexts of reception. This is to help us understand both the status of current research in the field of reception or interpretation of media and subsequently build the theoretical and methodological framework of this study.

3.1 Review of the audience studies (by subject area)

1) The factual area (news-type)

The works of Morley (1980) Lewis (1985), and Jensen (1990a) are worth noting because they represent quality and strength in the qualitative audience studies tradition in the news-type programme area. In the *Nationwide* research, the relationship between the dominant ideological forms of the programme, the subcultures and codes inhabited by different classes within British society, was central. The theoretical base of the study rests on the fact that 'culture' plays an important role in searching for answers regarding the problem of non-complementary codes at the production and reception ends. Thus Hall's (1973) concepts of encoding and decoding are central to the analytical framework.

Morley (1980) applied the social-semiotic framework in his methodology in order to arrive at social and discursive meanings. This was done by comparing the analytical data of the text being examined and the analytical data from the audience about that text. Data were collected using the focus group technique. What is crucial here is the findings which revealed that social or class position were in no way related to decoding. The groups studied were selected from the same social class but their decoding of the programme were inflected in different directions by the discourses and institutions in which they were situated.

The other point made by the study is that the different responses and interpretations were not similar to those of the *Uses and Gratifications* traditions. Rather, they were interpreted on cultural differences embedded within the structure of the society. The study also found that cultural domination and resistance manifested in the audiences' discourse were powerful determinants in explaining meanings made from media contents.

Lewis (1985) on the other hand, did his research on decoding of the British TV news broadcast, the thirty-minute ITN 'News at Ten', in 1982. He approached the study in terms of a convergence between text-oriented semiotics and an audience-oriented cultural studies which has contributed to an understanding of the

encoding-decoding process The work of Morley(1980) in the social-semiological model of analysis was replicated The empirical work was carried out using an interview method The sample was selected from different backgrounds, in terms of education, occupation, age range, and gender parity

One important point made in Lewis's study is the fact that the process of decoding is not a matter of 'choice' for the decoders It is not a case of the viewer choosing, which part of the message he/she feels important and then constructing a suitable meaning This is a common conception of the audience to which the *Uses and Gratifications* approach gave a deal of credence Reception Analysis rejected this because the viewer will have only a limited range of appropriate meaning systems (extra-textual contexts or narrative contexts) to draw upon

According to Lewis, these contacts will give the viewer a specific form of access to what is called as, 'lexias' (units of meaning as constructed by members of the audience) But because these channels of access (in 'reading' of news items) will frequently open up only certain parts of the programme message, the nature of exactly what is being communicated by the programme is by no means predictable Lewis therefore, recommended that if the news message is to be fully understood by the audience, the news item must be well constructed in terms of its narrative contexts, because they are to be used by the viewer to understand and interpret the news item, which itself will significantly determine which lexias will be decoded In relation to the above, he found in his study that the 'News at Ten' team on that particular programme under study failed to get its message across to a majority of decoders, not so much due to absences in the news item but due to the way that item was constructed

Jensen's (1990a) contribution in the reception of the news genre, particularly television news, was from a different perspective compared to that of Lewis (1985) While Lewis worked on how contradiction in the decoding of news had its source in the audience's class background, Jensen worked on 'what' in the television news actually facilitates significant participation by the public in political processes The 'themes' in the news then became the 'predictors' The re- conceptualisation of audience research made his mission possible, that is to

examine whether the audience's reception of news items confers any political relevance on the information received

It was found that the very mode of address of the news genre being examined, carried ideological implications. Thus, the study supported the notion that media contents are mainly ideological, and that this is especially true in the case of factual programme contents such as news

Jensen worked particularly on examining viewers' decoding and their evaluation of *Danish television news* as a cultural forum for considering national and international political issues and events, using in-depth individual interviews. In his study, he basically looked into the textual themes in explaining public participation in political processes. He nevertheless, found that receptions were carried out in many different modes

ii) the entertainment area (television soap operas and romance novel)

In this area, the work of Ang (1985), Hobson (1982), and Radway (1984), are essential to any review. Seiter et al.'s (1989) study is also noteworthy. Great interest has been focused in analysing the relationship between the soap opera genre and gendered recipients, especially women viewers. This is taken from the fact that soap opera viewers are commonly women. As Allen (1987) had thought, Hobson's (1982) work in this area, was built on the fact that she recognised that the contradictory positions of a soap opera are bound up with its address to women viewers and its popularity among women viewers. The focus of research has mainly been placed on 'what' in the 'feminine' genre actually appeals to women. In sum, soap operas are seen to carry some useful values, of an emancipator nature.

Ang (1985) made an important contribution to reception analysis research when she related her study of *Dallas* in Holland to the issue of 'Americanisation' of European public broadcasting. The analysis of the audiences decoding of that popular television text led into a more critical analysis of the way *Dallas* fans were silenced and thus disempowered by a dominant official discourse which had

earlier rejected such programmes as 'bad mass culture' (Ang, 1990). She suggested that policy-making in European broadcasting against the increasing commercialisation of broadcasting, should take into account the real enjoyment the audience takes in commercially produced media material. Only then we can understand the textual and socio-cultural parameters of that pleasure. When that happens, we would not be taken by surprise, for example, by the success of *Dallas* in serving as an accepted model for European productions of Television drama (Silj, 1988).

Ang (1985) described the above as a form of 'conjuncturalism' in cultural studies because reception analysis (as informed by the classic work of Morley, 1980, 1986, and Radway, 1984) has managed to generate the theoretical assumption that 'people, actively and creatively make their own meanings and create their own culture, rather than absorb pre-given meanings imposed upon them (regardless of the politics in broadcasting policy-making)'. Ang recommended that reception analysis be based on 'ethnography of media audiences' and herself used letters from viewers as a technique for collecting data.

Hobson (1982) worked on *Crossroad*, once a soap on Independent Television (ITV) channel. The aim was to examine how much soap operas in general fitted into the everyday cultural environment of work. Data were collected through the technique of interview and 'just talking' about the serials, with a group of six working women.

One important conclusion that Hobson had arrived at is that fiction is interwoven with events in the 'real' world—both those directly experienced by the viewers, and those which they have heard reported in the media. Soap opera is a genre where the viewer is always in a superior position to the producers. The viewers can criticise the production of the drama or suggest how the actors or actresses should be behaving, and they discuss their own views or critical opinions with colleagues and friends when they talk about the soaps at work or at home the next day. It is the 'talk about the soaps' that moves television into a dimension beyond the viewing moment.

Radway (1984) did a study on forty-two American women who are avid readers of romances. She claimed that the popularity appeal of the fiction text depends on the recognition of its genre attributes, which in this study, were described by the readers themselves. Radway was aware of the pitfall of the 'implied reader' assumption of Reader-Response Criticism and at the same time recognised the cultural competence of the readers, which is an important issue in Cultural Studies. She then approached the study empirically by using questionnaire responses and intensive interviews of the respondents, with the intention of reaching the affinities and correspondences between a certain narrative style of the text and the cultural competencies of the readers.

Radway did not stop at the intimate reading moment to understand reception but went beyond to the social event of reading. When the decoding experience is being related to the broader context of the social system, a more social meaning to the event of reading the romances could be discovered. Our society is a patriarchal society, and reading romances is a gesture or a form of protest against patriarchy.

Reading romances provides a relief to women from the seemingly endless demands on them as nurturers. In their attempt to give some 'spaces' or 'breaks' in the confining routines as wives and mothers, reading novels is an avenue towards 'pleasure'. This contributes to the popularity of romances among women. Thus in order to understand the meaning of 'popular culture', we have to 'get inside' the reasons why people read or watch, and how the audiences themselves understand these activities.

Seiter, et al (1989), also did a study of soap opera viewers. They basically adapted the work of Morley and Radway. What makes it different from the rest of the research in soaps is that, this study did not rely on responses to one episode but the soap opera text per se. This allows for the determination of the text from the perspective of the viewers, who tend to discuss narratives in terms of plot lines. The narrative material resulting from the interviews therefore provides insights into the way selections are made during the interaction with the genre in

its entirety. In other words, it generates a great deal of information on how viewers perceive the soap opera generically.

The most significant finding revealed in the study is the identification of the soap opera text as a fictional narrative governed by certain aesthetic and generic rules. That aesthetic construct is based on the fact that a particular soap usually manages a 'huge-meta-text', taking shape over the course of several decades. Because of the 'hugeness' of the text, no reader can be in control of the text.

III) The ethnic, culture and sub-cultural contexts of reception

The work of Katz and Liebes (1984) and Lull (1980, 1988a) in particular represent studies that have looked into variations in reception with reference to the ethnic, cultural and sub-cultural contexts of audiences, identifying mass communication as an important resource within other cultural practices. The distinction between these studies and ours is that, while they focused on the reception of an imported programme by groups of locals with a background naturally different from that of the programme, we focused on the reception of a local programme by groups of locals coming from different backgrounds. The common denominator is the multi-ethnicity in the audience groups that make up the interpretive communities.

Katz and Liebes (1984) did a study on the reception of *Dallas* by the people of Israel who are not homogeneous, ethnically and culturally. Their concerns were centered on the question of whether fictions imported from American television is doing damage to the goals of national integration and renaissance of culture in Israel, that is, *Dallas* was seen merely as a culture for sale or as an agent of subverting indigenous values. The test, they said, should be undertaken in countries outside America. For some good reasons, Israel was chosen.

They also asked if different ethnic groups in Israel, have raised the problematic of redefining their own identities with the importing of foreign culture through television into their homes.

Focus groups were used and discussions took place before, during, and after the real transmission time. This has been seen as the most natural way of examining reception. Katz and Liebes found that the focus group method has proved satisfactory in supporting the hypothesis that the viewing process is active and social. Group discussions of television programmes appear to constitute a forum for the discussion of social issues and themes. They liberate people to say playfully what they might say seriously only in situations of crisis and conflict. Statements from group discussions would never be evoked in reply to an individual questionnaire or interview. They found that the struggle for meanings was conducted within three types of power relations, as Israelites, as sub-cultures, and as wife and mother.

Television viewing opens up to different readings, but the text constrains its decoding. This is consonant to the decoding framework of Hall (1973). Decoding is socio-cultural because it is an interaction between the culture of the viewer and culture of the producer manifested through the programmes.

The study in general had enlightened us with some important findings. 1) Television viewing is active and social. Social processes contribute to the ease of understanding and to the making of meaning. 2) Focus group method is satisfactory in generating statements or perceptions, because the discussions act as a forum for the discussion of basic social issues and themes. 3) Groups appear to differ in 'critical distance' (using Katz's and Liebes's terminology), in describing the extent to which characters and issues are generalised or personalised, and the extent to which statements about the programme refer to the structure of the story.

James Lull (1980) worked on family television viewing, taking the family as a sub-cultural group relating itself with the media for some social uses. The process of cultural construction that takes place in the interpersonal context of the family is influenced by historical conditions, environmental factors, and religious factors, and so on, as well as patterns of communication in the home, like, that includes uses of language or uses of media.

Media scholars especially in television study, have often excluded in-depth treatment of the family. Lull argues that the family must be treated as a problematic to be developed in any attempt to theorise the social and cultural significance of television. He focused his study on the social uses of television in the family institution, in particular, stressing the qualitative character of the relationship, that is, how television influences the family and how families interpret and use television within their particular cultural contexts.

Lull's methodology is of great relevance to this study, because the most fundamental aspects of human interaction, such as the detailed events which audiences create in their own terms and on their own grounds in order to make their viewing meaningful, are often neglected in mathematically induced designs and theories.

In order to overcome such error, Lull employed participant observational strategies. He claimed that the family, which is television's primary audience, is a natural unit for this kind of analysis. Through ethnographic inquiry, the researcher can study actual communication contexts and the ways in which media experiences enter the lives of family members. Even the natural research method, such as that performed by researchers from the Kansas City Mental Health Foundation (Bechtel, Achelpohl, and Akers, 1972), which gains access to audience members' conversation alone without the benefits of ethnographic participation, have been shown to be inadequate as a methodology. The recording equipment of television cameras and microphones, according to Bechtel and associates, failed to provide much insight into the nature of interpersonal network that characterises family communication systems.

In a book entitled, *World Families Watch Television* (1988b), Lull accommodated research works on family television viewing from six different countries to support the need for qualitative methodologies in order to analyse how television influences the family and how families interpret and use television within their particular cultural contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

4 0 Introduction

In this chapter, an overview of the different theoretical traditions in audience studies will be presented. These theories have been used by both the media and audience researchers in the past, as their basis to understand media effects. In addition, a section on development theory was presented to provide us with a basis to understand development in Malaysia as a setting for the study. Finally, we have included the theoretical and research framework to outline how the study was being designed.

4 1 An overview of research traditions in audience studies

“ The history of audience studies during the post-war period can be seen as a series of oscillations between perspectives which have stressed the power of the text over its audiences and perspectives which have stressed the barriers “protecting” the audience from the potential effects of the message”

(Morley, 1989: 16)

The above statement suggests that audience studies tradition is divided into *two* main perspectives. As Morley had explained, the first perspective is represented by the tradition of *effect studies*, in which the media are seen as having the power to influence their audiences with messages that will cause them to behave in a particular way. This could take the form of the audience adopting the dominant culture (sometimes foreign to the audience) on one hand and turning them to be quiescent on the other. For example, Television has been accused of making people commit violence. This is about what the television does to people, especially the vulnerable ones. The effects theories traditions have been regarded to be one of the most popular paradigms that researchers in the past (especially those from North America) used to examine the nexus between media and audiences.

The second perspective has been the work that has developed from the *Uses and Gratifications* school. Within that perspective the audience is credited with an active role, looking more at what people do with the media rather than what media do to them (Halloran, 1970). One important thing that was developed by this approach however was that of the variability of response and interpretation. Apparently this was more of an individualistic effort because the differences in response are attributed to individual differences of personality. This differential interpretation is indeed an advance on effects theory. However, looking at a broader sociological context, Morley described the Uses and Gratifications model as "severally limited by its insufficiently sociological or cultural perspective" (Morley, 1989: 17).

4.1.1 Traditional Audience Studies

Media researchers have pointed out some important research traditions in their attempt to examine the nexus between media and audiences. Jensen and Resengren (1990) mentioned that other than Reception Analysis, media scholars (especially those from North America), in their attempt to investigate audience's response to media, have commonly used Effects Theories and Uses and Gratifications Approach.

a) Effects Theories

In discussing media effects, we are referring to what has already happened as a direct result of mass communication, whether intended or otherwise. The terms or expressions that have commonly been used in describing 'effects' include, 'media power' and 'media effectiveness'. According to McQuail (1987), 'media power' refers to both, a potential quality of the media in delivering effects in the future, and a statement of probability about effects, under given conditions. On the other hand, he said that 'media effectiveness', is a statement about the efficiency of the media in achieving a given aim, but always implying intention.

In speaking about effects, some of the significant effects of media that have received attention from media researchers, include, those which are related to the

S-R or stimulus-response model, the question of moral that has caused panics and disorder, campaign, diffusion of information in a development context, distribution of knowledge, socialisation, social control and consciousness-forming. In these cases, effects theories have been said to have changed the way people perceive media messages.

Originally, the interest on effect studies was focused on treating the messages as isolated or undifferentiated stimuli, but the present tradition has moved into looking at the messages as having recognisable and measurable characteristics (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990). Literature in media effects such as by Bradae (1989), and Bryant and Zillmann (1986), also confirmed that wholes of differentiated stimuli have replaced the undifferentiated stimuli.

The present effects theories also assume that social and/or individual characteristics as well as social context surrounding the communication process have been given increased attention in looking at effects for audience members. Jensen and Rosengren (1990) quoted that recent studies by Signorielli and Morgan (1989) and Melischeck, et al (1984), on Gerbner's Cultivation theory, and Noelle-Neumann (1988), on examining the Spiral of Silence theory, found that these factors are important in explaining effects on audience members. Not forgetting the comparative analysis undertaken by Rosengren and Windahl (1989) on effects of television viewing on children and adolescents, both of them found that the findings of the study carried out in the United States in the 1950s have been shown to be radically different from the one done in Sweden in the 1980s.

b) Uses and Gratification Approach

The Uses and Gratification approach is the first study to introduce the concept of 'active audience'. However, the extent of such activity depends on how motivated the audiences are. In any situation, motivation depends highly on the amount of reward an individual is able to get in return for an effort. In media consumption, this theory assumes that such motivation is caused by the amount of benefit the audience members can derive from the media to other purposes in life. Most media industries operate on the notion that there is some measure of selectivity by audiences among channels and types of content.

Nevertheless, some researchers have questioned how much selectivity there actually is, while a good deal of evidence shows that a lot of media use is habitual and unselective (Goodhart et al., 1975)

In this approach, audience activity is related to the question of differential needs, orientations and interpretative activities of the audience due to the differential social and/or individual characteristics of the audience themselves (Blumler and Katz, 1974, Rosengren et al., 1985). There has been a discrepancy in dealing with contents between, on one hand, the tendency to study theories about the use of media content in terms of subjectivity felt needs and, on the other, the tendency to study empirically the use of media content categorised in terms of objectivity given traditional content categories (Rosengren, 1974)

In addition, this approach has been said to have focused too much on the psychological aspect, so much that the macro social and media structure surrounding individual media use has been neglected. McQuail (1984) then felt that media use would not be complete without relating it to the environment where the media and the individuals operate. So he suggested for an alternative culturalist model to analyse the media experience because he believed that this could help re-orient media research to important but neglected matters.

Although Uses and Gratification had its first step in Herzog's works (1942, 1944) which undertook the task of finding out what gratification radio listeners might get from quiz programmes and daytime serials, it was only in the 1970's that the theory was revitalised (Katz, Blumberg and Gurevitch, 1974). The modern approach has drawn much on recent developments in Social Psychology, particularly the Expectancy-Value Approach (Palmgreen and Rayburn, 1985) which implies that people use a certain media content because they have an expectation placed on that content. However, this does not stop the theory from further enquiries, in particular, the Reception Analysis studies.

4.1.2 The New Audience Studies: Reception Analysis

The later part of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a new trend in audience studies. The most prominent one was reflected by the reception analysis work pioneered by Morley in his research entitled "The Nationwide", in 1980.

Reception Analysis theory seeks to integrate Social Science perspectives and Humanistic perspectives by adopting empirical approach to audience research (Jensen, 1986). It is the most recent development in the area of audience studies, taking, as its point of departure, the limitations found in the modes of enquiry of both, the Humanities and Social Sciences. On the one hand, this theory has questioned the validity of interpretative content analysis carried out in the Humanities, as a source of knowledge about the uses and effects of mass media contents on audiences, whose positions have mainly been implied. While on the other hand, this theory has also questioned the predominant methodologies of empirical Social Scientific research, a criticism which has at least contributed to debates about the purpose of media scholarship (Rosengren, 1989).

With that, Reception Analysis develops the 'audience-cum-content analysis', which is both, qualitative and empirical in nature (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990). Although the data are collected through empirical means, studies in Reception Analysis applies qualitative methods in comparing the audience data against the content data. The aim, is none other than to examine the most realistic processes of reception which ultimately will have a significant bearing on the use and impact of media content.

What makes Reception Analysis a step closer to a better approach in studying media audiences, lies in its methodology which stresses that comparative empirical analysis must be carried out between the media discourses and the audience discourses. Traditionally, this comparative analysis is carried out by analytically comparing the structure of the contents with the structure of audience response regarding that content. The results of the comparison are then interpreted with reference to the surrounding sociocultural system.

The socio-cultural system in which the audiences are a part, may be conceptualised as all of these together: a) a historical configuration of social practices, which implies that history of the society is responsible in moulding the social practices of the audiences, b) a context of use which implies that the existing social practices serve as the premise at which the pattern of media use by

the audiences is shaped, and c) an interpretative communities which often is based on gender, class or ethnicity, that can help to mediate the flow of communication. This gives rise to the 'social semiotic' theoretical framework of Reception Analysis which assigns the social and cultural practices of the audiences as well as their interpretation act, an autonomy, more important than that contained in the structure of the politics and economy of the society itself (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990)

Jensen and Rosengren then concluded that the remaining empirical question to be answered by this approach lies with, 'in what specific ways do audiences differ in their social production of meaning in interpreting politically and economically ideological media contents?', and Can these differences or variations, especially those that are formed outside the dominant social order, be strong enough a force to imply a change or reform in the existing social institutions?'

4.1.3 Other Theories Related to the Study Reception

Besides Effect Theories and Uses and Gratification Approach, there are other relevant theories that are commonly used to study how audiences make meanings out of media contents. The following two models applicable to the present study are described below

a) Hall's Encoding and Decoding Model

The concept of Encoding and Decoding initiated by Hall (1973) has made a deep impact in underlying the structure of Reception Analysis. The total concept of reception of media contents is basically built on the process of encoding and decoding two differentiated but related moments in the total communication process. Hall described them as the 'determinate' moments because they determine the 'meanings' that are resulted from the communicative exchange, that is, from the production of messages to the reception of those messages.

He pointed out that the production of a message is the prime object of television practices and structures. A message, he said, is like a 'sign-vehicle', organised through the operation of codes, within the syntagmatic chains of a discourse or within the rules of language. It is in this symbolic form that the reception of the

message, takes place. This concept of encoding and decoding does not limit the view of meaning production from the translation act of that message to only those 'leads' which emerge from content analysis, but also to the 'societal structures', if the communication circuit is to be completed.

In short, the 'message form' is the necessary form of an event in its passage from source to receiver. Meaning-dimension is not a random but determinate moment, which at another stage of the analysis requires an integration into the essential relations of communication, of which it forms only a part. This integration is a part of the communication circuit because the message, like any other semantic unit of a structured discourse, cannot signify anything on its own but depends on its relation with other elements in the context of the whole story. A person can only say something is 'good' when comparison is made with another thing which is bad or better, without these comparative values, the 'good' value could not be articulated.

In a television discourse, the conventional way of structuring a message by the producer, and the combination with the other elements, serve to delimit its meanings within that specified field or context. Hall (1973) claimed that this delimitation act produces a 'closure effect' which reduces the scope in meaning-making, so that a 'preferred meaning' for the message could be suggested. The 'preferred meaning' which lies within a scale that runs from 'dominant' meaning to 'subordinate' meaning, naturally offers a problem in reception because according to Hall (1973), 'there can be no law to ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning of an episode in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer'.

The encoding and decoding model of Stuart Hall (1973) developed at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, had its base on the Effects theory and the Uses and Gratifications Approach. From the effect theorist the encoding and the decoding model agreed that the texts have power over the audiences because mass communication is a structured activity in which the media have the power to set agendas and defined issues. However, this is not suggesting the 'direct effect' notion of effects theory; instead, the agenda would serve the audience as a cultural framework within which the audience will tend to operate their interpretation job.

From the Uses and Gratifications approach the model of the active viewer making meaning from the signs and symbols which the media provide is a matter of concern to the Encoding and Decoding model of Hall. This is because audience deals basically with signs and symbols which only have meaning within the producers of messages.

In sum, this model was concerned with both, matters of ideological and cultural power of the media as well as how it was possible for meaning to be produced from their messages. The focus was not really on what the text means but rather on the conditions of the practice of meaning-making. Moving away from the Uses and Gratifications traditions, these conditions are of social and cultural in nature.

Wren-Lewis (1983) identified some shortcomings contained in this model. One particular criticism of our interest is the concept of 'preferred reading' which is central to the process of encoding and decoding. Morley (1989) highlighted the problematic areas raised by many researchers in audience studies, for instance, how specific the concept of 'preferred reading' is to the field of news and current affairs television?, and how one might effectively transfer that model to the analysis of fictional television? The more interesting point was brought up with regard to the status of the 'preferred reading' itself. The popular questions concerned with whether it is a property of the text or is it something which can be generated by the audience from the text by certain methods of semiological analysis, or is it a prediction made by the analyst as to how most members will empirically read a given programme or message? Despite these criticisms, Morley however, defended the usefulness of this model because he said it insisted that members of the audience are engaged in productive work, though under deterministic conditions set by the textual organization, the producer and the social history of the audience members (Morley, 1989: 19).

b) Parkin's Theory of Meaning Systems

Understanding audience functions entailed us to get into the field of political sociology, notably with the work of Frank Parkin (1972) whose theory of meaning systems provides the basis of the three decoding 'potentials' identified in the encoding and decoding model. In this context, the receiver is said to either share, partly share or not to share the code in which the message is sent. This

theory was developed by Frank Parkin (1972) and it advocated that members of the different social classes within a society can be expected to inhabit, what he described a different meaning systems or ideological frameworks (Morley, 1992) Parkin's work was directed to the western societies where three major social categories (each promoting a different moral interpretation of class inequality) can commonly be distinguished, resulting in the production of three major meaning-systems According to Parkin, the three major meanings are derived from the dominant value-system, the subordinate value-system and the radical value-system These are also referred to respectively, as the 'dominant', the 'negotiated' and the 'oppositional' position in interpreting any cultural forms

Parkin's theory of meaning systems is suitable for this study because it can account for the ways in which members of the different ethnic groups decode the development-oriented television programme In a way, it helps to make us understand the typical positions of the different ethnic groups in context of the dominant ideology of the society The decoder will either share, thus taking the dominant position, partly share, thus taking the negotiated position, or reject the code in which the messages has been encoded, thus taking the oppositional position, in relating to the dominant ideology transmitted through the programme By adapting this meaning-systems model, a social perspective on the process of reception could thus be developed

4.2 Development Theory

Development theory has always been closely related to development strategy, i.e. changes of economic structures and social institutions, undertaken in order to find consistent and enduring solutions to problems facing decision-makers in a society Thus development theory refers to elements of social sciences which tried to tackle the problem of underdevelopment and were significantly changed in the process This applies to the interdisciplinary, increasingly normative and basically Third World oriented development theory that took shape in the post-war period To the extent that theorizing about development has been nothing but more or less mechanical application of the main body of theory to countries in the Third World

Bjorn Hettne (1982) argued that the development of development theory has not been a smooth and evolutionary process, but has rather been characterised by theoretical contradictions and ideological polarizations, at least after the pioneering years (late 40s and early 50s) were over. According to him, during that period theories were rather mechanically tried out on Third World countries, of which many were former colonies.

Thus, it is generally agreed that development economics as a distinct discipline emerged only after World War II. As emphasized by Gunnar Myrdal, the major recasting of economic thought has always been responses to changing political conditions and opportunities (Myrdal, 1968). As such, the study of development did not spring from an autonomous progress of social science theory, but from Western preoccupation with the new nations in the context of the emerging cold war. In this perspective these new nations were seen as potential allies by the Western powers that held up their own experiences, reflecting the Western Paradigm, as models of development. There was very little concrete knowledge about the problem of 'backwardness'. But certainly it is quite natural that the recipe for development given by the developed countries should emanate from their own experiences and prejudices (Hettne, 1982).

The dominant approach of development that ruled the social sciences prescribed a particular economic path to modernization, that is the neoclassical approach, which had served as an important model for Western economists. Adam Smith in his *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) originally proposed this approach which was later supported and enriched by other Western economists. The dominant approach was mainly concerned with economic growth as measured by the rate of growth of output (GNP). Thus an important goal of economists was to accelerate and maintain high rates of growth. The theory of development in this economic approach was simple. You need productive resources a society had and secondly, economic institutions to utilize and guide the use of the resources.

4.2.1 Dominant Paradigm of Development

Implicit in the discussion above was the need to examine what development in the Third World should be and how it should be brought about. According to Rogers (1976), this concept of development grew out of historical events, such as the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States, the colonial experience in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, the quantitative empiricism of North American social science, and capitalistic economic/political philosophy. He explained four elements in the concept of development:

- a) Economic growth through industrialization and accompanying urbanization was key to development. It was assumed that development performance could be quantified in economic terms: GNP, per capita income, etc.
- b) The choice of technology was to be capital-intensive.
- c) In order to guide and speed up the process of development, planning should be centralized and controlled by economists and bankers.
- d) Underdevelopment was mainly due to problems within the developing nations rather than in their external relationships with other countries.

Economic growth was considered the key to development. Most problems plaguing the Third World nations were diagnosed as economic in nature. Five-year plans were launched in several countries to dovetail several development activities and help bring about orderly economic progress. Bilateral and multilateral (for example, the World Bank) institutions were involved in these plans.

This approach was at the macro level. Problems were identified and solutions offered at the higher levels of government. Information and other inputs were then channeled down to local communities.

Industrialization was considered the main route to impressive economic growth. At least, that was the path by which North America and West Europe had developed in the late 19th century. So Third World countries were encouraged to invest in a programme of industrialization such as hydropower projects and a diversity of manufacturing units.

4 2 2 The Modernization Paradigm

Modernization means different things to different people at different occasions. In fact both the words *modernization* and *development* have come to be keywords in the contemporary dialogue on the human condition. Both shared three reference points. First, they refer to the states of society. Theorists of modernization distinguished between *traditional*, *transitional* and *modernized* societies. Development theorists, on the other hand, speak of *underdeveloped*, *developing* and *developed* societies. Second, both of them articulate a set of goals in the sense that the ideal of modernization or development provides an agenda for action. Third, both the concepts refer to a process---movement from tradition to modernity or from underdevelopment to development.

We shall discuss some well-known theories from different social sciences within the modernization paradigm. They have been chosen to illuminate both the central core and the borderlines of the paradigm.

Since the main contributions to modernization theory came from Sociology it is adequate to start with this discipline. There are many 'grand theorists' in this tradition but the central figure was Durkheim who saw in the division of labour and the postulate of structural differentiation the motive force of modern societies. It should, however, be noted that the classical theorists were mainly concerned with the transition from 'tradition' to 'modernity' in Western Europe, although the general relevance of this scheme sometimes is implied.

Like Durkheim and Weber, Marx also engaged in the construction of grand theories of societal development. His main contribution to social science was to focus on the economic aspects of man's activities. He argued that major historical changes (e.g. the transformation of feudalism into capitalism) were caused by conflicts generated in the mode of production. As the forces of production are developed so the relations of production must be altered. The alteration is achieved through struggles between social classes. Some classes will strive to maintain the status quo as they benefit from that social order but others will want to reshape the relations of production to bring them into line with the forces of production and to allow further development. Thus, old modes of production are replaced by higher modes of production. In Europe, feudalism gave way to

capitalism, and Marx predicted it was only a matter of time before the proletariat would triumph over the bourgeoisie and usher in the epoch of socialism leading to communism, the highest stage of social evolution

Marx also recognizes the different precapitalist modes of production around the world and believes that all societies would eventually become capitalist. But according to him, the same may not be true for the underdeveloped world because they were so ill-equipped to generate the transition from capitalism internally. For instance, in some parts of Asia where the mode of production was based on village economy and absence of private property, any economic surplus was taken by the state and not by individuals/landlords. The producers' control of their own means of subsistence enabled the Asiatic mode of production to resist change and movement to a higher mode of production.

It is also of importance that classical views usually were rather ambivalent *vis-à-vis* the process of modernization, as shown by Durkheim's concept of anomie and Marx' preoccupation with alienation. Another observation is that modernization theory as part of the larger evolutionary tradition, of which it forms the most recent tradition, conceives of social change as a basically endogenous process. We emphasize basically since external variables often were called upon to explain how the process of modernization was triggered off, as in Marx' and Engels' famous statements of the function of colonialism to drag stagnant societies into history. However, the potential for modernization lay dormant in the societies concerned.

The classical framework appears in modern form in Talcott Parson's pattern variables: particularism - universalism, ascription - achievement and diffuseness - specificity. To complete this chain of influences Bert Hoselitz was the first to apply Parson's pattern variables to the problem of development and underdevelopment (Hoselitz, 1960). Society went through development or modernization as particularism, ascription and diffuseness were replaced by universalism, achievement and specificity. In practice modernization was very much the same as Westernization, i.e. the underdeveloped country should imitate those institutions that were characteristics of the rich, western countries. Thereby Marx' prophecy that the less developed country saw the image of its own future in the more developed would come true.

Probably the most well-known of the economic contributions within the tradition of modernization theory is that of Walt Rostow, who conceived of development as a number of stages linking a state of tradition with what Rostow called 'maturity'. This development was analysed primarily as an endogenous process (Rostow, 1960).

Rostow's doctrine, which played an important role during the late 50's and 60's, was a typical expression of the Western development paradigm. The stages through which societies had to pass

- a) The traditional society
- b) The pre take-off stage
- c) Take-off
- d) The road to maturity
- e) The mass consumption society

The economic prerequisites for a take-off are created during the second stage and many of the characteristics of the traditional society are then removed. Agricultural productivity increases rapidly, and a more effective infrastructure is created. Society also develops a new mentality, as well as a new class - entrepreneurs. The third stage, the take-off, is the most crucial for further development. It is during this period, covering a few decades, that the last obstacles to economic development are removed. The most visible sign of the take-off stage is that the share of net investment and saving in national income rises from five per cent to ten per cent or more, resulting in the process of industrialization, where certain sectors assuming a leading role.

Modern technology is disseminated from the leading sectors while the economy moves towards the stages of maturity and mass consumption. According to Rostow, international relations, do, in fact, speed up the process of development, but have little to do with underdevelopment. Rostow differed from the early development theoreticians by his much broader approach (he saw his theory as an alternative to the Marxist theory), but the key element in his thinking is nevertheless the process of capital formation.

Rostow's stages were basically derived from the distinction between 'tradition' and 'modernity', which are well known from classical sociology and the Weberian analysis of ideal models. There is no denying that more or less sophisticated versions of this paradigm existed, but in its more simplistic form the modernization paradigm served as a development ideology, simply rationalizing cultural colonialism.

4.2.3 Neo-Marxism Dependency

By the late 1960s the sociology of development was in a state of crisis. Neither the modernization school nor classical Marxism could provide adequate explanations of what was happening in the Third World and of how development could be achieved. A new paradigm was urgently required. It was found in the neo-Marxist dependency approach.

The dependency school emerged from the convergence of two intellectual trends: one often called 'neo-Marxism', and the other rooted in the earlier Latin American discussion on development that ultimately formed the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America tradition, also known as ECLA or CEPAL in its Spanish acronym.

What really happened was that until 1929, Latin American nations followed a conventional export-led strategy of development. The economic depression of the 1930s drastically reduced Western demands for Latin American products and revealed to these countries the problem of relying on external trade as the engine of growth. Thus, countries began to design inward-looking development strategies, which would leave them less vulnerable to the vagaries of world trade. This suggested programme of action was supported by the offices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) established in Chile in 1948.

The ECLA analysis of Latin American development brought two important observations. Firstly, that the world could be perceived in terms of a core of developed industrial nations and a periphery of under-developed nations. Second, the core and the periphery were underlinked economically, especially in trade and investment. But these links prevented true development from taking place in the

periphery as they designed to work only to the advantage of the centre. The countries of the periphery had been made dependent on the economies of the centre. Inward-looking import substitution industrialization strategies of development were seen as the way to break this inequitable relationship of dependence. Only then could real development take place.

The dependency paradigm took the world of development theorizing by storm. It hastened the demise of modernization theory and provided a more convincing and politically acceptable explanation of the Third World than the classical Marxian perspective. The major achievement of the dependency school was to refine the object for study. Under the modernization approach the academic focus had been fixed on happenings within the boundaries of the developing nations. The dependency approach broke out of this bias and identified the world economy as the principal-object of analysis. The relations between nations determined development status. No longer could the blame for underdevelopment be placed exclusively on those who were underdeveloped.

However, one theorist, Andre Gunder Frank, has achieved the greatest fame and widest influence of the dependency school with his version of dependency (taken from the ideas of ECLA and Marxism) (Booth, 1985). According to Frank, 'it is capitalism, both world and national, which still generates underdevelopment in the present' (Frank 1981). He said that capitalism has been responsible for the development of the underdevelopment since the 16th century, when Spanish and Portuguese influence expanded to Latin America. The area (Latin America) has never experienced feudalism.

But the dependency paradigm did not have answers to everything. After a while it came under scrutiny and criticism. The wellspring of this criticism was largely from within the Marxist tradition, from a revitalised and reformulated debate about modes of production. As Leys (1975) pointed out, 'It is becoming clear that the underdevelopment and dependency theory is no longer serviceable and must now be transcended'. According to him, the theory (dependency) tends to be economicist in the sense that social classes, the state, politics, and ideology get very little attention.

It is quite clear that the concept of dependence was an expression of circular reasoning with a limited explanatory value. In reality almost all countries do import technology, are dependent on exports, and have the tendency to emulate consumption patterns in other countries. Thus, making it tough to distinguish between dependence from non-dependence and also implying that it would be difficult to rule out the possibility of industrialization for a certain category of countries based on this distinction. For instance, in the early 70's a number of countries in the Third World were in fact industrializing at a fast pace, contradicting a generally held view that their development was blocked.

The criticism of the theory also came from Cardoso who together with Faletto published their works known as *Dependency and Development in Latin America*. In this classic work published in 1979 for the American edition, both of them acknowledged that a form of 'associated dependent development' was possible for peripheral countries within capitalism. They implied that dependent on foreign capital can lead to expansion of productive forces but at the same time may increase poverty and marginalisation.

4.2.4 The World-Systems Approach

The background to the world-systems approach is the Latin American dependency theory, with which it shares a critical attitude toward evolutionist framework underlying the predominant theory of the 1950's and 1960's. Another theorist, an African, Immanuel Wallerstein in his work known as *The Modern World System* (1974) argued that the capitalist economy that existed in the 16th century in Western Europe as the catalyst for the world economy and by the 19th century had become the unique world system.

The system incorporates a number of previously more or less isolated and self-sufficient societies into a complex system of functional relations (Wallerstein, 1974). The result of this expansion was that a small number of *core-states* transformed a huge external arena into a periphery. Between these *core-states* and the periphery the world-system theorists identify semi-peripheries. Wallerstein introduced the term *semi-periphery* (a modified view of Frank) likening its role in the world system to those of the social sectors who feel that their success depends on the system and the leaders.

By having such categories, it is possible for us to see some states moving from one position to another. For example, as Japan moves to the core, some countries in Europe may be moving to the direction of semi-periphery. As such, we will always have developed, developing and underdeveloped countries but countries can move in and out of these categories.

4.2.5 Decline of the modernization paradigm

By mid-1970s the entire gamut of theories revolving round the question of a desired, preferred and possible future for the Third World has undergone rigorous and penetrating examination, which brought out into the open their many inadequacies. In the process, the concept of modernization was demystified.

The explanatory power of the paradigm was limited and the guidelines to action embodied in it were somewhat obscure. It was evasive on the vital issue of the poverty of the masses, especially in the less developed countries. Two basic questions remained unanswered: *Whose modernization? Modernization for what?* The formulation did not adequately take into account the qualitative changes in the problems that humanity faces, nor did it explore the prospects of modernization and development against the backdrop of the realities of the contemporary world order. Thus, the global context of modernity, remained unexamined.

For example, modernization places great reliance on science and technology. It is assumed that most human problems can be solved by injecting increasingly larger doses of them and by ceaselessly working for their greater participation. Some consequences of the trend of thought could be counter-productive. Much advanced technology is capital-intensive. As it becomes more sophisticated, it requires a relatively small but highly skilled labour force. In the less developed countries capital is scarce and competing claims on it are many. The labour force is large but low skilled. Developmental aid often comes with strings attached and manipulate the strings in such a way that the technology of the less developed countries emerges as a satellite of the dominant technology of the developed nations. This increases and even perpetuates national inequalities.

Yet another fallacious assumption is implicit in the modernization approach. The modernizing elite and the early beneficiaries of the modernization process do not necessarily spearhead the diffusion of its gains to the entire society. Here, the Western analogy does not appear to be holding true in the case of many less developed countries. According to the historical experience of the developed countries of the West, urban pressures were instrumental also in raising the living standards of the non-urban population. The experience of the less developed countries, on the contrary, suggests the opposite trend: the privileged urban sector, including its working class organizations, aggressively demonstrates their hostility to all equalizing measures.

4.2.6 Searching for an Alternative Paradigm?

The reigning paradigms of modernization and development no longer inspire the confidence which they did in the last three decades. As argued by Kirby (1997), the twin grand paradigms of modernization theory and later followed by the dependency theory had lost both their explanatory and their predictive capabilities. As such, this had led to serious doubts and questions, which in turn have thrown up insights leading towards the emergence of an alternative paradigm.

The broad configuration of the desired model is clear, although there is no unanimity in respect of the means by which to achieve it. However, although the need for a new paradigm of development is deeply felt and ambiguously articulated, development practice shows little impact of the new thinking. Planning continues to have an elite bias, where a small section determines what is good for the society and in the process gives high priority to what is good for itself and its own class interests. Even though poverty is recognized as the major problem, but this recognition has become almost ritualistic. It is quite common to hear politicians speak in the name of the common people, but what these people (common people) really get are few crumbs of development. And, by and large, planning objectives and processes continue to be emulative and exogenous, and, therefore, misdirected. They are non-participative, evince low sensitivity to the environment and are in most cases unsustainable. In the absence of the requisite political will, and because of the perverse international climate and pressures, the ideal of self-reliance remains confined to rhetoric, in actual practice, dependency

patterns continue to prevail. There is a wide gap between the new thinking and the on-going praxis.

The new paradigm of development calls for an alternative policy framework. If the development performance of the Third World has been unimpressive, the failure should be attributed to the absence of fit between the emerging paradigm and the institutional structure determining policy and its implementation (Dube, 1988).

The above, therefore, sets the scenario for consideration when discussing Malaysia's development.

4.3 The Malaysian Economic Development

This section seeks to advance our understanding of the changing nature of post-colonial Malaya and then Malaysian economy. A brief overview of Malaya's economic history under British colonialism serves to highlight some of the main sources and forms of inequality inherited from that period.

4.3.1 Background to the Malaysian Economy

The origins of the contemporary (Peninsular) Malaysian economy can be traced to the economy built by its population under British colonial auspices. The initial motive for British hegemony in the region from the late eighteenth century was the need to break the mercantilist stranglehold over trade with East and Southeast Asia by opening up new free ports around the strategic Malacca Straits.

While admittedly cursory, the preceding outline of some of the key aspects of economic development under colonial auspices offers important insights into the inherited structure of the Peninsular Malaysian economy. For instance, the regional imbalances between the East Coast and West Coast have their origin in the more advanced growth in the latter due to the location of the early tin mines, the consequent pattern of colonial annexation and infrastructural development. Similarly, the differences between the rice-growing North and the rest of the peninsula are related to the history of colonial territorial expansion on the peninsula, as well as the British desire to preserve the Malay peasants as rice

farmers. The typical urban-rural gap is, of course, related to the usual roles of town and country in the capital accumulation process, exacerbated by the relative backwardness of the peasant sector compared to the plantation sector. Ethnic differences, which, dominate most discussions of contemporary Malaysian society, often refer to "the identification of race with economic function" in office parlance, or the relationship of ethnicity to class and occupation, which has its origins in the formation of the colonial economy.

This growing inequality did not only result in growing inter-class tensions, but more importantly, was perceived in racial terms, not least because of officially encouraged political and social mobilization and expression along ethnic lines. Hence, Malay opposition to domination by capital was primarily expressed in terms of resentment against ethnic Chinese (who comprised the bulk of small businessmen), while non-Malay frustrations were directed against the state, widely identified with UMNO (the dominant partner in the ruling Alliance party) and the Malay dominated post-colonial state machinery.

The post-general elections 'race riots' of May 1969 were in a sense -then a consequence of the post-colonial state's exacerbation of the ethnic dimensions of the socioeconomic class structure inherited, largely intact, from the colonial period. This situation was fuelled by the frustrated ambitions of the emerging Malay middle class who, though enjoying nominal political control over the country, saw the gradual decline of British economic hegemony giving way to Chinese capital. This 'political-bureaucratic' stratum became more assertive from the mid-60s, establishing hegemony after the tragic events of May 13, 1969 (Jomo and Ishak, 1986).

The New Economic Policy (NEP) declared in 1970 marked the political ascendance of these interests. The first of the NEP's two main prongs is committed to eradicating 'absolute' poverty - defined largely in terms of raising the real income, and presumably the economic welfare of the population above a certain 'poverty line' (equivalent to USD125.00 p a in 1970). According to official estimates, about 49.3% of all households in Peninsular Malaysia in 1970 received incomes below the poverty line. The incidence of poverty is said to be high among padi growers, rubber smallholders, coconut smallholders, fishermen, estate workers, agricultural labourers and the urban poor. It was claimed that the overall

incidence of poverty has been declining since 1970 at 49.3% to 43.9% in 1975 and 29.2% in 1980

Despite the government's vowed commitment to poverty eradication, it should be emphasized that there is no official commitment to reducing economic inequality between the rich and the poor

The other major prong of the NEP is somewhat euphemistically referred to as 'restructuring society'. This involves a broad commitment to eliminating the identification of ethnicity with 'economic function'. The main mechanism used by the government in this area is 'preferential treatment', 'affirmative action' or 'ethnic discrimination' (depending on how one sees it) in training (e.g. admission policies or educational aid) and recruitment (especially in the government sector). Such policies are criticized by those who argue that not enough is being done for the Bumiputera (indigenous) to rectify inter-ethnic inequalities as well as others who emphasize government discrimination and oppression along ethnic lines as well as violation of meritocratic principles.

Even more contentious is the key component of the 'restructuring' prong which is committed to the creation of an indigenous 'commercial and entrepreneurial' class owning at 30% of the corporate sector by 1990. A quarter of this (i.e. 7.5%) was projected to be in the hands of Bumiputera individuals, with the rest held by public enterprises ostensibly representing the interests of the entire Bumiputera community.

The Malaysian economy grew rapidly with an annual growth rate of the GDP averaging at 5.8% during the years 1957 - 70 (Rao, 1976), and rising to 7.8%, on average, between 1971 - 80 (Malaysia, 1981). There have been several especially important changes. Post-colonial industrial development has involved two main stages so far, namely **import substitution** from the late 50s to the mid-60s, and **export-oriented** industrialization since the late 60s.

4 3 2 Evaluation of the NEP

While it can be observed that the NEP programmes have contributed to restructuring, not all policies have been effective. For example, the Government employed three main measures to reduce poverty: new land schemes, 'in-situ' development of existing rural communities, and provision of various basic social amenities. All of the land schemes except for the ones developed under FELDA (Federal Land Development Agency) have no policies for land distribution. It observes that *in-situ* development schemes benefit landowners while ignoring the poorest such as agricultural labourers and the landless. There was failure to revitalize the cultivation of 900,000 hectares of 'idle' (abandoned agricultural) land. It was also widely reported on the lack of attention given to environmental protection, the huge bureaucracy which has emerged, the high overhead costs of most developmental projects, the 'leakages' which occur as well as patronage and political 'interference' by the 'influential' (Jomo, 1994).

Many poverty reduction programmes seek to raise productivity in the short term without considering long-term consequences, especially for resource availability, e.g. the effects of trawling on the fishery, of the Green Revolution on soil fertility and logging on the environment.

In fact in the report submitted by the NECC, it criticizes the inadequate funding of technical and vocational education as well as the high costs of educational administration. It calls for curricular reform at the tertiary level to improve graduate quality as well as versatility, and to promote the capacity to better respond to market needs (Social Assessment Group at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1990).

On NEP promulgation to achieve national unity, it was clear that the programmes have not been successful in addressing the ethnic disparities in poverty, wealth and occupations (employment) during the period. Despite considerable reduction of absolute poverty, many economists including Jomo, commented that the problem of relative poverty (deprivation) is of greater importance. Many agreed that there has been some progress in ethnic 'restructuring', yet the inter-ethnic economic disparities and the resentments they generate still persist. For instance, in the private sector, the recent official emphasis on growth and reduced role for the

state are perceived by many Bumiputeras as detrimental to their interests. By the same token, non-Bumiputeras resent official restrictions of access to tertiary education, land schemes and the public services. Further, the Indians among the non-Bumiputeras and the non-Muslims among the non-Bumiputeras have felt marginalized by the tendency to equate Bumiputeras with the Malays and non-Bumiputeras with Chinese, ignoring the particularistic interests of smaller, less influential minorities.

4.3.3 Malaysia's Economic Development Policies After 1990

In 1991, the twenty-year period of the Outline Perspective Plan (OPP) for Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP) came to an end. Even before, the NEP came to an end, the government had formed for the ensuing debate over economic development policy. In an attempt to facilitate, influence and perhaps control the debate, the government announced the formation of a National Economic Consultative Council (NECC) at the end of 1988. After more than two years of often acrimonious debate, mainly between representatives of the leading parties in the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, the NECC's came up with a rather compromised report emphasizing national unity and government accountability (Jomo, 1994).

The NECC proposal for economic policy after 1990 is called the 'Economic Policy for National development'. The proposed new policy implicitly abandoned the option of continuing the NEP beyond the period of the first Outline Perspective Plan for 1971 - 1990. While reiterating some concerns and policies associated with the NEP - especially poverty reduction and inter-ethnic economic redistribution - in broad terms it departs significantly from the NEP in various respects. It highlights issues which the NEP ignored, as well as concerns which have emerged as a consequence of the NEP, or at least in the OPP time period (1971 - 1990) associated with the NEP. Perhaps most importantly, it gave greater emphasis to growth - compared to the NEP's focus on distributive issues - and recommends some reforms especially in human resource development, to accelerate growth. Unlike the NEP, which focused primarily on inter-ethnic differences, the NECC Report also emphasized intra-ethnic, intra-sectoral and intra-regional imbalances as well as inequalities among strata and groups in society besides recommending policies to address them.

In mid-1991 the Malaysian Government announced its National Development Policy (NDP), with a ten-year Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2) for 1991-2000, followed several weeks later by the Sixth Malaysia Plan (6MP) for 1991-1995. Hence, while the OPP2 and 6MP are supposed to provide a medium-term economic policy perspective, Vision 2020 provides the long-term objectives.

4.3.4 Vision 2020 (Malaysia's Long Term Development Plan)

On 28 February 1991, two months after the end of the OPP period, Dr Mahathir Mohamed (Malaysia's Fourth Prime Minister) inaugurated the National Business Council (NBC) with a speech entitled 'Malaysia: The way Forward' in which he announced a new national objective of achieving 'fully developed country' status by the year 2020.

Vision 2020's nine main objectives may be summed up as desiring to establish

- i) a united, peaceful, integrated and harmonious Malaysian nation,
- ii) a secure, confident, respected and robust society committed to excellence
- iii) a mature, consensual and exemplary democracy,
- iv) a 'fully moral' society with citizens strongly imbued with spiritual values and the highest ethical standards,
- v) a culturally, ethically and religiously diverse, liberal, tolerant, and unified society,
- vi) a scientific, progressive, innovative, and forward-looking society,
- vii) a caring society with a family-based welfare system,
- viii) an 'economically just' society with inter-ethnic economic parity, and
- ix) a 'fully competitive' dynamic, robust, resilient and prosperous' economy

Close examination reveals that these nine objectives can be seen as reformulation and combination of the *Rukunegara*, or national Ideology and the NEP, both announced in 1970. However, the apparently minor as well as subtle differences and, more importantly, the new context are significant. Understandably, there has been some enthusiasm, especially among the non-Malays, for Mahathir's explicit speech commitment to forging a Malaysian nation (*bangsa Malaysia*) transcending existing ethnic identities and loyalties. While consistent with Mahathir's new UMNO constitution, there is little evidence of how this had been

translated into policy and practice. Whereas the Rukunegara and the NFP emphasized national unity, Vision 2020's 'developed country' goal implies a narrower, more materialistic and economic growth emphasis.

The second part of that speech on Vision 2020 deals with various economic challenges as Malaysia pursues growth, especially industrialization. Besides mentioning several well-known problems, it sums up existing economic policies as the best ones for the foreseeable future. In this sense then, unlike the NEP at the time of its inception, little of significance in Vision 2020 is really new. Besides the orchestrated official hype, its significance lies primarily in its timing (i.e. right after the end of the OPP period), its long-term (three decade) perspective and the clear shift in emphasis and priority from distribution to growth and industrialization.

In terms of growth, Vision 2020 sets an average growth target rate of 7.0 % for the next three decades. If achieved, this would almost double the GDP every decade. However, with 2.5 % population growth rate, per capita GDP would only be four times as much in 2020 compared to 1990. Whether these ambitious growth targets are realistic - in the light of Malaysia's admittedly impressive growth record - remains to be seen. The economy has diversified considerably from the colonial economic pillars of rubber and tin. Within the primary sector, petroleum and gas have raised mining's contribution, while palm oil, cocoa and pepper have made agriculture more varied. Yet, Malaysia's economic reliance on non-renewable natural resources continues to be high.

In some important ways, Vision 2020 represents a partial return of the pendulum to the relatively *laissez faire* policies during the first dozen years after Independence in 1957 from the state intervention and public sector expansion of the following decade and a half under the NEP. While not representing fundamentally new policy change, it has nonetheless made economic policies already in place more explicit, coherent and legitimate.

Whether Vision 2020 adequately addresses the main contemporary challenges faced by Malaysian society, however, is a different question. It has certainly shifted attention away from the previous narrow emphasis on inter-ethnic distributional concerns without abandoning them altogether. It has also prioritized

the challenge of late industrialization without seeming oblivious to human welfare considerations. Yet, despite a widespread desire for change and reform among Malaysians, it cannot be claimed that there is a shared vision of an alternative.

Even so, the marginalization and abandonment of distributional considerations as well as other non-economic concerns in favour of a naive growth and industrialization fetish is unlikely to resolve the complex problems continuing to divide and destabilize Malaysian society. Without stability achieved through mutually acceptable compromise, it will be difficult to ensure the socio-political stability necessary for rapid industrialization and growth. Also, as recent discussion of resource, environmental and moral issues suggests, human welfare is unlikely to be secured by economic growth alone in the future.

Needless to say, there is no universal formula for resolving such problems. Such challenges must be addressed differently at different times, and in different circumstances. Only approaches that recognize the inter-relatedness of various dimensions of national life as well as their increasingly global connections stand some chance of success. Unfortunately, despite good intentions and eloquent rhetoric, Vision 2020 is not adequate to this challenge.

On the other hand, however, Vision 2020 has successfully shifted the terms and reference points for national political and economic discourse. Growth, modernization and industrialization are clearly the new national priorities, at least for the remaining Mahathir years, but probably thereafter as well, though not necessarily with Mahathir's almost single-minded commitment. And while redistribution remains high on the agenda, the focus is mainly on consolidating and strengthening a Malay bourgeoisie, though not one hopelessly rentier in nature. Perhaps most importantly, considerable economic and cultural liberalization has been and will continue to be justified as necessary for growth (in era of globalization), which has successfully been portrayed as essential redistribution. But the buoyant economy since the late 1980s has been affected by the current Asian economic crisis and thereby, making the promises of Vision 2020 seem very remote.

4.4 The theoretical framework of this study

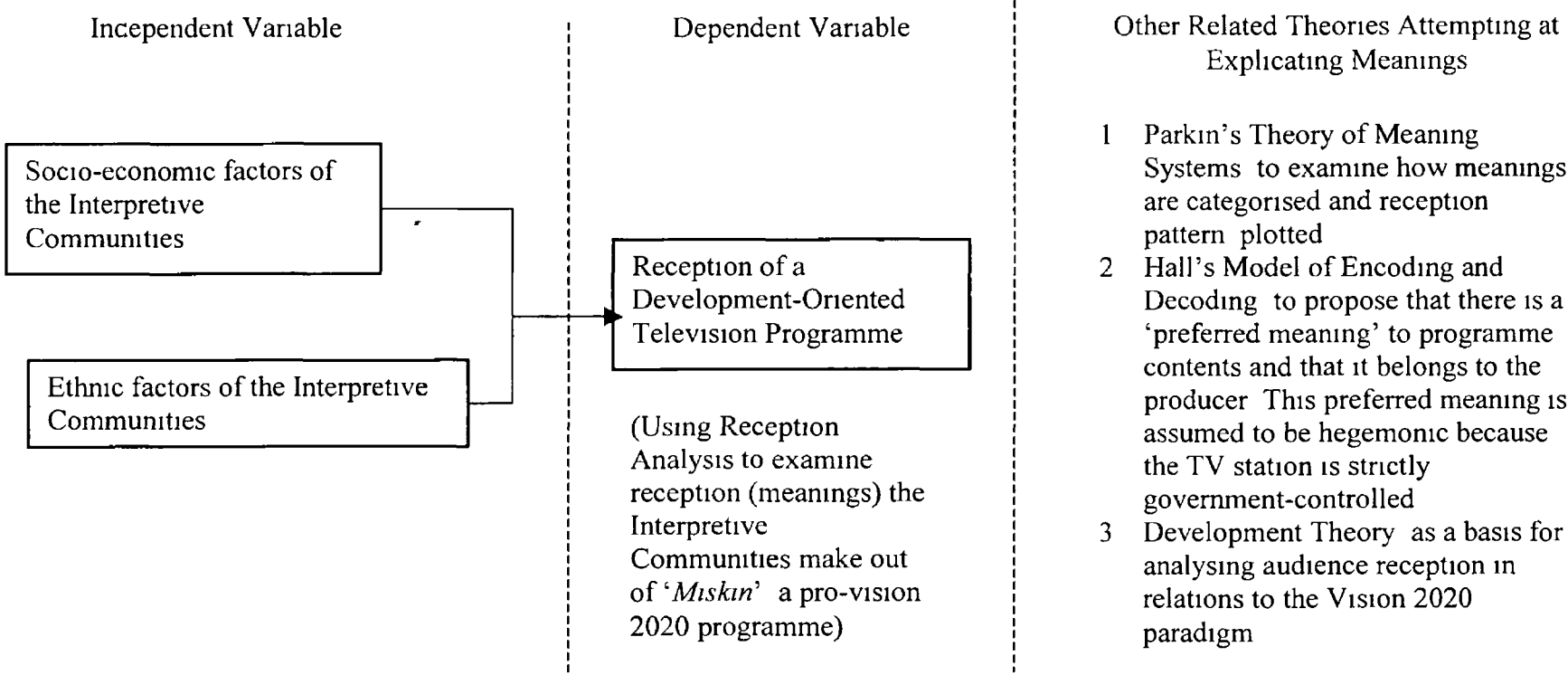
An overview of the interactions of the mentioned theories in analyzing the reception of media contents could be seen by referring to **Figure 4(a)**

Following Morley's idea we have decided to look at Reception Analysis as an approach in conducting this research. We believed that the Reception Analysis traditions has the potential to explain the multi-variant and multi-faceted process of audiences' interpretation of media contents.

Basically we could identify at least two main reasons to explain the choice of Reception Analysis. Firstly, the tradition is ethnographic, and thus it is easier to understand the audiences' world and discourses in relations to media contents. Unlike Uses and Gratifications Approach, ethnographic audience studies offer a new way (audience-cum-content analysis) of investigating audiences' media responses, which is what this study is all about. This approach is able to chart the senses audiences make of the text they encounter in everyday life. In addition, because it is cultural, it equips us with the strategies for mapping out the media's varied uses and meanings for particular audiences in particular cultural contexts. This is the area which other approaches have failed to address in an attempt to understand the audiences' behaviours in relations to media contents. The 'ethnographic turn' in audience studies is indeed an intervention in the dominant ways' of studying the audiences (Moore, 1993).

Secondly, Reception Analysis handles the question of media effects subtly and interestingly. The history of effects in mass communication started with the birth of the cultural and communication products themselves. Thus far, the dominant paradigms initiated by the North American Behavioural Scientists have based their empirical studies only on verifying the media influence on individuals, more in terms of 'observable changes found in human behaviours'. Such a framework, which the Uses and Gratifications is a part, is regarded as incomplete, because it leaves out 'the formal structure of media output' wholly untheorised (Hall, 1982). Therefore, it will be unable to deal with the wider scope of economic and cultural or even political processes involved in mass communication.

Figure 4(a) Theoretical Framework of this study



With that, the critical paradigm, which Reception Analysis is a part, is a worth while alternative because it stresses on 'signification' rather than direct 'behavioural changes' in the definition of effects. For example, the critical communication theorists such as Jensen (1991) would draw on semiotics by looking at the text as a complex and structured arrangement of signs rather than an empty vehicle for the transmission of information. The receivers on the other hand, will be interpreted as 'readers' who involve themselves with the world of meaning-making.

A short note on the critical paradigm would enlighten further why Reception Analysis is a more suitable choice than the American-based media theories in explaining 'effects'. Although the critical paradigm had earned its name since the 1960's (the impetus of which came from the European Social theory), it was only in the 1980's that it found its popularity fully-engraved. This was marked by the significant model of text-reader relationship debate brought by the members of the Media Group at Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) who criticised the concept of 'textual determinism' of the Screen theory. Screen theory, according to Morley (1992), neglected the interplay of other discourses on the text/reader encounter.

In their analyses of the television and its audiences (for example, Morley's, "*Nationwide*" study, 1980), the CCCS members recognised the text has the 'power' to propose and prefer particular ideological readings, while the readers of the text are regarded as active 'decoders' who will not necessarily accept the encoded meanings and positions which are on offer. This democratic approach often allows readers to negotiate or even refuse the offered meanings, and much of the decision depends on the socioeconomic and cultural placing the readers occupy. Moores (1993) commented that the CCCS's encoding and decoding theory promoted by Hall (1977)) explained the gap between 'readings inscribed in the text and 'audiences' who interact with it. It is this dialogic encounter between the text and the audiences, he said, that moves the qualitative audience researchers, in particular, the reception analysts, to explore

The critical school reminds that the Uses and the Gratifications Approach be treated with a caution. Although both parties do reject the passive audience theory, the differences between them really outweigh this apparent similarity.

Whereas Morley, Hall, and other CCCS researchers were working toward a sociologically-grounded semiotics of the text-reader dialogue, Gratifications researchers concerned themselves with how individuals use the media to satisfy their needs and achieve their personal goals (Katz et al , 1974) The former is a social theory of subjectivity, power and meaning construction, while the latter, is a psychological conception of human personality which focuses narrowly on the media's functions for the individuals The bottom line is, gratification's research overplays the audiences' freedom and ignore ideology, and hence, media effects are not identified accurately

Above all, the development of the audience-cum-content analysis of Reception theory is very fair in an attempt to discover generally the use and impact of media contents, which is the gist of all effects research, and of which this study is generally a about The autonomy of the sociocultural environmental element and the audiences' act of interpretation of media text, which are accountable for the production of social meanings to the text, allow the examination on the difference in meaning by the different ethnic groups be carried out in this study As a matter of fact, it has become the main objective of this study, to observe 'what' sort of meanings the different ethnic groups make out the selected development-oriented television programme, and 'what' has accounted for those difference in meanings Out of such an investigation we would expect to learn, in Jensen and Rosengren's (1990) term, the 'very processes of reception' The reception perspective for this particular study, thus, may be summarised in a statement, as follows

that the social and discursive development-oriented meanings, central in reception' are the qualities assigned by the multi-ethnic Malaysian audiences, who act as the interpretative communities, to the ideologically-coded development-oriented television programme, produced by the television, whose prime role is to reproduce and present the government-constructed development ideologies, in order to ensure that the present hegemonic order is maintained This will subsequently be used to define the scope of television effects, assumed to be more significant in societies with a dominant culture, such as Malaysia The construction of the present state hegemony manifested through the national development policy, has to be understood from the political and the historical conditions the country has been placed in, that serves as the research context within which reception is analysed

This theoretical framework is used as a guide in our empirical work. It is important that this study be carried out so that the work of Morley (1980) and Katz and Liebes (1984) could be replicated to a certain extent using a different cultural setting. In that sense, reception theory may be modified or expanded to include the new setting.

Any cultural-based communication study would certainly leave behind at least two types of implication: first, that which relates to the socioeconomic and political system governing the social practices; and second, that which relates to the roles and performance of the media institutions. With regards to the first type, this study is specifically interested in knowing, what kinds of implication these variations in meaning, especially those that are formed outside the dominant social order, would have on the nation-building programmes envisaged through the strategies contained in the Vision 2020. The point is, whether the contradictories are strong enough to steer an immediate change, or are capable only of causing a long term change, to the existing social practices, to an extent that the government has to manipulate the economic and political practices to suit the needs of the people. Contradictory meanings caused by the oppositional decoding, shall be interpreted as an act of resistance to the existing social order (Steiner, 1988), or the present ideologies (Grossberg and Stack, 1985, Hall, 1980). In this case, could such an act of resistance, be read as a form of a threat to national security?

With regard to the second type, this study is interested in knowing if the difference in meaning, is capable of causing a change in the existing roles and practices of the television as a mass communication medium. The television, in complying to the needs of both the government who regulates, and the multi-ethnic society who seeks the television contents for its informational and entertainment values, is expected to be sensitive enough towards these needs. This is to avoid the television from being labelled as biased, or unprofessional.

Some of the theoretical questions that need to be answered by this investigation include, whether the television can still hold on to the classic role of fostering development in this country and hence setting itself free from the socio-political conditions governing the society? Or, can the television still act objectively and professionally despite the attachment?

In the course of theorising both the media and the audience institutions in this country we believe that the theoretical properties of Reception Analysis have a great potential in answering the important research questions. But a full insight into the question of reception of development-oriented television programme in this study could not be obtained without the application of other related theories. As described earlier in this chapter we have identified several other related concepts/frameworks that we know have great potentials in signifying the meanings produced by our interpretative communities.

4.5 The research framework of this study

A research framework containing the important variables derived from the various theories discussed in the previous section was then developed.

The issue of reception in this study starts with the question of 'meanings' an outcome of the groups' interaction with the programme content of "*Miskin*" or poverty. In the production of "*Miskin*" we were told that the TV Station (TV3) referred mostly to the government and its agencies as its source of information and ideas. This is because poverty is topic of national interest and how poverty is handled has a lot to do with the government and its development policies.

The government is the authority in the eradication of poverty programmes as well as in the construction of the national development policy, in which, eradication of poverty is apart. The government's activities and decisions usually influence most of the professional activities and decisions of the television so much so that the programme contents and messages are often mapped in accordance with the aspiration of the government. At this point, the television station often comes into "conflict" with those who decide for the television.

In this country the television is supposed to play the role of an ideological reproduction apparatus whereby it reproduces the ideologies of the government. Using the dominant code system all programmes are negotiated and transmitted to the public. Upon contact the ideology-loaded messages are expected to trigger the unconscious level of the audiences' mind in the process of affecting them. The experience of "*Miskin*" is not different.

The different ethnic groups that made up the respondents were regarded as our interpretative communities, and the meanings that they produce from the interpretative work, are subsequently called as the 'communities of meanings'. The term 'communities' actually assembles a community with its own sociocultural qualities of discourse or reservoir of experience that the members have acquired through out their life. The strategy that the different ethnic groups use in interpreting the programme is the sociocultural codes that they have learned, none other from their own surrounding or social system that they have been brought into from birth. Hence the groups' background experiences are the main sources of their decoding codes.

Meanings acquired from the interpretative communities are not usually empirically worthy unless comparative analysis is carried out between the analysis of the programme text and the analysis of the audiences' decoding of that text. The outcome of that comparative work may produce meanings that are analytical enough but not necessarily social in character, until unless they are referred to the macro social system that constitute the context and the environment of the communication. In other words the analytical meanings have yet to be 'interpreted' in context of the social system in which the groups live before they can be described as contextual or social in meanings. In our case, the prevailing Malaysian conditions would be the background against which the analysis would finally be made. In order to attain the social perspective of those meanings, Parkin's model of meaning system would be applied and these meanings would be categorised dominant, negotiated or oppositional--each having its own theoretical and practical implication.

The pattern of meanings resulting from the mapping out of the groups' responses could assist us in understanding the different types-of effect (mainly ideological) that the development-oriented programme "*Miskin*" is able to offer to the society. Therefore a dominant decoding position should be read as the society being receptive of the dominant ideologies or hegemony. The reverse is also true. From the media point of view the dominant slant in decoding would result in the media as being functionally effective in disseminating the dominant or hegemonic ideologies.

What is more crucial in this study is the implication of the 'negotiated-going to-oppositional' type of effect experienced by the different ethnic groups. When this is the reality, we have a reason to be alarmed because the problem could originate from either the television or the structure of the socioeconomic and political system or both.

Finally, the reception analysis study is to be conducted on a premise that dictates the Malaysian society social systems. This system represents the territory within which this research is confined. More significantly, the system serves as the context of reception and the source of origin to the social *codes* for the interpretation of the development-oriented television programme by the different ethnic groups who make up the interpretative communities of this study. A general research framework model for reception of development-oriented television programmes in multi-ethnic societies could be referred to in **Figure 4(b)**. Framework used into our study, a research model for reception of "*Miskin*" would be now seen as in **Figure 4(c)**.

Figure 4 (b) A General Research Framework Model for Reception Analysis of Development-Orientated Television Programme in Multi-Ethnic Societies

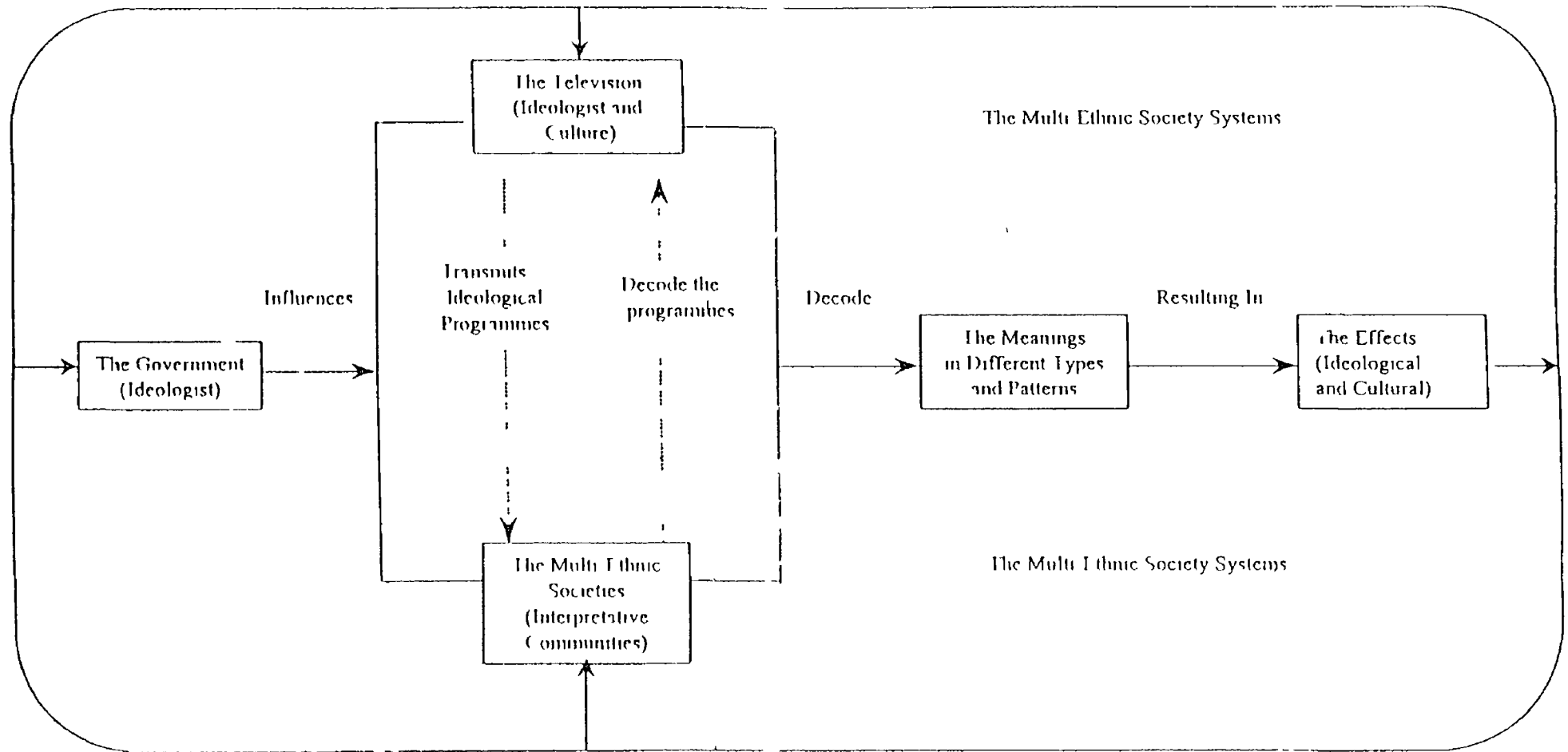
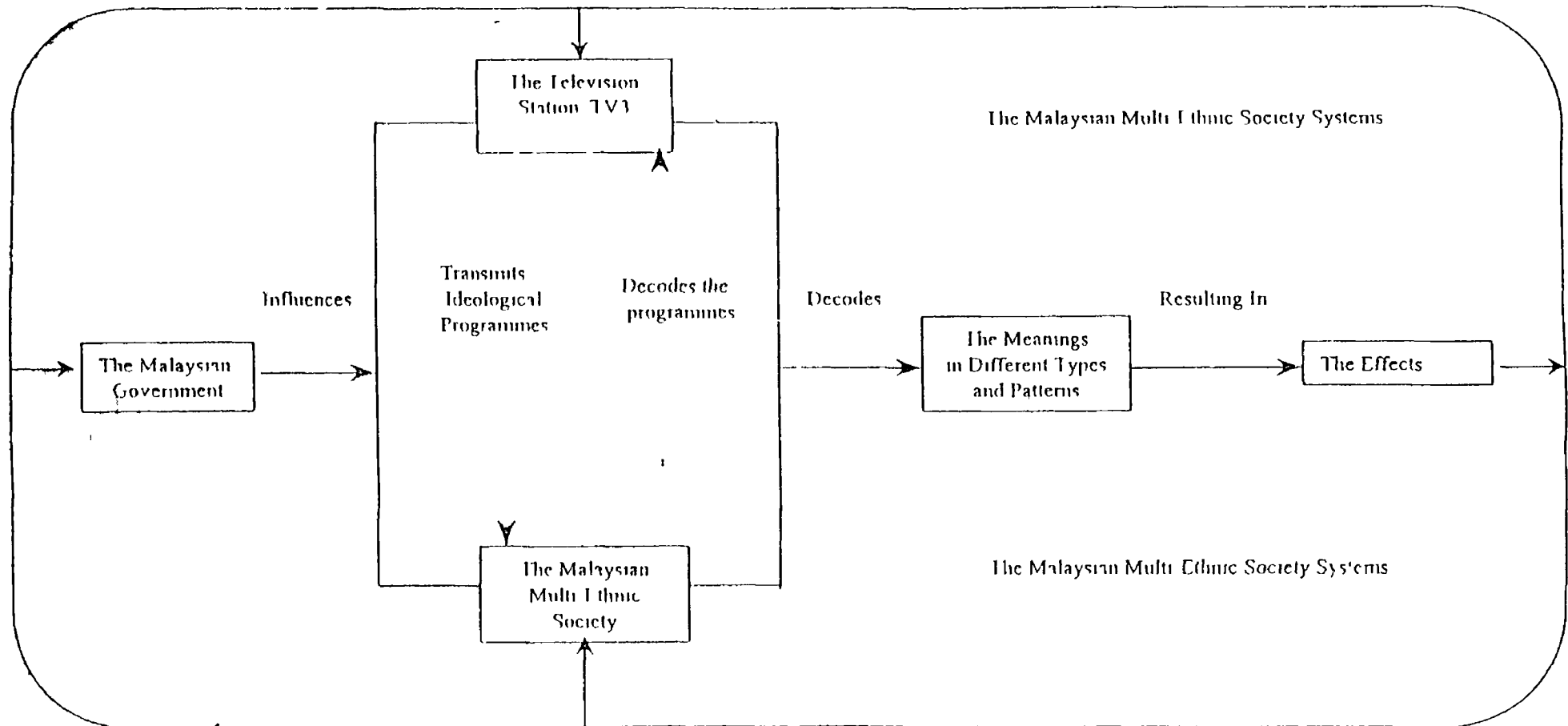


Figure 4 (c) A Research Framework Model for Reception of 'Miskin'
in the Malaysia Multi-Ethnic Society



CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.0 Introduction

Like many other researchers in the field of Social Sciences, we were faced with the problem of choosing the most suitable approach among the possible alternatives in how our study should be conducted. We were concerned about the fact that 'different approaches could yield different findings'. Knowledge on the available research paradigms therefore became a precondition to deciding of which particular method to use.

According to Easter-Smith et al., (1991), research traditions can be categorised into two: positivism and phenomenology. They argued that if a study aims at explaining people's view about 'something' rather than 'what the thing' is, the social constructions approach would be more appropriate. This is similar to what the phenomenology paradigm advocated, whereby, the world and reality are not seen as that objective and exterior, but are socially constructed and given meaning by people (Husserl, 1946).

We believe that our reception process is said to be socially and culturally constructed. This is in line with the idea of many of the strong advocates of Social Constructionism (Ang, 1985, Morley, 1980, Liebes and Katz, 1991, Radway, 1984), who claimed that the key factors in reception lies in the human beliefs, attitudes and values of the decoder.

Our study, which is concerned at how the different ethnic groups construct meaning from the selected development-oriented television programme, was indeed biased towards this research philosophy. The concept of development that the groups wanted to reach in the programme was believed to have lived in their social and cultural discourses. A qualitative research design via the process of an in-depth interview, was therefore needed because this technique could effectively help us in understanding the processes the different ethnic groups interpret development from the programme, "*Miskin*".

5.1 The research design

The study was conducted in three stages. The *first* stage was an 'exploratory study on the television programme' where we interviewed the television professionals for issues that might be relevant as input to our structured questionnaire for the focus group sessions. The *second* stage was the 'focus group interviews' in relation to the programme they watch. The *final* stage was where we conducted 'personal interviews' with people from the government and other related organisations, including those from the various political parties. The aim was to get information reflecting their opinions on what they think about the programme and the rightful role of television in developing Malaysia.

5.1.1 The exploratory study

While the main technique to conduct the research was *using focus group interviews*, nevertheless, we need to get the correct direction from the relevant parties. We approached TV3 and interviewed the producer of *Majalah 3* with the main objective of trying to find out the rationale for producing the programme "*Miskin*". We also interviewed RTM with regards to producing development-oriented type of television programme. The input obtained greatly assisted us in putting up a somewhat structured questionnaire that was to be used during the focus group interviews.

5.1.2 The Focus Group studies

Since the general aim of this study is to examine the ways the different ethnic groups receive or decode development messages, that has directed us to adopt the phenomenological rather than the traditional positivist philosophical approach. The construction of our focus group has basically been influenced by the strong qualities of the phenomenological approach, in terms of how, a) the researcher plays his role, b) sampling technique and sampling size are determined, and c) fieldwork is executed.

i) Researcher involvement

The concept that 'the researcher and the subjects of research are partners' (Easterby-Smith, 1991) are well supported in this study. An input from the concept of 'co-operative inquiry' (Reason, 1988) into communication research methodology has also been useful to this study. The belief that all people have the ability to be self, to choose how they will act, and to give meaning to their own experiences, fitted into the needs of our reception study. Our research participants were actually seen as our important 'sources' from which our theoretical research questions were derived and decided upon.

Our study was in a way a product of the marriage of the above concepts. We worked closely with the focus group participants who became our respondents. Empirically, the participants were required to inform us the 'readings' they make from the chosen programme content. But, such 'readings' could only be made possible by the 'questioning' efforts the researcher make in the whole process of the enquiry. We realised that the input from the participants had made us decide what 'else' that was worth researching. In other words, from the semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix 1), efforts were also made to go deeper into other issues raised up by the participants. Thus, partnership between the researcher and the subjects of study did exist as components of the empirical work.

ii) Sampling and sampling size

In our case, since our main aim was to observe the processes the different ethnic groups 'read' a television programme, therefore, sampling had to be carried out across ethnic line. *Ethnic segmentation*, hence, became our prime technique in determining our focus group samples. We believed that recruitment of participants made along ethnic line could significantly account for the 'varied meanings' the multi-ethnic Malaysian society makes in the reception of the developmental messages from our selected television programme. Inevitably, therefore, samples for this study were drawn from each of the main sub-ethnic groups, namely, the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians (all from the Malay Peninsular), and one indigenous group of Malaysians in Borneo, the Sarawakians.

Strictly speaking, the differences between Malays, Chinese and Indians in the Peninsular Malaysia are not 'racial' as such, but are more social and cultural in nature (S Husin Ali, 1984). Comparatively, the Malays are least urbanised with less than a fifth of the urban areas, while the Chinese, with about a half of their number, seem to be most urbanised. As for the Indians, they are in between, a little over a third of them living in towns. As it is, not only is it possible to identify the various ethnic group according to physical appearance, but each group tends to manifest different cultural traits and norms which are easily discernible. As described earlier (Chapter 2), the Malays are Muslims, many of them adhere faithfully to the fundamental teachings of Islam. The way they dress up and keep their diet also reflects their religious beliefs and other cultural norms. While the Chinese are associated mainly with the beliefs in Buddhism and Taoism, the Indians adhere strictly to the teachings of Hinduism.

Although it is granted that the Malays and the Chinese, and as much as the Indians, do form distinct and separate entities, intra- and inter-ethnic group relations do exist (S Husin Ali, 1984). But, these relations are more of 'plural society- oriented'. According to Furnivall (1984) who first formulated the concept, a plural society exists when "different sections of the community live side by side but separately, within the same political unit". In this country, when political parties were formed at the time when Malaya was about to be given Independence by the British, there was a necessity to form parties according to the different ethnic groups' needs. Thus, UMNO was formed for the Malays, MCA for the Chinese, and MIC for the Indians. The ethnic make-up of Malaya (before Independence) and the separate ideological and political mobilisation of the different ethnic groups were an important factor that militated against the long-term working class solidarity (P Ramasamy, 1984).

For instance, it is interesting to note that the Malays are represented in two opposite political parties, namely, UMNO and PAS. But, that does not mean that the Malays will think differently when it comes to the issue of development. They only differ when it comes to the issue of how development is to be implemented, Islamic-structured obvious or otherwise. Being an Islamic based political party, PAS would not tolerate anything for Islam. Hence, from the point of view of development, the various ethnic groups were believed to have based their thinking along ethnic lines (Sanusi Osman, 1984, p. 50).

It is for these reasons that we have not selected other demographic factors (like, gender, age, profession) of our interpretive communities. In the Malaysia's multi-racial population, people tend to think along ethnic lines as opposed to gender or profession. In other words, we assure or hypothesize that people from different professions but of the same ethnic background will tend to have the same opinion towards development issues. This is because, different ethnic groups have different development needs to be addressed and solved. However, such might not be true of a multi-racial population of the US, as a comparison, where people are more individualistic and able to rationalise arguments and development needs beyond ethnic lines. Historical factors do make Malaysians' needs different from that of the other nations'. Hence, the idea that groups for our sample should constitute, for example, of women or profession from different ethnic groups, need not necessarily add far greater validity to any conclusions out of the study.

Malaysia's economic excellence in the past twenty years or so has affected in some way or other, the society's socio-cultural components and practices. Great attempts have been seen in making individuals' achievements free from any racial influence but intellectual and professional merits. The question is what is the extent of this objectivity? Being a country that is being dominated socially, culturally and politically by one race, could this objectivity be raised at all? In other words, can class consciousness one day emerge to be a more important determining factor than ethnic consciousness in explaining reception of developmental messages as the country develops further? It is also been the intention of this to see if class consciousness has now developed into a significant determining factor in accounting for the varied nature of reception among the Malaysian society, in particular, the decoding pattern of our multi-ethnic focus group participants.

For that purpose, this study formally opted for 'income segmentation' and 'ethnic' segmentation as the criteria for our sampling strategy. Thus, when groups were formed to reflect the three socio-economic representation, they were also to represent the different groups found in the society. The income category is in accordance to the Malaysian norms of defining income category.

Twelve (12) groups were formed for the *four* sub-ethnic groups. However, the Malays and the Sarawak Indigenous had an extra group each, which made the total number of groups as, fourteen (14). The rationale for choosing an extra group among the Malays was based on two reasons. Firstly, the Malays who are the politically dominant race are significantly divided in two important Malay-based political parties, UMNO and PAS. Although the strength of PAS could be seen only in Kelantan, the party's influence in the country is not as correspondingly "small", because effectively, PAS managed to break the Malays' solidarity within the country. Therefore, political affiliation among the Malays certainly is a factor that can be used to account for the way the politically divided Malays see development-oriented programmes.

The fact that development in this country is politically-linked, makes it more appropriate to form two Malay focus groups, one supporting UMNO, the dominant political party, and the other, supporting PAS, the Malay opposition party. Secondly, since the majority of the Malays are still found in the rural, the members of the extra group for our sample were recruited from a village in Kelantan.

The decision on forming an extra focus group from the Sarawak indigenous category was based on two reasons. Firstly, because the Sarawak indigenous society is made of many different sub-indigenous groups, a line of division was conveniently made between the Sarawak Malay and the Non-Sarawak Malay Indigenous. Hence, both the sub-ethnic groups were represented in this study. Secondly, the students' group representing the educated members of the society, posed no problem with the language of instruction of the fieldwork, which are *Bahasa Melayu* and English, while at the same time they represent a captured group of the study subjects. Hence, we obtained one group of Sarawak Malay students and one group the Non-Sarawak Malay students. A summary of the interpretive communities of this study is shown in **Table 5 (a)**.

Table 5(a) The Interpretive Communities showing the Ethnic-Income Relationship

	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Sarawak	Total
High-income • professional	1	1	-	1	3
Middle-income • Clerical/technical • Teachers • University students	- - 1	1 - 1	1 - 1	- 2 -	2 2 3
Low-income • Farmers • Labourers	2 -	- -	- 1	1 -	3 1
Total	4	3	3	4	14

Since our study was ‘not’ aimed at achieving a ‘generalisation’ or ‘validity’ effects as that of research in the positivist type, our sample size may be considered small (85 participants). Each group ranged from, as little as, five (5) to ten (10). Basically, recruitment of participants was quite difficult and time consuming, unless they were taken from a ‘captured audience’, such as students. Our experience in forming groups from the university or college students was less hazardous than those from the public. To avoid from having student participants who are too familiar with each other, participants were recruited from different classes or different academic years. A comprehensive account of the profile of the focus groups is presented in **Table 5(b)**.

In order to ensure that some form of ‘representation’ of population is achieved, focus group participants were recruited from various parts of the country. This is also to make sure that the groups inherit sufficient ‘variability’ to account for the variations in decoding. Please refer to **Figure 5(a)**, illustrating the focus group locations on the map of Malaysia.

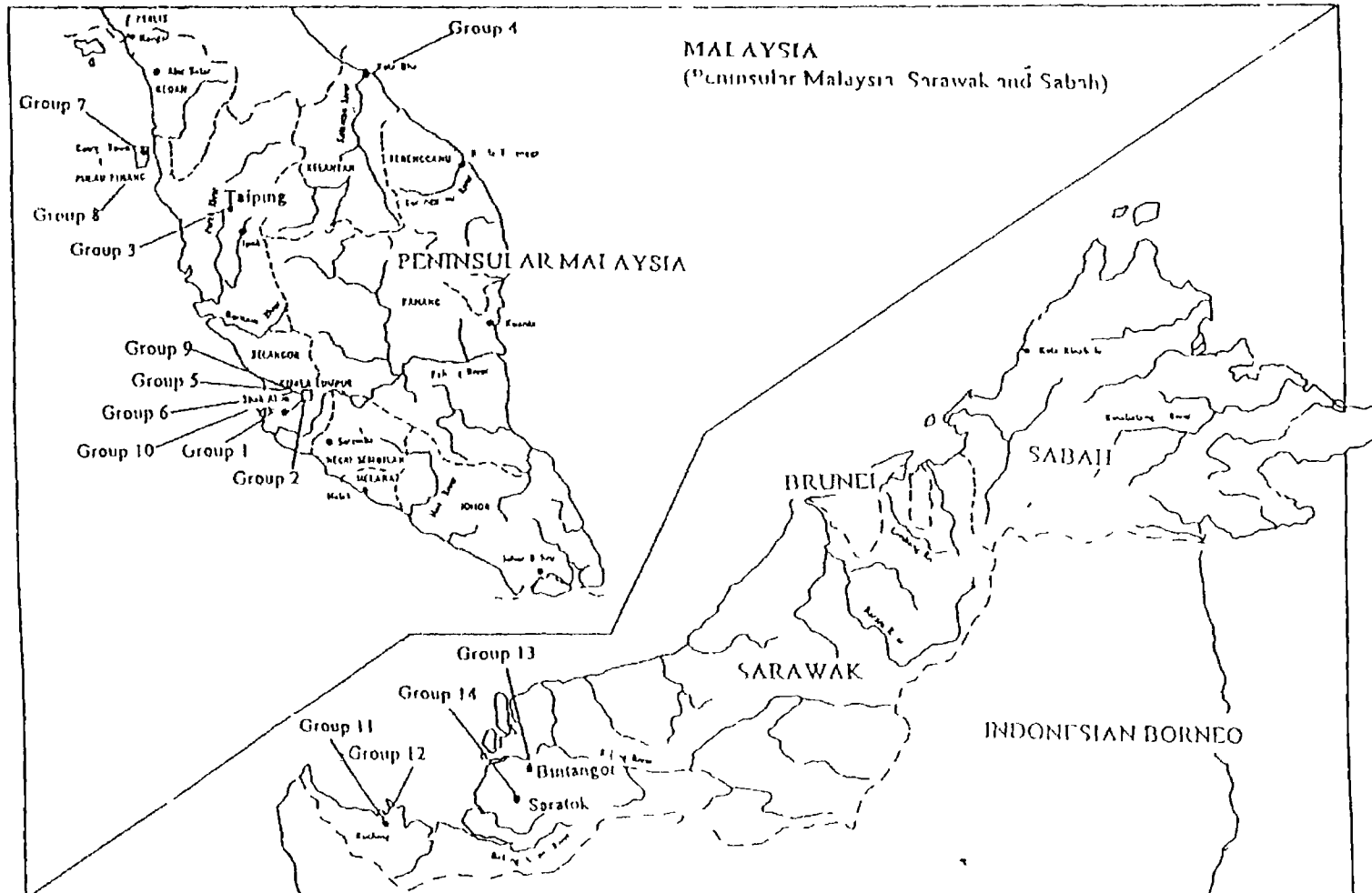
Table 5(b) A Profile of the Focus Groups

Ethnic Group	Location	Profile of Groups	Size of Group
<u>Malays</u>			
Group 1	Shah Alam Selangor	Professional working in various organisations (public & private), 2 women 5 men, aged 25 – 35, high income category (HC)	7
Group 2	UPM, Serdang Selangor	University students doing Agri-Business degree course, 3 women 5 men, aged 22 – 30, middle income category (MC)	8
Group 3	Taiping, Perak	Small-scale farmers, mainly rubber-tapers and padi planters, 3 women 5 men, 27 – 50, low income category (LC)	8
Group 4	Kota Bharu, Kelantan	Small-scale farmers, mainly padi planters and tobacco growers, 3 women 6 men, 35 – 45, (LC)	9
<u>Chinese</u>			
Group 5	MAS, Kuala Lumpur	Professional from an airline company, all men, 35 – 40 (HC)	6
Group 6	UPM, Serdang Selangor	University students doing Business Admin Degree course, 1 woman 5 men, 22 – 25 (MC)	6
Group 7	USM, Pulau Pinang, Pulau Pinang	Clerical staff, 3 women 4 men, 30 – 38, (MC)	7

cont / Table 5(b)

<u>Indians</u>			
Group 8	USM, Pulau Pinang, Pulau Pinang	Technical staff, all men, 27 – 35, (MC)	7
Group 9	UPM, Serdang Selangor	University students doing Accounting degree course, 2 women 4 men, 22-25, (MC)	6
Group 10	KGPA, Kuala Lumpur	Gardeners and cleaners, 1 woman 4 men, 27 – 35, (LC)	5
<u>Sarawak Indigenous</u>			
Group 11	Kuching, Sarawak	Professional from various organizations (Public & Private), all men, 35 – 40, (HC)	6
Group 12	BLTC, Kuching	Teacher training students, Sarawak Malays, 4 women 5 men, 20 – 23, (MC)	9
Group 13	RTC, Bintangor	Teacher training students, Non-Malay Indigenous, like the Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan etc , 2 women 5 men, 20 – 23, (MC)	7
Group 14	Long house at Saratok	Small-scale farmers, Iban, 2 women 8 men, 27 – 45, (LC)	10

Figure 5 (a) Map Showing the Locations of the Focus Groups Interviews



iii) The fieldwork

Our study opted for 'in-depth' focus group interviews as adopted by Morley (1980). Although it is not really a 'typical' ethnographic method of inquiry, but the data obtained were sufficient to meet the objectives of this study. The comparative analysis procedure carried out between the examination of the programme text and the analytical response of the participants towards that text made our inquiry a scientific and an empirical one. As a result, the decoding of our participants, was not totally being determined by the participants' own free judgement, discourse or opinion but guided by a certain amount of 'closure' resulting from the work of textual or genre conventions contained in the structure of the texts. This was the essence of the 'preferred' reading theory claimed by Hall (1973).

Proponents of empirical and critical research tradition argued that the 'media audiences encounter' used in the process of collecting qualitative data could still be regarded as ethnographic, because the data presented are acquired through the similar in-depth, open-ended interviews, instead of the 'self reporting' of the questionnaire-type of data-collection method.

5.2 The empirical work

The use of qualitative data in this reception study is backed by past research works, such as those of Morley (1980, 1992), Ang (1985, 1990), Jensen (1990a), and Hojer (1990), to name a few. For examples, the contribution from Morley (1980) which made a significant debut on the stage of reception studies shows the importance of qualitative data in examining reception of media consumers. Ang (1990), who championed the issue that hegemonic can also be determined through the popular culture, suggested that the critical ethnography proposed in the cultural studies tradition, offers an appropriate way of analysing reception. Jensen (1990a) in particular, had determined that a social action methodology should be used for studying 'interpretative communities', the new concept given to media audiences. Hojer (1990) commented that there is a need to problematise both the gathering of reception data and the analysis of such data.

However, reception studies traditionalists reminded that there are conceptual considerations or preconditions that media researchers have to be aware about because these factors help to bridge the audiences and the media content. Factors, such as, mass communication is regarded as a meaning production behaviour, media contents are ideological, media usage is situational, and specific genre conventions in the programme content can inform the way audiences decode the subject matter, and as a result of which, a combined analysis of textual structures and audiences' responses on the same text had to be used, and the decoders' competence required in reception is just a generalised one instead of the linguistic-type of competence, altogether they form as sources to the formulation of our research questions.

5.2.1 The procedure for analysing the empirical work

The objectives of the study are expected to be obtained from two levels of analysis: the groups-programme level, and the relationship between the 'meanings' raised by the groups against the relevant issue in the Vision 2020.

The first level has been commonly referred to as 'micro' analysis, while the latter is known as 'macro' analysis. This tradition ensures that reception analysis is approached socially and culturally and therefore, has a broader socio-cultural theoretical framework to work on. Ang (1990), acknowledging the critiques from Morris (1988), suggested that reception should not stop at the media-audience encounter but should address the differentiated meaning and significance of specific reception patterns in articulating social relations of power. The conflict-ridden reception of Salman's Rushdie's novel "*The Satanic Verses*" was used as a good example, in which the clash between the world wide interpretative communities have resulted in worldwide consequences. This shows that an understanding of reception of a certain media messages, certainly requires an understanding of the structural and historical aspects of the society social system where the media are a part. Media effects thus, should not be interpreted to occur only at that the meanings the receivers make during the process of decoding but beyond and above to include a wider social framework.

The objectives of this study have been formulated around one key theoretical assumption from the Reception Analysis theory, that is, '*the same media content may be decoded in many different ways by many different individuals*'. In other words, the different ethnic groups taken in this study may decode the same development-oriented television programme in several different ways. At this point, reception may best be understood to be only a mere psychological process. To be more meaningful and realistic, the problematic was then expanded to inscribe the large-scale, structural and historical relations of power in Malaysia, so that reception would be accepted more as a socio-cultural and a political phenomenon. With that, any forms of contradictory meaning resulting from such a reception event could therefore be read as a sign of 'uneasiness' to the practice of hegemony in the society.

In this study, the different meanings were termed as 'ideological themes'. They were judged as 'dominant', 'negotiated' or 'oppositional'. Dominant means the meaning is in agreement with the dominant ideology, while negotiated refers to meanings that are in agreement with the dominant ideology but partially reflect the given preferred meaning when personal interests are affected. Oppositional works in an opposite manner where respondents recognise the dominant ideology but choose to interpret the messages that works in a directly opposite way (Parkin, 1972). As a result of the categorisation process, a pattern on the groups' decoding of the programme "*Miskin*" could then be drawn.

However, having a pattern on decoding would not mean much to the study unless we ask, 'what does this pattern mean to the whole issue of reception?' In other words, we have to interpret the pattern if we wish to know what sorts of attitude or discourse the groups have towards the development-oriented ideological issues brought up in the programme.

Since several groups were involved in the study, and as they were characteristically known by both their income and ethnic background, a 'reception matrix' of the groups from the socio-economic versus ethnic perspectives must be obtained if a holistic view of the reception was to be thoroughly understood. For that purpose, several comparative analyses on the sample groups' decoding were conducted to look for information from the two perspectives, the different socio-economic background and also their ethnic factor. In particular, we wish to know

if their income levels make any difference in their perception of the same programme content. We also wish to know how the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians and the Sarawakians think of poverty or alternatively, development, in this country.

But again, as Malaysians, these groups are socially and politically categorised as the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra, through which, we believed that their behaviours and attitudes towards development could be made significantly different. Subsequently data could be drawn from the perspective of Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra too.

What turned out to be a more valuable information than the pattern of the groups' decoding matrix itself, was finding on the many ideological themes that caught the attention of the groups. This finding then served as the *agenda* for the next and more abstract and social level of analysis. With that, the reception analysis circuit for the development-oriented television programme "*Miskin*", is completed, microscopically and macroscopically.

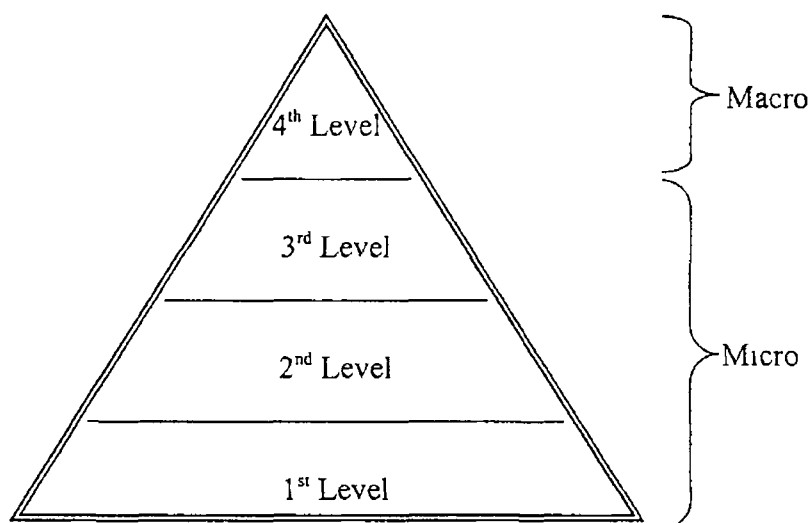
The hypothesised model of hierarchy of decoding and the multi-layered model of decoding analysis used in this study, are shown **Figure 5(b)** and **Figure 5(c)** consecutively.

The diagram on Figure 5(b) shows that the general process of decoding analysis in any multi-ethnic society could possibly be done in an hierarchical basis. Several different levels of analysis could be carried out, the last of which should act as the most abstract because the perspective is aiming at looking at reception macroscopically, that is, in context of the society social system, the site of reception. The first few levels refer to a series of decoding analysis in context of the relationship between the audience groups and the programme content itself.

Applying this model into our study, Figure 5(c) shows how an analysis of a development-oriented television programme could be carried out in the Malaysian society. While, the first three of the analysis levels were used to analyse the groups' decoding against the programme, "*Miskin*", the last was to match the groups' perception against the most relevant challenge of the Vision 2020.

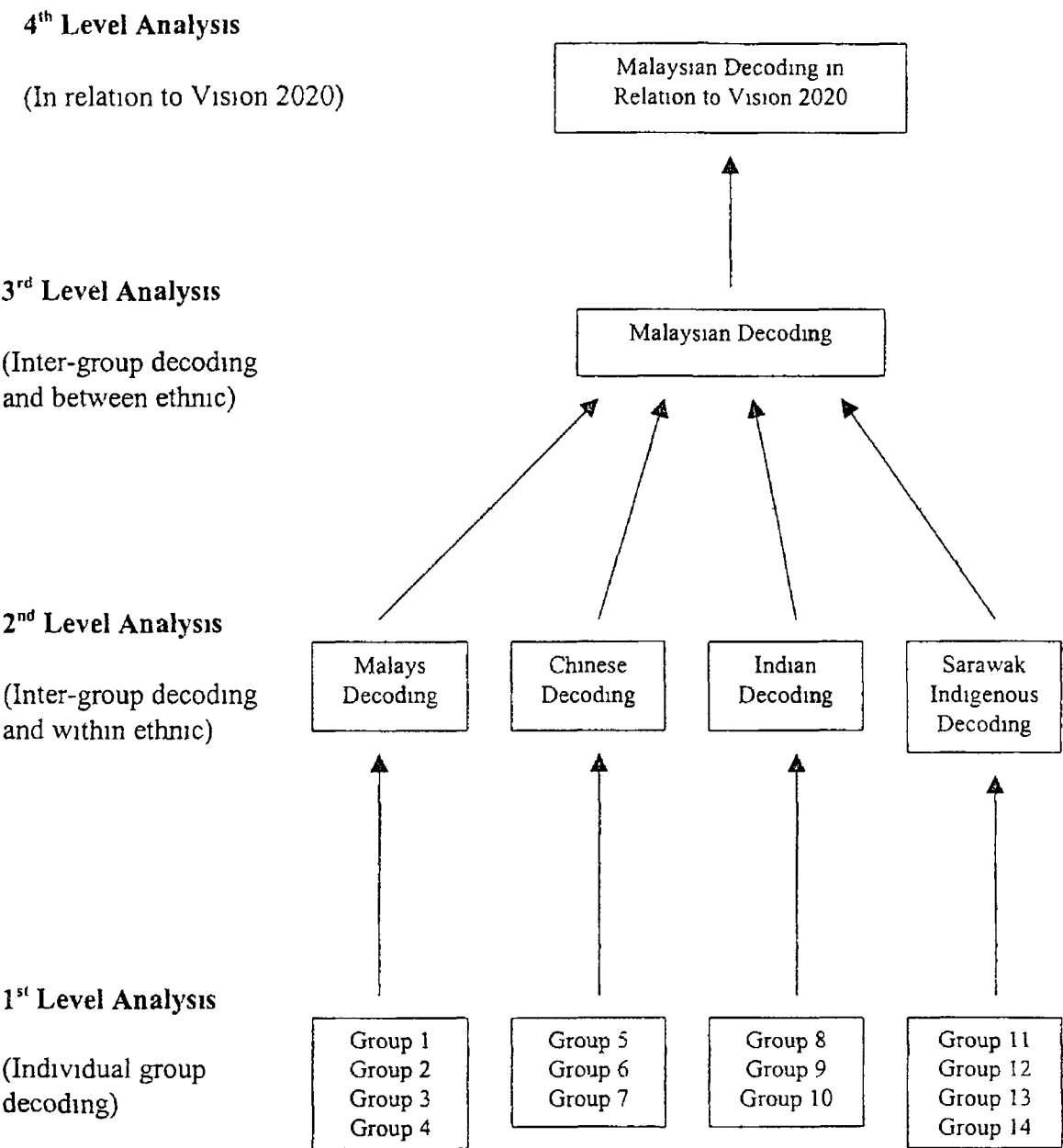
Nevertheless, all of the above played around with volumes of non-standard data as they were the results of in-depth interviews. The Grounded Theory advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) hence, was chosen as the basis for our analytical process because it deals well with such data. Unlike the traditional Content Analysis, the Grounded Theory was preferred because its technology is capable of developing theories or insights about the ways the different ethnic groups interpret the selected television programme content. The popular comparative method used by looking at the same event from many different settings or situations allows us to generate themes. When they were sorted out, a decoding pattern emerged. With Grounded Theory, a substantive insight about reception pattern of the multi-ethnic Malaysian audience could thus be developed and formalised.

Figure 5(b) The Hierarchy of Decoding Analysis in Multi Ethnic Societies



1 st Level	Analysis of individual group decoding
2 nd Level	Analysis of inter-group decoding within ethnics
3 rd Level	Analysis of inter-group decoding, between ethnics
4 th Level	Analysis of multi-ethnic decoding in relation to the contemporary social and cultural structure

Figure 5(c) The Hierarchy of Decoding Analysis of a Development-Oriented Television Programme in the Malaysian Society



5.2.2 Recruiting the focus groups participants

We used the focus group technique as a mean of collecting our research data because it has the right qualities needed to fulfil our research objectives. Krueger (1988) summed up focus groups as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest, and in a non-threatening environment. Such a technique is applicable in a research tradition with an aim of getting as much free information as possible. In particular, the in-depth focus group interviews and discussions used in this study were done to retrieve the complex picture about how the participants 'read' or decode "*Miskin*". Using focus group interviews in reception has been overwhelming.

Prior to the conduct of the focus group sessions, we took effort in controlling the processes from the common pitfalls. These include, the lack of skills in moderating, in particular, in terms of imposition of personal ideas upon any group, and the domination of discussion from one strong character or characters that will cause a small enough sample to become even smaller (Curran, 1990, Hojer, 1990, Schlesinger, 1992). We were also aware of the recruitment problematic that could have been caused by the recruitment of friends, neighbours, relatives (Hojer, 1990), or students (Morley, 1992), especially those drawn from a local university directory (Jensen, 1990a). It was said that it would produce a sample that is typical of, in MacGregor's and Morrison's words, "professors of drama, music, English literature and communication".

Nevertheless, we have to admit that pragmatically, we were faced with limitations due to unavoidable circumstances, such as, time constraint or undue hardship in getting participants from the open society. Malaysians were generally very shy and would prefer not to speak or express their opinions in public. The situation is made worst if they have very little education and exposures. For instance, during the recruitment of participants in the long house in the rural of Sarawak, we had to seek the help of the village heads. The same goes to the women folks who prefer not to say anything in front of the men. Despite such situation, we managed to get the 'right' groups from whom we were able to establish a cordial relationship and finally giving us frank opinions beyond our expectations. In Sarawak we managed to get the assistance of few teachers (who are regarded as opinion leaders in the

rural areas) who came along with us in some of the rural villages that we visited. Not many problems were accounted in the urban areas though.

Generally, as a researcher and a moderator in most of the sessions, we were aware of the repercussion of imposing of personal ideas in moderating work. It could affect the quality of the viewers' responses that will eventually affect the whole quality of research insight. Similarly, attempts were made at controlling the imbalance in idea contribution caused by the stronger character(s) by removing any possible causes to the deterrence of idea production by the weaker personalities in the group. Similarly, none of the participants has the professorial status or working in television organisations that could sway the findings. Above all, the moderation work had been carefully organised to minimise all levels of un-professionalism.

Between July 10 to September 25, 1994, we conducted a total of fourteen (14) focus group interviews, running from several sub-regions in the Malay Peninsula to Sarawak in Borneo. Through out the fieldwork, we managed the moderating work ourselves except in two cases: the low-paid Indian group and the long house group. In both cases, we worked through assistants.

The profile of the focus groups were as follows:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Group 1 | Professional executives from Shah Alam, Selangor, (Malay, high income category) |
| Group 2 | University students from UPM, Selangor, (Malay, mid-income category) |
| Group 3 | Small-scale farmers from Kuala Rengas, Perak, (Malay, low income category) |
| Group 4 | Small-scale farmers from Kota Baharu, Kelantan, (Malay, low income category) |
| Group 5 | Executives from the Malaysian Airlines, Kuala Lumpur, (Chinese, high income category) |
| Group 6 | University students from UPM, (Chinese mid-income category) |
| Group 7 | Clerks from USM, Pulau Pinang, (Chinese, mid-income category) |
| Group 8 | Technical staff from USM, Pulau Pinang, (Indians, low income category) |

Group 9	University students from UPM, (Indians, mid-income category)
Group 10	Manual workers from KGPA, (Indians, low income category)
Group 11	Professionals from Kuching, Sarawak, (mixed of Sarawak indigenous, high income category)
Group 12	Teacher training students from BLTC, in Kuching (mixed of Non-Malay Sarawak indigenous, mid-income category)
Group 13	Teacher training students from RTC, in Kuching (Sarawak Malay, mid-income category)
Group 14	Small-scale farmers of the Senyawan Long House, Saratok, Sarawak, (Iban, low income category)

Initially, as mention earlier, in this chapter, we missed out the high-income group for the Indians, and the low-income group for the Chinese, for the simple reason that, majority of the Indian population are found in the lower-income category, while majority of the Chinese population are found in the higher-income category. To form groups from the social position that represent a small part of the population, would only offer a minimum use. As such, an extra group was formed from the middle-income category for both, the Chinese and the Indian groups.

For the high-income level we decided to look for professionals whom we believed have less or no influence in academic fields. Several arrangements were made with friends who were willing to help identify and recruit participants. Some participants were taken from organisations while others were recruited via personal contacts. For example, both, the Malay professional group and the Sarawak professional group were identified and recruited through our friends. The participants in each group did not come from the same organisation, nor do they know each other before they became our participants.

The Chinese professional group however, was not recruited through personal contacts but through organisation. We could foresee that it might not be easy for us (being a Malay) to get favours from any Non-Malay unless there is an economic return. So, we decided to use a little bit of power and authority by approaching someone 'big' we know in MAS and requested him to allow a focus group to be formed and carried out there. Through his directive, a group was

formed comprising of some MAS executives who came from different departments and stations

Most of the participants in the middle-income category were recruited through the directives from the top officers of the organisations involved. For example, the clerks and the laboratory technicians from the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) were recruited via the heads of the respective departments. To avoid them from becoming too familiar with each other, members were selected from different work areas. The farmers in our study who represented the *low-income* category were recruited through some formal channels too, like the head of the villages.

Forming a focus group out of members who are rather familiar with each other is an unavoidable circumstance sometimes. There has been a considerable amount of fear that familiarity can create biases in opinion or can impede generation of ideas due to social and psychological factors. In our experience, participants coming from the same village or neighbouring villages may know each other, but that had not harmed so much in the generation of views compared to the existence of some one who carries a political role in the village. When 'respect' overrules group communication, small group communication turns out to be really small with only one or two persons talking and monopolising the discussions. Moderator's role left behind little effects. That happened in the Kelantanese group and the Sarawak long-house group. Talking was initially done mainly by the key figures in the group or the society where the members were selected. Extra efforts were made to create a balance in the dialogue.

The other interesting incident was about the presence of male and female participants in the same group. The rural and the traditional culture of the people has been found to be a strong influence in making the women think that they are not in equal par with the man and hence talk less when the man are around. Only after several efforts of persuasions, the ladies in the Perak group were able to voice out their personal feelings. They commented about the types of television programmes they prefer (mainly entertainment type), and the needs for a television channel to employ pretty or good looking presenters if they want their viewers to stay tuned. The presence of male counterparts could shy away many sensational views from the female members.

5.2.3 Conducting the focus groups interviews

The focus group session was conducted immediately after the participants have viewed the recorded programme. The intention was to exploit the participants' fresh memory of the programme to the maximum. Although studies on television viewing had called for the viewing activity to be done naturally in terms of the viewing environment and viewing the programme during the actual transmission time, the choice is still dependent on the overall objective of the study. Certainly, 'naturalness' was not the main aim of this study, but the 'act of decoding' of the participants about the programme was. The latter took into account both, the 'ideological determination and signification' of the programme text and the 'competence' of the groups in decoding that text. Hence, the fear that the pseudo social setting would reduce the effects of physical and interpersonal context in shaping viewers' interpretation and choice, would be less of our concern.

Furthermore, the concept of 'interpretative communities' manifested the sources of social and ethnic-cultural codes the groups needed in interpreting "*Miskin*". Our concern was therefore, to find out how codes rather than the physical or interpersonal settings shape interpretation and choice of meaning position. Focus groups discussions were conducted in houses, offices and classrooms.

Our experience indicated that the uneasiness of the participants was highly felt only at the beginning. As the discussions heightened, the environmental issue started dying out. Although natural setting was often hard to come by, but we applied all forms of psychological strategies to create an informal situation.

Before starting the discussion, the participants were seated in a way that could help to reduce any forms of communication hindrances. Sitting arrangements whether in classrooms or house premises were made in such a way that everybody should be able to view everybody. We took pain in removing physical items such as tables or anything that would block effective communication or create a sense of power between us (the moderator and the participants). We also realised that space must be used to motivate and not kill communication.

We used a typical way of introducing some fundamental issues meant to spark discussions or set up an agenda for discussion. For instance, we often asked them,

“who is responsible for the eradication of poverty in this country? Can this country be free from poverty by the year 2020? Where do you stand on the issue of poverty? Can you help? And whom can you help? Do you want development?” The participants were slowly brought to the film again and the first question from the topical guide was given to the participants

During the discussion, conversation was focussed on the programme perspective “*Miskin*” The range of topics covered in the interview-discussion sessions attempted to extract both, the explicit as well as the implicit meanings of the programme. Most meanings derived from media contents are implicit and social, more so when the contents are known to be ideologically symbolic. For that reason, an understanding into the relationship between the media contents and meanings would certainly demand a certain way of analysing reception

Social meanings could only be understood in terms of the personal context of the maker. As part of our strategy we tried to find out what sorts of experience the groups have with poverty. Such information was obtained as we posed a question to the groups like “Poverty occurs in the rural as well as in the city, what is your experience with poverty?” From there, we were then able to map their responses within the participants' own discourses. For example, when we took the responses of the PAS members against their life experiences, only then we were able to understand why they were thinking in a way, which was different from that of the Non-PAS members

Time was indeed a limiting factor in the production of our data. To manage time effectively, we maintained our focus of discussion through the use of a ‘topical guide’. This is basically a list of questions relating to the main research problems. In that way, we managed to avoid ourselves from wasting time asking irrelevant questions and got swayed from the objectives. Besides, consistency in moderating interviews and discussions across all groups could also be secured. Consistency is definitely crucial, because without it a comparative decoding analysis on data obtained from all groups could not be done in a consistent and scientific manner

Although the order of topics was predetermined, the actual usage of the guide was flexible, allowing the moderator to make probes whenever necessary, skip, or

reverse as the needs arise. We took note of Merton's et al (1956) warning on the various fallacies commonly occurred in moderating work, such as, the fallacy of adhering to fixed questions, and rapid shifts

In the interview sessions with the groups, the major topics touched, include the following

- i) The *explicit* meanings they make from interpreting the visual
- ii) The *implicit* meanings they create from interpreting the ideologies transmitted through the programme messages
- iii) The *development ideologies* identified from the programme
- iv) The *role and status* of our television in our society
- v) The *presentation style of the programme* (Please refer to the sample questions in the *Appendix*)

The summary statements given at the end of every focus group session most often contain a lot of virtues. We used them to fill in any blanks for the sake of maintaining consistency of data across groups

When selecting focus group sites, the availability of electrical plug points to facilitate video playing and recording of the discussion became our main concern. We have had no problem with electricity even in the remote villages of Sarawak. We also equipped ourselves with the necessary apparatus including a television set.

In this study, we used a video camera to record our focus group discussions. Videotaping is certainly more helpful because every movement and every sound produced by the participants can be placed on record which audio-taping and manual note-taking cannot. Sometimes, the participants did not use words to express their feelings, and if these non-verbal communication events were not recorded in video, the meanings of those events would be lost in the air. As Morley had reminded in his critical postscript to "*Nationwide*" (1981), 'decoding is not a singular event but a set of processes---of attention, recognition of relevance, of comprehension, and of interpretation and response'. He even suggested for an 'ethnography of reading' in analysis for an understanding of audiences' decoding process, that is, by giving close attentions to the linguistic

form (including body language) in which meanings are expressed (Seiter, et al , 1989)

Hence, the videotaping had made our data more complete and richer. Although videotaping has much been associated with an 'invasion of privacy' but we were lucky for not being affected. Similarly, people claimed that videotaping encourages anxiety among the participants, but we exploited this to help produce a more dynamic result.

5.2.4 The television programme chosen for the study

This study had selected "*Miskin*" (meaning poverty), a 'perspective' segment from an episode of the public affairs programme called, "*Majalah 3*". This is a weekly, magazine-type television programme produced by a private television channel, TV3, of the station, the *Sistem Television Malaysia Berhad* (STMB). A detailed description of the programme is contained in **Table 5(c)**.

Since the analysis was to be carried out on reception of a development oriented television programme, our immediate job was to look for a suitable and appropriate development-based programme. There were options as to which development-oriented programme and which television programme to choose, because at the time when this study was to be carried out, there were several development-oriented programmes running on all channels. For examples, besides "*Majalah*" from TV3, there was "*Panorama*", centring on development and current affairs issues, and "*Visi 2020*" centring on current and futuristic, scientific and technological issues, both broadcast by the RTM.

Our prime concern was to look for a programme that is relevant, informative, as well as 'light' enough to be used as a study material for the wide-ranging character of our chosen interpretative communities, but 'heavy' enough to contain important issues pertaining to *development*. On deciding at which particular programme, we took note of the 'absence' of Morley's (1980) work on the issue of the social patterning of taste and preference of the audiences (Moore, 1993).

Table 5(c) Summary of *Majalah 3* programme description broadcasted on 24 July 1994

Time	Items	Descriptions
22 30 hrs	<i>Introduction</i> Music of <i>Majalah 3</i> followed by the presenter, Miss Wan Zaleha	
22 31	<i>Perspective Segment</i> entitled 'Kemiskinan' (Poverty)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction Presenter highlighted the main issues on poverty • Visual showing poor Malay families • Interview with an academician, Prof Sulaiman describes the issues relating to poverty definitions and categories • Interview with one poor Malay lady • TV3 Reporter, Ms Fadilah reports on Govt spending for the poor • Interview with Mr Zainal, Chairman of the Foundation for Eradicating Poverty (YBK) He discusses issues on 'hijrah' (a state of moving to a better status), Various programmes from YBK to assist the poor (education, health, housing) • Interview with another poor Malay housewife • Interview with Dr Syed Othman, Chairman of Islamic Economics Foundation • Summing up by Presenter Wan Zaleha

Cont / next page

Cont / Table 5 (c)

22 55	<i>'Caring Society' Segment</i> presented by TV3 reporter Ms Halizah from London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story of a 4 year old girl, Nadirah who was undergoing liver transplant at the Kings College Hospital, London
23 05	<i>'News from the Continent'</i> presented by TV3 reporter Mr Azemi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A documentary about the mosque in Morocco and the architecture of Islam
23 13	<i>Science Report'</i> by TV3 reporter Mr Khairizal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A documentary on the production of local cheese • Interviews with two academicians from Universiti Pertanian Malaysia
23 25	<i>'Video Club' Segment</i> Video clips sent by two viewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A story of keeping birds as a pet • Another story was about a monkey employed to pluck coconuts
23 29	Presenter Wan Zaleha appeared on the screen to sum up the programme	

We agreed that there would be not much of a value of investigating a programme if it is not watched or favoured by the audiences. In that sense, the programme chosen for the study has to be one that is regarded as 'popular' among the participants.

Majalah 3 met our needs and it was taken. It was one of the most highly watched programme in the country. This was evident from the report by a leading survey research company in Malaysia, the Survey Research Malaysia (SRM). An account on the ratings received by *Majalah 3* running from May to July, 1994 (figures during the time of the study) is shown in Table 5(d). Even *Panorama* could not beat the popularity of *Majalah 3*. Its viewer size was understood to be small and specialised. Small viewer size could result in a difficulty in recruiting focus group participants, especially when they are to come from very varied cultural background and income levels. The producer, Ismail Mustaffa, was aware of this, but nevertheless argued that he would rather go for 'quality' than 'quantity' in identifying his viewers. "*Visi 2020*" on the other hand was a bit too scientific where many ordinary people could not understand.

The choice of *Majalah 3* was according to the 'programme-type preference' need as suggested by Morley (1981). This is an attempt to avoid mismatching of interest between the programme and the decoders. Above all, the perspective on 'poverty' turned to be a relevant theme in discussing 'development' in this country.

Although we detected that some of the groups have not been following the programme on a regular basis, we still need them to represent the different ethnic for the sake of conducting the comparative analysis. For example, we found that the professional Chinese from the Malaysian Airlines (MAS), and the Kelantanese farmers, due to a lack of free time and submitting to a different political philosophy, consequently, have had little exposure to the series. But they were still taken because we still feel that their representation is crucial in order to facilitate our analysis on how the different sub-cultural groups decode a development-oriented programme like *Majalah 3*. This is acceptable because this study did not and had not intended to work on them so much as the 'audiences' of *Majalah 3* (like the audiences of *Nationwide*) but rather as 'decoders' of *Majalah 3*. To be able to study the participants as 'audiences' of a certain programme, the

Table 5(d) Programmes Ratingd for one-time slot on Sundays (all networks)
Time slot 2130-2230 hours
Period May-July 1994

Date	Programme	Network	Audience ('000s)	%
1 May	Majalah 3	TV3	4028	67.0*
	Intan (Malay Drama)	TV1	1700	28.3
	Takraw Live (sports)	TV2	278	4.6
8 May	Majalah 3	TV3	3022	37.9
	Anugerah Live (awards)	TV1	4175	52.4*
	Dark Justice (series)	TV2	760	9.5
15 May	Majalah 3	TV3	3390	49.1*
	Intan	TV1	1443	20.9
	Thomas Cup (badminton)	TV2	2059	29.8
22 May	Majalah 3	TV3	3423	52.5*
	Intan	TV1	2100	32.2
	Dark Justice	TV2	988	15.1
29 May	Majalah 3	TV3	3219	49.7*
	Intan	TV1	2308	35.6
	Dark Justice	TV2	939	14.5
5 June	<i>Pre-empted</i>	TV3	-	-
	Sandiwara (Malay drama)	TV1	4606	-
	Stuntmasters (series)	TV2	1105	-
12 June	Majalah 3	TV3	3995	56.6*
	Intan	TV1	2138	30.2
	Sukma Live (sports)	TV2	925	13.1
19 June	Majalah 3	TV3	3912	53.5*
	Intan	TV1	2503	34.2
	Dark Justice	TV2	892	12.2
26 June	<i>Pre-empted</i>	TV3	-	-
	Hawa (Malay drama)	TV1	2096	-
	Stuntmasters	TV2	477	-
3 July	<i>Pre-empted</i>	TV3	-	-
	Hawa	TV1	4428	-
	Stuntmasters	TV2	881	-
10 July	Majalah 3	TV3	3144	41.8
	Hawa	TV1	3669	48.8*
	Stuntmasters	TV2	698	9.2

Notes 5 June-Tennis Live (France Open), 26 June-Movie Carnival, 3 June-Tennis Live (Wimbledon)

* Denotes the highest rating for that particular time slot on Sundays

Source Survey Research Malaysia (SRM)

participants should be identified more as regular viewers, or be known to have a high programme attachment. As decoders, the least the participants could do is to participate in watching the programme and involved in the discussion and analysis.

The perspective segment of *Majalah 3*, which is normally factual and developmental, lasts only for fifteen (15) minutes of the total air time. The time period was regarded as suitable for a viewing session before a cross-examination could be made on the participants. The remaining question is which particular episode?

Majalah 3 episode broadcasted on the 24th July 1994 was featuring 'Miskin' meaning 'life being poor' or 'poverty', for its perspective segment. The content was ideologically structured towards the concept that the country is gearing at, that is, *making Malaysia into a fully developed, industrialised nation by the year 2020*. In the pursuit of progress and modernisation, poverty remains as the nation's oldest challenge. This pre-empted 'eradication of poverty' as the most important agenda in the government's effort towards achieving the nation's socio-economic goal. Among its strategies, the government stressed that the socio-economic status of the country must be redressed to ensure that the nation's economic wealth be distributed fairly among the different ethnic groups (Mahathir, 1991). With that note, we made our decision to take "Miskin" a perspective from one of *Majalah 3* episodes as our study material because we believed that it has all the potential for fulfilling our research needs.

TV3 is a private television station, and as such, its orientation and goals are different from that of RTM. However, there was no fear of TV3 lacking the grip of the national political ideologies. This is because all radio and television stations, irrespective of whether they are privately owned or otherwise, are highly regulated by the government. The television stations are to be responsible socially and expected to operate only within the guidelines given in the nation's philosophy, that is, the RUKUNEGARA. Experiences in the past had shown that a private radio station, "Time Highway Radio" and the second private television station, "Metro Vision", had received 'warnings' for belittling the national language or over using of a foreign language. Similarly, the latest television private station of "ntv7" (launched on 7th April 1998) was given a warning for

airing imported entertainment programmes during prime time (8 pm – 19 pm)
Punishment is usually in the form of a withdrawal of the business licence

This opinion was further strengthened by Karthigesu's (1994) claim that the setting up of TV3 in 1984 was merely political. It was far from what the public has been made to understand about the broadcasting industry, that is, to liberalise the broadcasting institutions. The government was claimed to have had even a stronger control over the broadcasting institutions but now via the economic aspect. The *STMB*, the company that obtained the licence to operate TV3 is an UMNO company, and thus, loyalty to the ruling government is an undeniable fact. As evidence, the then chairman even declared that, 'as corporate citizens, we do not dispute the values in them (government policies). It all depends on the way we present them' (National Eco, 15 August, 1988, quoted in Karthigesu, 1994)

5.2.5 Analysing the television programme, "*Miskin*"

The subsequent step was to empirically 'analyse the programme' and this was done together with the producer. The purpose was to develop a set of empirical data about the programme "*Miskin*", to be analysed later against the empirical data developed from the different groups' decoding of that programme. The steps include seeking information on

- i) How the topic was first articulated - who originated the idea or who was the source to the idea (institutions or individuals, power-related or otherwise)
- ii) The ideology carried by the programme - what is TV3's attitude on Vision 2020, and on the effort of the government in eradicating poverty in relations to the different ethnic groups, etc
- iii) The structuring of the programme content - how background and explanatory frameworks were mobilised, visually and verbally, how guests or experts were recruited and their comments integrated, how discussions and interviews were monitored and included in the structure of the message, and how ideologies were stated, openly or covertly

The analysis to the programme "*Miskin*" was crucial because it would be able to inform us how 'symbolic' the messages have been structured. The Malaysian television seems to act more as an 'ideological reproduction apparatus' for the government, while the nation's economic and development plan is publicly known as an outcome of an affirmative action of the government. The possibility of "*Miskin*" having a 'politically-constrained preferred reading' is definitely higher. Any researcher placed in such a situation would be eager to conclude that the 'preferred reading' of the programme "*Miskin*", had been an intentional conduct of the programme producer.

5.3 Personal interviews

The final part of our fieldwork was to conduct personal interviews' with relevant people both from the government and the industry. The aim was to obtain information that reflects the opinions, critiques, ideas and values, on what they think of the rightful role of television in instrumenting development in Malaysia. We also asked the respondents to discuss the politics of television as well as the general television viewing in this country. This information which was collected from 13 individuals contributed into the completion of our study.

Procedurally, the data were solicited through the use of a separate set of questions. They include, a) the *enacted role* and the *expected role* of television in fostering development, be it in social, economic or political, b) the issue of *ideology* in relations to television as an ideological reproduction apparatus, c) the pattern of *hegemony* and its reflection in the nation's media systems, d) the formation of *national identity* in building Malaysia as a nation, and e) the problem of *national unity* and the role of television in uniting the various ethnic groups.

To secure a variability of opinion expected from the above issues, a considerable amount of understanding on television and television viewing were required out of the respondents. This resulted in the selection of thirteen (13) interviewees consisting of people who were then involved in various important social activities. The group consists of, one (1) social activist, three (3) academicians, four (4) officials from the television stations, four (4) politicians, and one (1) Human Resource consultant.

The social activist was a former Member of Parliament of an opposition party (Democratic Action Party), now retired and works full-time as a social activist. Two of the academicians were from the Department of Social Sciences and Anthropology, Universiti Malaya (UM), while the other one was from the Department of Marketing and Management, Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM). Officials from the television stations comprised of, the Minister of Information, the Director General of Broadcasting at Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), the Head of the News Section of RTM, and the producer of “*Majalah 3*” at TV3. The four politicians came from the four major political parties in this country, namely, UMNO, MCA and MIC (from the government) and PAS (from the opposition). Finally, the human resource consultant is a former professor of the Communication Studies at UPM. A profile of the interviewees is found in **Table 5(e)**.

Table 5(e) A Profile of Interviewees

Category/Name	Profile of Interviewees
A Academicians	
1 Prof Datuk Zainal Kling	Dean, Faculty of Arts, University Malaya
2 Assoc Prof Dr Muhammad Ikmal Said	Lecturer, Dept of Anthropology, University Malaya
B Media professionals	
3 Dato' Jaffar Kamin	Director of Broadcasting, Radio & Televisyen Malaysia (RTM)
4 Ismail Mustaffa	Director of News, RTM
5 Norma Ramli	Producer "Selamat Pagi Malaysia" (Good Morning Malaysia), RTM
6 Hisham Abdullah	Producer "Majalah 3" (Magazine 3), TV3
C Politicians	
7 Dato' Mohamed Rahmat	UMNO politician, Minister of Information
8 Dato' Nazeri Tan Sri Azmi	UMNO politician, Chairman of MARA
9 Datuk Lee Kim Sai	MCA politician, Minister of Health
10 Dr T Marimuthu	MIC politician, Deputy Minister of Agriculture
11 Hj Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman	PAS politician, Deputy Chief Minister of Kelantan (the only state that comes under the administration of PAS, an opposition party)
D Social Activist	
12 Lee Lam Thye	A social activist, as Head of Drug Rehabilitation Centre (Pemadam), ex-leader of an opposition party, Democratic Action Party (DAP)
E Communications Consultant	
13 Dr Muhammad Fadzhilah Kamsah	A consultant at Excel Training, former Professor of Communications

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter attempts to give an account of our focus group sessions as well as the results from the subsequent comparative analyses carried out on those findings, both at the viewers-text interaction level as well as at the wider social context level. The latter, involved comparing the data obtained from the groups-programme analysis and the strategies of the **Vision 2020**.

We have described earlier that redressing the Malaysian socio-economic status in the national development plan has been perceived by the state national policy makers to be a prerequisite to building Malaysia as a fully-developed nation by the year 2020. Contradict perceptions of the present development practices are expected especially from those who are not the 'direct' beneficiaries of the development policy and programmes, such as, the Non-Bumiputra. From the nationalist point of view, any form of contradictions could be read as a form of disempowerment on the part of the dominant official discourse. In analysing media reception activities, non-complimentarity of codes in decoding or reception could indicate negative signals to the authorities. More importantly, non-dominant decoding positions are interpreted as a form of disempowerment on the part of the dominant media.

But then, what actually causes their meanings to be different from that of the dominant? What are the issues or bases of their arguments? And above all, what does this difference mean to Malaysia as a nation, and to national hegemony? Since media reception is very cultural, contradict responses to the media may provide us wider opportunities for cultural critiques.

This study, therefore, hypothesises that,

- i) There is a strong relationship between the individual decoder's ethnic and cultural discourse and the meanings he/she produces from interpreting any form of development-oriented messages (in reference to Reception theory)
- ii) The more dominant the individual decoder is, the more dominant the meaning he/she produces (in reference to Parkin's theory)

In other words, we assume that much of what the respondents 'think' of development in this country, is highly dependent on which ethnic or cultural group they belong to. Subsequently, we also assume that the 'closer' the respondents (decoders) are to the dominant group culturally in this society, the more dominant the meanings they make when relating themselves to development-oriented messages.

6.1 The various discourses availed in this study

Referring to the matrix of the interpretive communities of this study put up earlier, discussions on groups' decoding are analysed from both, the socio-economic perspective and the ethnic-cultural perspective. This study would like to see how the two types of discourses of the interpretive communities play their parts in influencing the groups' decisions in adopting a certain decoding position. In due course, we would also like to see what would be the nature of 'fit' between the two discourses as the groups interpret development messages from the television programme. (This refers to objective # 3). We would also like to explore what goes on beyond the two discourses. Do we have other emerging discourses that help to determine the decoding pattern of this study? How strong are the chosen discourses and the newly found discourses (if any), and affecting which group(s)?

A) The socio-economic discourses

The three ethnic groups which represented the *high income level* did not show any consistency in meaning production. The meanings made by the Malay groups

were dominant (+2), while the other two groups, the Chinese staff from MAS and the Sarawakians, were both taking the same negotiated stance (-3). This shows that income category did not have significant relationship with meaning construction of the groups. The data showed that the discourse used was not from the socio-economic perspective but others. It was learnt that the Malays were strongly defending the 'Malay Rights' in developing the country, the Chinese were strong in their 'anti-subsidy' attitude and the affirmative development policy, while the Sarawakian group were full of discontentment over the socio-economic disparity between Sarawak and the Malay Peninsula.

The *middle income level* was represented by seven (7) groups: the Malay students, the Indian students, and the Chinese students, all from UPM, the technicians and the clerks groups, both from USM, and the two teacher-to-be student groups from Sarawak. Their decoding positions were found distributed among the dominant, negotiated and oppositional columns. These shows that in no way the socio-economic factor indicated by the groups' income-level, did not determine their decoding behaviours. The findings showed that the groups' decoding positions were much determined by their ethnic and cultural existence. For examples, the Malay students from UPM who took the dominant position (+1) in relating themselves with the television programme, "*Miskin*", were strong in believing that the government has to continue helping the Malays until they can stand at par or better with the successful Non-Malays. Their arguments on development were based on ethnocentrism. The Chinese students from the same university took an oppositional decoding position (-2), resented the unfairness of the government for backing indiscriminately the failing Malays or Bumiputra members in trade and business. They said, these failures were only 'robbing' government's money which is the taxpayers' money. The Indian students on the other hand were critical because they felt that the poor Indian communities in the agricultural estates were being neglected. They thought that the eradication of poverty project should not concentrate only on the Malays or Bumiputra population.

The Chinese clerks, influenced by their government-based or organisational culture, adopted a considerate, though negative decoding position (-1), but the technicians who came from the same working organisation at USM, was much more critical (-2). The technicians just like the Indian students of UPM, were

critical because they were unhappy with the policy of the government discriminating the poor Indian communities in the estates

For both student groups from Sarawak, although they belong to the same income category, their decoding stances were found to be different from one another. The Sarawak Malay students who believed that the 'protection' given to the Malay/Bumiputra groups was highly necessary even beyond the year 2020 undoubtedly opted the dominant position (+1). On the other hand, the indigenous Sarawak students who resented over the disparity in the provision of facilities in public schools by the government, and consequently causing the difference in school education status between schools in Sarawak region and schools in the Peninsula, opted the negotiated decoding position (-1).

The observations carried out at the *lower income* level showed that the income characteristic of the participants was not significant in determining their decoding of the television programme. While the farmers from Perak were for the national development policy, which protects the rights of the Malays/Bumiputra (dominant decoding position +2), the farmers from Kelantan rejected the same policy on the pretext that it was not using Islam as its thrust (oppositional decoding position -3). Although the Indian labourers were found dominant (+1), the reason they used was different from that of the farmers from Perak who also opted for the dominant. The labourers were thinking that the present government and their policy are a source of their survival. As mentioned by one of the members, "our country grows because we have a strong and excellent government. As the country develops more jobs are created, and that is very good for us." These Indian communities found that the present socio-economic and political environment was very encouraging. To them as long as they can survive a living (even if the criticisms towards the government were to have been true), they would be just as happy because they could survive. Finally, the Ibans were seen to have opted the negotiated decoding position (-1) despite the fact that they had now joined the ruling ban wagon. Their negotiated stance was found to have rooted from their perception that they have been 'side-stepped' due to their past affiliation with the oppositional parties.

The above findings indicated that the socio-economic factor did not 'fit' well and, therefore, insignificant in determining the decoding of development works by the multi-ethnic groups in this country

B) The *ethnic-cultural* perspective of the groups' discourse

At this level, the unequal socio-economic status of the different ethnic groups' and the 'Bumiputra slant' of the national development policy adopted by the government became crucial and acted as the main yardsticks against which most of the decoding of the groups were based. The Non-Bumiputra groups hence, were quite unhappy when a series of Bumiputra-biased national economic and development policy was constructed to ensure that no one ethnic group should be left out of the mainstream of development.

The 'special privilege' especially earned by the Malays in the **Constitution**, became the cause of contradiction in the pattern of decoding availed in the different ethnic groups' decoding of "*Miskin*". To add into the variety the different levels of political dominance earned by the individual groups within the Bumiputra class has also contributed to the production of contradictory decoding even though the concept of 'special privilege' does apply to all Bumiputra members. In other words, contradictory decoding in this study was caused not only by the fact that the decoder is a Bumiputra or Non-Bumiputra but also by the fact of whether the decoder belongs to the dominant or the less dominant Bumiputra group.

The racial components of the Malaysian society could provide some explanation. As described in Chapter Two, the Bumiputra group makes about 57% of the total 19 million population of Malaysia. The rest is taken by the Non-Bumiputra, with about 33 % Chinese, 19% Indians, and 1% others. Within the Bumiputra category, the dominance of the Malays is not only politically determined but size wise too. Out of the 57%, the Malays form about 49% compared to the other Bumiputra members (8%). Majority of the Bumiputra minority is the indigenous population of Sabah and Sarawak.

It is without doubt that the 'ethnic-cultural discourses' of the different groups, were much connected to the politics of the country and hence, influenced the groups' decoding of the programme "*Miskin*". For example, our data showed that responses from the Malay professionals informed us how the Malays see the present affirmative economic policy and programmes (NEP and the NDP), as the only channels through which the government could restore 'socio-economic justice' within the society. They also said that the government had intended to make the policy serves as a mechanism through which the Malays could prove the negative stereotyping on their economic disability as baseless or non-genetic but environmental.

The Malay professionals insisted the Malays and the other Bumiputra groups to optimise their effort in exploiting opportunities given by the government. They believed that this is the only way that they could get out from the long illness of poverty and be able to stand at par or better than the other races especially the emigrant groups. This group, together with the other Bumiputra groups in our study, welcomed the UMNO leaders' idea about the setting up of a commercial and industrious Bumiputra community, so that the nation's economic wealth could be shared fairly among all of the different ethnic groups. The Malay members in particular realised that the political dominance that they inherited from the British rule is insufficient and would not last without having a strong footing in the nation's economy.

Given that as a background, we can now understand why the Malays and the other Bumiputra groups think that the present economic and development policy is absolutely necessary. It acts as the mechanism through which the ethnic Malay and the indigenous people grow into stronger and powerful participants in building Malaysia as a nation.

The Sarawak Malay students however, felt that the government assistance is appropriate and should be extended to reach the poor indigenous communities in Sarawak or Sabah because their socio-economic status is definitely much lower than the 'poor' communities found in other parts of the country. They claimed that in many cases their lives remain at the mercy of the middlemen who are mostly Chinese. They argued that although the indigenous people need to learn

how to stop from becoming the “*kuli*” (servant) to survive, they nevertheless felt that the responsibility still is with the government in order to introduce the policies to protect the indigenous people

Other than the socio-economic function, the Malay farmers from Perak in particular, felt that the policy is also a source to gain back their ‘esteem and pride’ after being tattered by the colonisation of the West and other foreigners

A higher form of abstraction of opinion was that given by PAS members when they said that the government by all means must restore the present Malay hegemony in all aspects of the system. They feared that the liberal concept practised by the government today especially in ‘Malaysianising’ the country would only dilute the ‘Malay’ element content. They do not want Malaysia to be like Indonesia where the ethnic identity of the indigenous was totally submerged during the process of nationalising the nation. Specifically, they expressed the need to preserve the Malay monarchy system because they said it symbolises the identity and dignity of the Malay race

However, the bio-structure element owned was insufficient to shape the PAS member’s perception towards the developmental issues contained in the programme content. They used Islam as the perspective through which all opinions and attitudes about development were formed. Although Islam and Malays complement each other in the context of the Malaysian society, the attitude and orientation of PAS members towards development automatically differ from that of Non-PAS members. Above all the PAS members opposed the existing development policy produced by the government because they felt that the policy was built on a non-Islamic premise. Their decoding or arguments of “*Miskin*” therefore rested on how Islamic or non-Islamic the development policy has been

In our interpretation of the Non-Malay Bumiputra groups, like the Sarawak indigenous professionals, the Non-Malay indigenous students and the Ibans from the long-house, showed that they were just ‘close’ (neg - 1 and neg -3) to the dominant decoding position. This is the furthest they could go, no matter how dominant they wanted to be. What stopped them from acquiring the dominant discourse is the fact that they are not Malays. They are the ‘minority’ in the

Bumiputra class. Hence, they still have a 'space' to argue that the government had not fulfilled its justice because they felt that they have been deprived of the many benefits the Bumiputra Malays in the Malay Peninsula have benefited. For example, in terms of getting quality teachers and quality schools, in terms of getting rural development projects, and in terms of receiving business knowledge and skills/training, they felt that they are far away behind the Malays in the Malay Peninsula.

In another setting, the Indian labourers had taken the dominant decoding position. The possibility of influence from the 'survival factor' among the low-paid workers in the Indian community explain their decoding behaviours. They are certainly not Malays and yet they shared the dominant code in interpreting the developmental issues contained in the television programme.

Similarly, the PAS members, by being Malays, hypothesised to be taking the dominant decoding position in interpreting such a development-oriented television programme, took the reverse stance. They were observed as preferring the oppositional decoding positions, and that was at the highest degree. We believed that the group's 'affiliation with an Islamic-based political party' has something to do with their rejection of the dominant ideologies. What implications would these examples bring to the research? Will this represent a case against the notion that ethnic factor determines the way the concept of development is defined in this country?

From the above, the ethnic-cultural discourses seemed to be more relevant or fitted better compared to the income factor, in determining the decoding of the various groups when relating themselves to development messages in this country. Each individual group interpreted the television programme from the context of the group's own existence as a sub-ethnic group in the bigger Malaysian society.

C) Socio-oriented factors identified from the study

Ethnic-based discourses or the fact that they belong to some ethnic groupings had undoubtedly made a profound effect on the way the different groups made their interpretations of the television programme. But, there were certainly other socially related discourses or interpretative codes that the groups had used in deciding on a certain decoding position as they read *Miskin*'. Identification of such factor(s) or variable(s) is regarded as highly necessary, through which, characteristics of reception in such a condition could then be understood more clearly. In our case, for examples, the phenomenon of the unexpected decoding of the Kelantan Malay farmers who are sympathisers of PAS, and the incident of the Indian labourers in supporting the government are therefore understood

Factor 1 Political affiliation on the course of a religious survival

We found that the PAS followers in this study had placed Islam as an absolute factor in their lives, more than any otherworldly importance, including the fact that they are Malays. They rejected UMNO because its prime role has been nationalistic in character, which is to fight for the rights of the Malays. Unlike UMNO, PAS members claimed that their prime goal is to fight for a Godly mission manifested through their political activities. Thus, politics to them serve only as a channel through which they could contribute to the course of Islam in this country.

They have even declared in public that if UMNO were to fight for Malaysia to be an Islamic state, then PAS would be dissolved. As PAS followers, they believed that politics is a good strategy to that survival. Their political affiliation was thus, interpreted as what influenced their decoding which was different from that of the other Malay groups. Their affiliation with the opposition political party could thus be described as an important component of their discourse.

Factor 2 Basic human survival needs

The 'dominant' character of the Indian labourers' decoding on the other hand was analysed as being determined by the group's own personal factor. When basic

human survival needs outsized other types of human needs, naturally the more peripheral needs such as, ethnic-related egos would be pushed aside or considered as secondary

Factor 3 Working environment

In addition, the Indian labourers' discourse was also assumed to have been nurtured by the organisation's status quo which they described as symbolising strength, progress, dominant, elite, and modernity in the government system. The *Kelab Golf Perkhidmatan Awam* (KGPA) where they worked, is an elite golf club organisation for the top officers in the government sector. The members consist of 90% Malays. That being the case, it would not be surprising if their world views, attitudes and values have been influenced towards believing that the government is right, capable, and efficient. When such a system is said to be the source to the fulfilment of their basic needs, they therefore accept the government's ideologies without further ado. This explained why being Indian, yet they could still be dominant in their decoding.

While the decoding of the rest of the groups were carried out as expected (meaning, the dominant Malay society opting the dominant position and the subordinate Non-Malay groups opting the non-dominant positions), other socially driven factors were also found playing a prominent role in explaining the phenomenon. The goal here is to explore further into as many non-ethnic based issues or perspectives as possible that have simultaneously been used by the different ethnic groups in relating themselves to the programme messages of poverty or development.

Factor 4 Organisational culture

It was also observed that cultural orientation of an organisation plays a part in determining the way development messages are read, especially in terms of the recipients' attitudes towards how development is approached in this country. Comparing the decoding of MAS executives against that of the clerks' from USM, it showed that the tolerance level of the MAS executives towards the present development policy that favours the Malays and the other Bumiputra

communities” was found to be much lower (negative -3) The clerks’ performance was at negative -1 The type of culture practised in both of the organisations believed to have greatly influenced these decoding activities

As a corporate organisation, MAS organisational culture works differently from that of the USM, a government-sponsored institution It was believed that this difference was caused wholly by the orientation of the organisational goals For example, a company, MAS is expected to maximise profit, and as such, success and survival of both the company and the staff, depend highly on job performance Competition thus becomes the organisation’s tradition or practice The staff would then adhere to the principle that every success has to be earned and no reward is given for free In relating themselves to the television programme, “*Miskin*” it was assumed that the organisational culture that bound the staffs behavioural and cognitive pattern thus became their framework for judging the television programme They were observed to be highly critical over the ‘special treatment’ the Malays and the other Bumiputra members received from the government They were particularly against the ‘subsidy culture’ (government’s aid given to the poor for free) because they said it can make the society lethargically dependent

It was noticed that such negative comments about the ‘biasness’ of the government in helping the economically lagged behind Malay/Bumiputra communities, are parallel to the ideologies promoted by the local opposition political parties The MAS executives argued that in doing so, the government was only pampering the Malays/Bumiputra They then proposed the ‘participative economic plan’ to replace the ‘affirmative economic plan’, so as to enable the country be ruled by the system of ‘meritocracy’

On the other hand, the university is a government organisation, which requires the staff to understand the soul of the government and its missions and goals, as well as the role of the university as an agent of development The behaviours and traditions expected out of the staff are spelt and governed by the rules and regulations contained in the Government General Orders No matter the government development policy is biased towards the needs of the Malays and the Bumiputra, they can still rationalise the act and finally submitting to the policy

Factor 5 Working responsibility and accountability

The UPM Chinese students however, were at the strong oppositional pole (-2) Their status of being free from any working organisational responsibility and accountability could be the best reason to explain why they were situated at that point in responding to the development-oriented television programme Unlike the Chinese executives from MAS and the Chinese clerks from USM, this group of young and innocent Chinese felt that they have no obligation to any official body as yet and therefore felt free to express what they feel about the societal system MAS is a corporate company indeed but fully 'protected' by the government, while USM is controlled by the government General Orders At least, if their studies at the university were to have been sponsored by some government agencies, things might be different

In relation to their decoding, even though they may argue that their comments on the 'policy of helping' the Bumiputra failures in business were objective, these ideas are far from being congruent to the development paradigm adhered by the government in building a Malaysian nation from a multi-ethnic society This shows that they still need to learn more about the nation's history as well as the political system adopted in this country because much of what has been decided on by the government was known to be centred around these two factors The least the government could expect out of them would be an understanding of their own existence in this country, so that they can be more tolerant This has often been heard as the wish of the national leaders in their attempt to integrate or unite the society

Factor 6 Educational sponsorship for the Bumiputra

Scholarship given to the Malays and other Bumiputra students to study in the various institutes of higher learning was much a cause of envy and dissatisfaction to many of the Chinese and Indian students in this country The issue of Bumiputra sponsorship in education is a highly sensitive issue in the university environment, and had called many debates among politicians and decision-

makers. The opinions of the Chinese and the Indian students implied that scholarships should be given only to students who earned the academic merits.

But, such opinions do not “fit” the strategies of the government because education is partly a political strategy. The Prime Minister, in his book entitled, “The Malay Dilemma” (Mahathir, 1970), said that, granting scholarships is one of the more effective ways in which the government can help to improve education among the Bumiputra groups. For that purpose, it was understood that scholarships need to be awarded to two categories of students. Firstly, the brilliant students, and secondly, the less brilliant but poor. In the first category, scholarships are actually prizes, and like most prizes, he said, they are seldom won by the most needy because their home surroundings seldom or never permit excellence in education. The needy or poor with a minimum qualification comes under the second category, in which case the scholarships are regarded as an absolute necessity because it acts as a strategy for breaking the poverty vicious cycle.

We learned that dissatisfaction did not occur only among the Non-Bumiputra groups but the Malays and the Bumiputra students too, especially those studying abroad. Their denial of the scholarships could be due to ‘wrong’ political affiliation or wealth. We heard that many Bumiputra students who sponsored themselves to study abroad have turned against the government.

Factor 7: The biased-policy is maintained long after it is necessary

The Chinese students of UPM also claimed that the Malay/Bumiputra-biased economic policy is maintained long after it is necessary. They said that the Malays in general are better off now but the government still gives them assistance indiscriminately, including giving a second offer to failing Bumiputra businessmen. They argued that the policy therefore is self-defeating because the government's fund that was meant to help the most needy has been given to those who are already well to do things on their own. If aid is given just because they are Malays, but not really poor, for example, the existing poor will naturally remain poorer because they would be too weak to participate in the ‘opportunity race’ that is opened to the Bumiputra in general.

***Eactor 8 High educational achievements among the less dominant groups
made them more critical***

In this context, it was noticed that the increased level of education achieved by the higher-income level communities in the less dominant party or the Non Malay party, had affected the pattern of decoding these particular groups made on 'Miskin'. The pattern of decoding showed that all of them fell into the negative category and not according to the 'preferred meaning' adopted by the programme producer. Compared to the lower-income level communities, such as, the Indian labourers and the long house Ibans, the higher-income groups were more outspoken, strong-opinionated, and more critical in their views towards how development has been planned in this country. We believed that this has something to do with the increased level in education they acquired thus far.

For example, the Sarawak professionals' decoding was far more negative (-3) compared to the long house Ibans' (-1). By virtue of their wide experience and knowledge, they could now see that Sarawak's economic progress is too slow compared to the progress going on in the Peninsula. They felt that the government led by the state authorities had failed in distributing the state wealth whereby development was brought only to *Kuching*, the capital city, and a few other major towns. The rest of the state they described has remained rural for too long a time that an access to some of the villages in the internal part of the state today is only possible by boats. Life with the majority of the Sarawak rural population has remained unchanged despite the many changes that have taken place in other parts of the country, especially the Malay Peninsula, they said. Some of them argued "if we have no roads, how could we become cosmopolitan? Or modern?"

Unlike the professional members, the teacher-student trainees generally lacked much of what had been experienced by the professionals. Some of them had informed that joining the colleges marked their first time leaving their home places or towns. Most of them have heard about or seen the socio-economic imbalance from the media but have not really 'felt' the difference. That limits them from becoming critical as the highly educated members become

Besides the different types of organisational culture, the critics from the MAS executive officers on the other hand, was believed to have also been contributed by their wide educational experience and background. Being corporate-oriented they are meant to be relatively highly intellectual, well read and informed group. That being the case, they are naturally more aware than the other groups about or in a better position to understand of the many types of philosophies or social ideologies in nation building. In that light, they were quite critical when the government chose to be Bumiputra-biased rather than 'meritocracy-biased' in its approach to developing Malaysia as a nation state.

Disregarding the historical platform on which Malaysia has been built on, and the uneven nature of its socio-economic ground, they wished everybody to be treated equal by proposing a 'participative' economic plan instead of the present ethnic-based economic plan. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier somewhere, the above is only true among the Non-Malay participants especially the Chinese, because in such a proposition, their interests would be well looked after as their socio-economic status was already much better off right from the start.

The Malays, irrespective of their level of education, had remained dominant. For example, the Malay professionals with high educational background had been supportive as much as those small-scale farmers from Perak. This shows that an increased level of education among the Malays did not have any special bearing on the 'stance' they took towards the government's effort, but ethnicity did. They are indeed ethnic-conscious and therefore, politically conscious.

In studying reception of development messages in this society, other than the ethnic-cultural factor, it was found that there are eight other factors that have come into play with the process of reception. The strength of education as a research variable should not be doubtful. This is because education is a vital component in the Malaysian National Development Plan. In this country, part of the functions of education is to encourage national integration, national solidarity and national hegemony, workable and achievable. The National Educational Policy is supposed to make the varied background society think like what the State wants them to think and be dominant.

Conclusions

We can conclude that the individual ethnic group's decoding was made in relation to the existence of the other ethnic groups in the country. As such, the relationships between the Malays and the Chinese or the Indians and the Chinese, are significant in interpreting the development programmes produced by the local media. The economic achievements of the Chinese were regarded as a 'yardstick' to the Bumiputra's support of the present corrective economic policy. At the same time, the encroachment of the Bumiputra groups into the Non-Bumiputra economic monopoly, became a source to the Non-Bumiputra's discontentment.

For example, our data showed that the Malay professionals thought that the present development policy is very crucial because it is a source of their overall survival. It is only through this, they could improve their socio-economic status, recover their lost racial 'pride', and prove wrong the unfair stereotyping that the Malays have received from the other Non-Malay counterparts. To be specific, the Malays felt they have the 'constitutional right' to lead a life as good as the Chinese who have for a long time, achieved a better socio-economic status. To them, the present national development policy can help the Malays achieve these needs.

The responses from the indigenous teacher-student trainees on the other hand, explained how urgent it is to change the negative attitude of the indigenous people in Sarawak in order to stop the Chinese from exploiting the people's weaknesses for their own business ends. The MAS officers also complained that in handling poverty the government had concerned itself more with the plight of the poor Malays and ignoring the needs of the other poor communities from the other races. The group saw the extra emphasis on rural poverty against urban poverty in the television programme as a good example of the government's biases.

The Indian groups used their experiences and associations with the poor estate workers as the basis for their arguments against the unfairness of the development policy in handling poverty in this country. The Indian students uncovered that poverty among the Indian estate dwellers was beyond people's imagination. The

government was criticised for thinking only the Malays have been badly affected by poverty

The above examples chosen from the different groups' decoding supported our hypothesis that *ethnic-based discourses* of the groups have been used to help them interpret the television programme and decided on a certain decoding position. In particular, the fear of the Bumiputra groups on the high rise economic performance of the Non-Bumiputra groups, and the experience of the Non-Bumiputra groups on the biases of the government's corrective policy, were used as the two main opposite sources of codes in interpreting the television programme content.

The different income-levels (high, middle, and low), that categorized the participants into three different income categories showed no relationship with the groups' decoding. Income level is therefore, not a unifying factor in getting into agreement or disagreement about development in this country at the present moment, but ethnic factor is, indeed. What could be the contributing factor in accounting for the importance of the ethnic-based variables in the different groups' decoding? One possible reason that could have contributed to this fact is that there is no 'racial unity' in a real sense as yet in this country. Even if there is it's only carried out at the superficial level. The different ethnic groups are obviously enclosed by their own ethnic discourses, while ethnocentrism is high in each of the ethnic group.

Although the country's goal is to make Malaysia into a united Malaysia, this is however, still hard to achieve. As mentioned somewhere earlier, the 'divide and rule' legacy left by the British still runs deep in the heart and soul of the different ethnic groups. The concept of "sharing" was not introduced to the people, so much that, the different groups perceived 'development' or 'poverty' from their own individual ends without considering the needs and conditions of the other counterparts. When the national economic policy was discussed, the Malays went even far beyond to instil a sense that they should remain as a 'master' to their land. Such an attitude could easily turn into a spark of conflict not only between the Malays and the Chinese or the Indians but also between the Malays and the Non-Malay Bumiputra groups like the Sabahan and the Sarawakians. The

indigenouness and the politically dominance of the Malays on the other hand, were used to back the Malays' arguments why they should be given a fair deal economically. Since, the Bumiputra term was included in the Constitution, the other Non-Malay but Bumiputra communities therefore got into the ride.

Other circumstances have made some groups think that they are more important than the question of ethnic pride and survival. In this study, we found that circumstances relating to 'self' needs and super-natural' needs were more respected than ethnic-based needs, in which case, they past the boundary of 'ethnocentrism' into 'universality'. The PAS sympathisers in our study had treated 'ethnic' as secondary to the-survival of Islam in this country. They rejected the government's effort in developing the Malays but accepted PAS because they thought that PAS could guarantee their more important spiritual needs, which are manifested through their political interests and activities.

Similarly, the Indians labourers were for the meaning preferred or intended by the messages contained in the television programme despite the criticism faced by the government for being biased towards the needs of the Malays/Bumiputra, their ethnic counterparts. They argued that the elite clubhouse where they work for a living is a symbol of strength and progress of the present government. To them, it is a worth while effort to place economic achievements above ethnic sensitivities as life was much harder decades ago before the new economic plan was introduced. To the low-income groups, such as the labourers, basic and physical needs, like, food, shelter and security, are important. Their actualisation rests only at fulfilment of the basic needs. They voiced out their principle that as long as 'that' policy provides a space for everybody's existence, respects the people as human beings who have needs to live, they argued that people should accept that policy and live happily. That was what the labourers did.

This shows that other significant socially based factors have played a part in shaping the groups' discourses along with the ethnic-based factor. The list includes political affiliation, economic survival, organisational culture, working environment, educational sponsorship, and an increased educational level among the less dominant groups.

Since the findings of this study had informed us that the ethnic-cultural variable of the study is more dominant than the income category variable then, the following discussions will therefore, focus on how the former had played its role in the production of meaning to the television programme, *Miskin*” Analyses were carried out at **four** different levels

6 2 First Level of Analysis

Examining the four different ethnic groups’ decoding

This section describes the findings from analysing the four different ethnic groups’ decoding of “*Miskin*” From this analysis, we can therefore,

- 1) Discover and identify the *different types of meaning (ideological themes)* the groups make from watching the television programme
The analysis is made against the Reception Analysis assumptions
Meanings deriving from the analysis would then be categorised
- 2) Plot the groups’ *decoding pattern* according to the value received by each of the decoding position These values (dominant, negotiated oppositional) are based on Parkin’s Theory of Meaning Systems

(This is to answer **research objective #1** of the study, which is to find the range of meanings, and what causes them to vary)

6 2 1 The different meanings availed from the analysis

In every group discussion the participants were encouraged to generate as many opinions as possible from the programme that was shown to them prior to the discussion It was noticed that different discussion groups had produced different quantity and quality of meanings depending on the groups’ discourses or interests on the issue

For the purpose of analysing the data obtained from the groups-text encounter, these volumes of meaning have to be sorted out and later categorised according to the development concepts of the Vision 2020 Critiques and counter-critiques in

context of the identified issues were then retrieved. Our next important job was to analyse *whom* or *which* group makes *what* perception, and *why* such opinions (supportive or otherwise) were made.

It was learned that the technical aspect of the programme presentation also contributed to the ways decoding was made. During the discussion some useful media-related issues were brought up:

- 1) Development is ethnic-oriented, the challenge is to ensure the state experiences an economically just society.

One of the meanings generated by the focus groups centred on the issue that 'development (eradication of poverty as one aspect of its strategy) is ethnic-oriented and political in character'. Ethnicity in this country is indeed a political item. Even the political parties found in this country are ethnic-based, with UMNO, a party of the Malays, being the dominant political party.

It was for this reason that the New Economic policy (NEP) was structured by the dominant Malay government aimed to protect mainly the socio-economic status of the Malays because they have been identified as the most backward ethnic group compared to some other ethnic groups. This identification and labelling of the Malays being the most backward group and the evidence that the immigrant Chinese and Indians were occupying a better economic status, contributed to the 'sour' relationship between the Malays and the economic-successful Non-Bumiputra groups.

The racial riot of 1969 marked the limit to the tolerance of the indigenous Malays whose ego had been said to have been humiliated by their own failure in their own motherland. To rescue peace and stability, the government then introduced the affirmative economic policy, the NEP [now being superseded by the New Development Plan (NDP)], aimed at removing any form of identification of jobs or economic functions from the ethnic perspective, in which area, the Malays have poorly been affected. For example, in the past, the business sector is always associated with the Chinese, while public administration and the uniformed

groups like, the police and the army, have been known to be monopolised by the Malays

The strategy of redressing the socio-economic imbalance in the societal structure envisaged in the Vision 2020 is related strongly to the meeting of the economic needs of the Bumiputra groups in Malaysia. For example, the government, in its attempt to introduce a socio-economic just society, has obviously concerned itself with 'middle-classing' of the Malays and the Bumiputra groups through the creation of the Malay and Bumiputra industrial commercial community (BICC). The Non-Bumiputra group saw this as a form of a reaction to the existing Non-Malay middle and upper-middle class communities, especially the Chinese (Chandra Muzaffar, 1984)

Most of the opinions given by the different ethnic groups hence, reflected their attitudes, beliefs and values towards the present attempts of the state or government in correcting both, the 'harmful' link between occupational functions and ethnic components, and in removing 'poverty' from the Malaysia's social, economic and political jargon.

With 'plural society' concept as a backdrop to the society, it was expected that the different ethnic groups would have their own opinions when interpreting a development-oriented programme like, "*Miskin*". This phenomenon gave rise to a research question, which centred on the variable of 'variance'. The question is what made those opinions or meanings vary? Either from one to another, or from the one intended by the producer (preferred meaning)? The explanation to this would therefore provide a significant value to the research.

From the interviews, Group 1 representing the Malays in the higher income category felt that the present arrangement offered by the government in helping to create a larger middle class bracket for the Malays is highly desirable. The reason given was that the socio-economic status of the Malays as well as the other Bumiputra groups. They said the Malays and the Bumiputra groups inevitably need such an economic policy to allow them prove that the negative stereotyping on them as wrong. Nevertheless, the higher level intention, they believed, was to secure national security and stability. They said, this could possibly be achieved only

when everybody (all the different ethnic groups), especially the Malays are comparatively better economically

The Malay students from UPM, Group2, also thought that the intervention from the government as, necessary. But, they said, that should not be seen as a threat because in building Malaysia as a nation, the government has its own style and philosophy. The group thought that the NEP or NDP, represents the middle and moderate approach of the government in its attempt to bring an economic growth to the nation, as well as helping the weaker group developed like the other counterparts.

Similarly, Group3, the farmers from Perak, who were very concerned about Malay poverty, thought that any assistance from the government is fair and was very much welcomed. They believed that the government must help the Malays realise the Vision 2020. They said the Malays need to recover the lost esteem and pride caused by the aggression of foreigners some 400 years ago. After all they felt that they are the dominant group, and they deserved the special treatment. As a matter of fact, all of the above groups, Group1, Group2, and Group 3, even suggested the government come up with a more aggressive and combative strategy to wipe out Malay poverty once and for all.

Ethnic consciousness among the Malay groups was so high that they even urged those who have made the grade to help those who are still struggling such as, contributing to the existing charity organisations, or involving directly with some out-reach development programmes for the poor Malay families. Group2 for example, said that although the government is helping the Malays wherever it can but those who have benefited the government development policy must have a way of saying, “thank you”. Much of these reasons were based on the Islamic and business values the groups inherited. The group explained that there are many Islamic organisations in the country that have called donors or shareholders to participate in their activities. They urged the successful Malays to participate in these trade and investment activities of the Islamic foundation organisations so that some aspect of the profit these organisations earn could be used to help the poor Muslim communities.

The professional Malays of Group 1 and the Sarawak Malay students of Batu Lintang College of Group 12, showed a high tolerance level toward some of the weaknesses of the government agencies in implementing the development policy. This is because they believe that the bottom line is the government truly wants to help the Malays. They claimed that many of the development agents have vested interests and lack of professional skills.

The Malay professionals (Group 1), the Perak farmers (Group 3) and the Sarawak Malay students of Batu Lintang (Group 12), felt that the economic protection given to the Malays is timely and legitimate. They all agreed that every Malaysian (especially the Non-Bumiputra citizens) should understand the nation's history so that misunderstanding or misconception about the issues and conditions that led to the development of the present affirmative economic policy could be avoided. They claimed that the Non-Bumiputra critics are usually short sighted and always look for a quick financial gain as their priority in life.

The Non-Bumiputra groups showed a negative response particularly towards the concept of 'equality' contained in all of the development policies developed by the government. The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad realised that this indecent phenomenon has been due to both, lack of knowledge as well as lack of attitudes. In his book entitled, "*The Malay Dilemma*", he loudly said "although racial equality is recognised as indispensable to racial harmony, there is still little understanding of what is meant by racial equality. Each community or individual interprets racial equality to the advantage of the interpreter" (Mahathir, 1970, p. 62).

All of the above groups did not believe that the Malays are genetically poor or backward but have been forced into an environment that has made them so. According to them, the present UMNO-led government is the 'force' that can induce the correct environment to enable the Bumiputra groups change and progress. The Sarawak Malay students (Group 12) even demanded that the assistance to the poor Malays be extended until they can live a quality life independently. They also realised how the Non-Bumiputra groups have construed the 'special' treatment issue. They labelled such behaviours from the anti-government movements as a form of 'greed' from individuals who refuse to admit

that 'sharing' and 'tolerance', are two important prerequisites to a peace living in a multi-ethnic society. They also demanded history to be rewritten to emphasise the significance of Malay hegemony.

The followers of PAS (Group 4) on the other hand, formed opinions that worked in an opposite direction to the existing opinions, and perceived this political image and character of development as a 'misfortune'. Such a negative decoding was expected because they are the followers of the opposition political party and understandably not included as the 'beneficiaries' of the government development policy. They criticized the government for having channelled the benefit only to the government supporters. While the implementers might see the discriminatory practice of the government as logical, being Malays and indigenous, the group resented it because said they were deprived of the national wealth they deserve.

Even though the Kelantanese group (Group 4) realised that they could not benefit from the present economic and development strategy because of the difference in political ideology between PAS and UMNO, they insisted that the government tightened the 'Malaynisation effect' in the national development policy. This is to ensure that 'Malay dominance' be concretely built in the socio-economic and politics of the country.

Apparently, 'Malay hegemony' has been accepted as crucial to the sovereign of the Malays. The UMNO as well as the PAS followers equally endorsed this salience. They said they did not want Malaysia to be like Indonesia where the ethnic identity of the indigenous was buried during the process of nationalisation of the state. Specifically, they said that the Malays in this country should be together to preserve the Malay monarchy system because it symbolises identity, power and dignity of the Malay race. This is a good example to show that the people in this country despite their political difference still think along the ethnic base line.

Although the Federal government led by the Malay-based UMNO party, at one point (1992), amended the law to restrict the 'unlimited' rights of the State Rulers and Sultans, the aim was actually to avoid the monarchy from every possibility of being 'rejected' by the people at large. This was what happened to the monarchy.

systems in many of the European countries today. The government explained to the effect that, 'absolute freedom' earned by the Rulers or Sultans from the colonial days, is 'harmful' and can inhibit 'abuses' of power. The government said that in democratic countries of today where the people have reached a stage where they understand their rights, any form of dissatisfaction experienced by the people in their relationship with the State Rulers, can result in the loss of respect and support. The new law was claimed to work better in the government's effort to preserve the monarchy systems in this country.

There were a lot of controversies when the change was first introduced. The anti-government groups manipulated the issue and amplified the perception on 'autocratic behaviour' and the act of 'belittling the monarchy' by the existing government. Even though this decision affects the interest of all Malaysians, the PAS government decided to abstain probably because Kelantan is on its own, while its relationship with the State Monarch was in the best of form then. But things changed recently (May, 1996) when the PAS government experienced a crisis in its relationship with the Ruler's office, and outwardly the PAS government expressed their support to the amendment of the law made by the federal government. This is one area where the UMNO and the PAS have been seen together in their course of action.

On a different tone, the Chinese professional group from MAS (Group5) felt that the affirmative development plan advocated little democracy and instead recommended an alternative development plan in cases where an acceptance to any plan is not obtained.

The technicians (Group 8) regretted the fact that the development policy was politicised and manipulated to suit a certain interest. The group remarked that the politics in this country is certainly in favour of the dominant group, the Malays. It is for that reason that the needs of the poor Malays were entertained more than the needs of the estate dwellers, whose conditions were much worse than being shown in the programme. The Indian students from UPM (Group9) had the same thought.

The Sarawak professionals (Group 11) realised though that to have a development policy that suits everybody could never be easy in this country, especially when the citizenship of the emigrants was not based on the process of 'culturalisation' but 'political consensus'. A political approach to development is thus required, more so when the dominant population, the Bumiputra groups, is economically weaker than that of the emigrants'.

The Sarawak teacher-training students (Group 13) said that the time has come that the Bumiputra be given a chance to participate in the economy so that they stop from being the '*kuli*', (meaning servant), to the Chinese middle-class who acted as their '*taukey*', (meaning master). They realised that this 'counter-cultural' practice should not be allowed to prolong.

The fact is, the country is in the midst of redressing the socio-economic status of the Bumiputra. As such, all programmes that have been developed could undoubtedly be seen as favouring the needs of that particular group only. The government felt that the status of a fully developed country could not be acquired until and unless all of the ethnic groups are able to stand at par with each other, socially and economically. Until that time, the government will have to continue with its development project and critiques have to be accepted as challenges to establishing an economically just society.

ii) 'Communalism' in television The challenge of establishing a united Malaysia

In interpreting the programme, "*Miskin*", many of the Non-Malay groups thought that 'communalism', is seeping into the television. They rejected the attitude of the television for ignoring the needs of the other non-dominant groups when handling the issue of poverty. The focus on the plight of the poor Malays or Bumiputra in the programme gave the idea as though they are the only groups that deserve the sympathy and assistance from the authority the target group. They said that the television is biased as poverty is also very prevalent in other communities.

Most of the Non-Malay groups particularly members of Group5 and Group7 brought up this resentment. They argued that 'urban poverty' was not elaborated in the programme simply because that would have included the Non-Malays. They claimed that urban poverty is much worse at times than rural poverty because food is not that scarce in the rural compared to the urban areas. There is always something that they can rip off from the jungle, they claimed. An interesting comment given by members of Group5, who are Chinese and urban, pointed out to the fact that 'being poor is sometimes by choice of the rural people'. They said that these people (referring to the Malays, in particular) just love being in the rural area and contented with that sort of life style. "They are not poor economically but the lifestyle they choose make them look like one the government mistakenly thought they are poor", claimed the group. "To make things worst, the television was so insensitive to what is happening to the other poor communities in other different social settings." one participant from Group7 expressed in despair.

The Malay group from the opposition party PAS, Group4, accused the television for being communal because the television's intention was only to fulfill the needs of the government's supporters, the group said. "Although we are Malays, we got nothing", claimed the group. The group also stressed that the television is not for all Malays but those who supported the government.

The Sarawak groups on the other hand, brought up an issue that relates to the ignorance of the television towards highlighting the socio-economic needs of the poor Bumiputra communities in Sarawak. "How could they miss the Sarawak people when talking about poverty?", one of them exclaimed. The group resented that the television did practise communalism even within the Bumiputra group. As one of them had said, "if the television could not afford to talk about poverty nation-wide, then it should not be out in the television", the group argued. "Viewers who are poor themselves, when watching a programme such as *'Miskin'*, would certainly expect that they are part of those who are being served. Unfortunately they were not. This really make us unhappy", one of them explained. The Sarawak Malay students from Group12 expressed their fear that such a practice might lead to the conception of the Bumiputra of Sarawak and Sabah being valued as a 'second class' Bumiputra.

The Sarawak groups also brought up a point that relates to the inference made on the word 'Bumiputra'. For example, the Ibans of Group 14 claimed that the television often used the term 'bumiputra' but to infer only to the 'Malays'. They feared that such a practice would coincidentally influence the way the development authorities operate their work. They even came to the conclusion that this could have been one of the reasons why the Ibans have been denied of the many benefits other Bumiputra have been receiving. Being a member of the Bumiputra groups, they demanded that the same status given to the Malays be given to them too. The Sarawak professionals (Group 11), and all of the indigenous students (Group 13), realised the unfairness too.

The Sarawak groups suggested that there is a certain amount of discrimination due to the religious difference among the Peninsula Bumiputra (Malays) and the Sarawak Bumiputra groups. Unlike the Malays, the Sarawakian Bumiputras are not Muslims. The groups claimed that the Muslims in this country especially the Malays, undoubtedly have a better place than the Non-Muslims. One thing that cannot be discriminated is that Islam is the official religion of the State, and also the religion of the dominant Malays. With this fact, discrimination could run further down, not only between the Muslims and the Non-Muslims, but also between the Muslims who are Malays and Muslims who are not Malays. This is the perceptual context in which the different Bumiputra groups have to live with at the moment.

The focus on the plight of the poor Malays or Bumiputra mainly in the television programme had caused resentments among the Non-Bumiputra members. On discussing poverty in the television, critics argued that the television should have avoided all sense of communalism or ethnocentrism. The topic should have been approached from all possible perspectives. Otherwise, the already plural society would remain disunited, hence, the challenge to establishing a united Malaysian nation would remain continuously high.

- iii) 'Government and its development policy' as a source of strengths and weaknesses The challenge of establishing a prosperous society

The government certainly has its own reasons and rationales for formulating a development policy for this country. The country's economic policy started as soon as the country earned its independence in 1957.

But the 1969 racial riot reminded the newly formed Malaysian nation how important it was to keep a balance between socio-politics and the distribution of nation's wealth.

The distribution of wealth was far from being distributed equally among the different ethnic groups. The indigenous Malays who formed the major ethnic group in the country were left far behind the other ethnic groups, the Chinese or the Indians, who were only emigrants but successfully enjoying the bigger share of the 'economic cake'.

The economic power earned by the Chinese has led them into questioning other sensitive issues with regard to 'citizenship' and 'special Malay privileges' in the Constitution. The Malays were humiliated by the Chinese and blamed them for forgetting the consensus their forefathers had given in, and the conditions of their being in this country signed during the formation of the Federated Malay States (1948) and its extension to the Independence (1957). The riot that broke out in 1969 actually indicated the limit in interracial tolerance as well as the resentment the Malays expressed to the government for being so weak and lacking of political insights. The government practically had no vision and was submerged in the 'fat' of independence. The riot shocked the government and the whole nation and inevitably forced it to act affirmatively in its next political era (Intan 1992).

Although the NEP was designed to tackle poverty nation-wide, the needs of the Malays and the other Bumiputra groups in surviving poverty outgrew the needs of the others. Many historians and politicians in the country agreed to the fact that the NEP was indeed structured to serve not only the economic needs of the

Malays and the Bumiputra groups but also the socio-political aspect of it. The Malay communities especially demanded that their lost esteem be recovered and further humiliation in their own motherland be stopped (Abu Hassan, 1991). The strategy then was to remove any form of an identification of ethnic via specific occupational or professional functions, in which the Malays and the other Bumiputra groups happened to have been poorly labelled. The government's first step was to ensure that the Malays and the other Bumiputra communities associate themselves with trade and business and the other critical professions, and consequently help them grow into a commercial and professional community.

The positive responses from the Malay participants towards the government's new development actions were expected. They looked at the government as a source of strength (with an exception of the group from Kelantan, Group4).

The Malay professionals (Group1) commented that the action was right for giving the Malays a chance to catch up what they have 'missed' from the success of the Non-Malays, in particular, the Chinese and the Indians. The Malay farmers from Perak (Group3) treated the NEP as a way in gaining back and defending the pride of the Malay race. They claimed the Malay pride was damaged right on the first day when the West (the Portuguese) came to land on the coast of Malacca in 1611. Even until the present day, the Malays were still feeling distraught by the existence and interference of other races, but less intense now because the UMNO government had managed to bring the pride back to the hands of the Malays. Socio-economically, they have made some achievements although the ultimate goals are still not achieved.

Giving an 'economic subsidy' to the helpless and poor has for a long time been one of the immediate steps taken by the government in helping the poor Malay and other Bumiputra communities grow. This has caused a lot of resentment on the part of the Non-Bumiputra communities because they are not the beneficiary groups. While the Malay/Bumiputra communities perceived this act as a necessity in order to 'start the ball rolling', the Non-Malays criticised the government for starting the 'subsidy culture'. The latter claimed that this is a counter-productive act, driving the people only to be dependent and spoilt. In response, the Malays/Bumiputra groups defended the subsidy programme and

instead claimed that the motive has been benevolent because it was given only to the poor, the sick and the old. The direct assistance from the government, such as, building a house for the real poor, and granting of financial assistance and fertilisers to the farmers and small holders during replanting periods, are parts of the subsidy programmes the government had rendered to the people. This is to enable them to start, continue and progress.

The Bumiputra participants took it as a source of strength and life, and supported the concept that 'progress needs sacrifices', in which the public is expected to sacrifice a little in order to allow for an economic progress to occur. Subsidy uses public's money, but it was nevertheless argued that it is only to enable the poor to take the first step in the mainstream activities, they argued. They added that as these poor communities who received the assistance progress they practically contributed to the growth of the economy, which in a real sense benefits everybody, the groups explained.

The groups also argued that factors conducive to economic progress would not be able to function after all with different groups participating at different level of resources. Compared to those of the Non-Bumiputra the Bumiputra's resources are known to be considerably low. If competition is used as a yardstick to progress and growth, the Bumiputra will get to no where, they remarked. When that happens, then the vicious cycle to ethnic dissatisfaction is likely to continue, argued the groups.

In a different context, the Bumiputra participant groups regarded the government as a source of unhappiness too. The fact that poverty across nation is still relatively high, only to reflect that the NEP has not been successful, the Malays and the other Bumiputra groups claimed. They seemed worried about the economic gap separating the 'haves' and the 'have nots' especially when the 'have nots' are basically the Bumiputra people. The contrast in living conditions and quality of life experienced by the poor lot and the elite class is still obvious, many of the participants said. If this is overlooked, before the old problem of ethnic-based economic difference could be solved, a new problem of class difference will emerge and consequently complicate the situation, they claimed. The lower income Bumiputra group from Sarawak (group14) however, insisted

that the government implement its social responsibility goal that 'no one community group should be left out of the economic mainstream' The participants also said that there is a lot to be done in Sarawak

Almost all of the groups (the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra group participants) were not quite happy with the way development programmes had been implemented nation-wide In particular, they saw many malpractices going on at the grassroots level involving the development officers (Group2) The farmers (Group3), the MAS officers (Group5), the Chinese students of UPM (Group6), the clerks of USM (Group7), and the Sarawak indigenous student group of Group12 all urged that immorality must be curbed by introducing stricter regulations They also suggested that proper studies or evaluation must be carried out often so that 'human-related' problems could be detected at early stages The argued that the development policy and programmes may have been perfectly structured but spoilt due to a handful of irresponsible people The Chinese executives from MAS said that all types and levels of corruption involving the implementation officers should be regularly checked so that the confidence of the people towards the government would not be eroded

The Non-Malay Bumiputra participant groups had not seen much strength from the government' effort compared to the Malay Bumiputra participants because they felt that the government had not fulfilled many of their political promises The professionals (Group 11) and the indigenous students of Sarawak (Group 13) urged the government to introduce a more aggressive work plan to fasten the economic growth and development in Sarawak At this moment, they claimed that the socio-economic imbalance is not only occurring among the different ethnic groups but across regional setting too, especially between the Peninsula states and the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak They said that the dissatisfaction of the Kadazan people of Sabah expressed through the retreat of the Kadazan-based political party, *Parti Bumi Bersatu* (PBB), from the National Front (the ruling party) in 1989 was a lesson to be learnt

During our investigations, we found that many of the people in Sarawak were not too sure of the meaning of Vision 2020 The professionals (Group 11) said the reason being that the government had not made enough effort in diffusing the

knowledge especially to those who are not in the mainstream of the society. The participants realised that the needs of the Malay business communities were served by the Vision more than the needs of the other Non-Malay indigenous groups, and this naturally caused them to resent.

In an attempt to develop the people, both the professionals of Group 11 and the indigenous students of Group 12, suggested that the Sarawak State government follows the step of the Selangor State government in eradicating poverty. This is especially so in bringing more companies to invest in Sarawak and in return getting them involved in the eradication of poverty projects of that state. But the more urgent need, according to the groups, was to distribute the wealth fairly so that the weaker groups of the society can live an equally reasonable life. The professionals regretted that the majority of the people especially the tribes in the inland areas are still forced to practice the traditional lifestyle because modernisation was still far from them.

The opposition group of Group 4 however, thought that 'assistance' to eradicate poverty should not be done on the basis of political affiliation. The government should treat poverty or development as a 'humanitarian' or social issue, and therefore assistance to the poor should be given to anybody irrespective of which political party he/she belongs to, they said. Injustice, they claimed, happened because the government did not structure the policy of using Islam as its basis. Because of the discriminative attitude of the development agents, they were driven into all types of corruption, explained the group. According to the group, even those who did not deserve the help but support the government received the help. They stressed that the introduction of the Islamic law, in particular, the *Hudud* (crime) Law, could well remedy the situation. 'Justice' in Islam would also mean that the needs of the political oppositions as well as the Non-Muslims living under the an Islamic government would be accommodated and defended too, the group concluded.

In another context, the group saw the UMNO government's effort in amending the law in 1990, with the aim of reducing the 'immunity' of the Malay Sultans and Rulers, as a 'slap' on the face of the Malays. They argued that when the 'image' of the Sultans and Rulers are affected, the Malays are affected too because the

monarchy is a symbol of power for the Malays. Being nationalistic, they also feared that the liberal concept of 'Malaysianising' the nation in the government public policy and programmes today would loosen the strength of Malay power in the long run. They strongly wanted the government to check on the policy to ensure that the Malays be given a priority in all of its development programmes. Most of the Malays and the other Bumiputra members were particularly sure that the present government and its policy are a source of their strength and survival. This is well indicated by the outgrown number of Barisan National supporters nation wide. The government had proven to the people that its policies and programmes had met social obligations not only of the Bumiputra but the Non-Bumiputra too. The Malays and the Bumiputra were most happy because they had been given the chance to prove that 'they can perform when they are given the chance to do so', and they did.

But the fact still remains the same that the PAS members are breathing well, while the Non-Bumiputra were heard saying that the assistance to the Malays had long been overdue, thus, reflecting a sense of unhappiness on some parts of the society. Such opinions, though insignificant, would certainly remain as a challenge to creating a prosperous society.

- iv) 'Poor attitude' of the poor. The challenge of creating a psychologically liberated society.

Many of the participants realised that poverty is much caused by the negative attitude of the poor people themselves. They are known by their 'couldn't care less' attitude, lazy, dependent, lack of farsightedness, close-mindedness, orthodox dogmatic, unobjective and unrealistic. The Chinese executives from MAS said that we need not worry why they are poor because they chose to be one by refusing and denying new technology, new ideas, new world views or outlook and worst of all having very low self-concept. "When they lack proper education naturally poverty perpetuates", the teacher-training students of Group 12 and Group13 said. The Perak farmers (Group3) uncovered that some of the poor were too snobbish with the development authority. They described such a group as 'stupid innocent', defending too much of their self-pride and remained backward.

They also urged that the Malays to be responsible over their own live because the government assistance certainly has its limit

Most of the Malay participants fully agreed with the message from the television programme that the poor must '*hyrah*' (shift in paradigm) to accommodate new needs created in the environment, otherwise personal growth could not be achieved. Nevertheless, the Malay groups in particular, have their personal reasons for defending why the Malays have generally been poor

The Malay professionals argued in particular that the negative attitudes of the poor are not mainly caused by their own-making but the 'environment' in which they have been placed by their previous colonial masters, the British. They claimed that the concept of 'divide and rule' of the British had a lot to do with why the Malays were poor in this country as compared to the Chinese. That administrative approach had resulted in the Malays to remain 'rural', while the Chinese flooded the towns and monopolised the commerce sector

Many realised that negative attitudes are hard to remove but some of them recommended few ways to help change these attitudes. The USM clerks (Group 7) however, commented that the government should help by bringing development-oriented opportunities to the areas where the poor can participate

This is what the USM technicians (Group 8) meant when they said, 'provide the environment for the change to occur'. Any form of help to the poor should be designed in such a way that it encourages creativity and independent living, the groups said. The Indian students from UPM (Group 9) on the other hand, felt that the government has to introduce more 'motivation-development-based programmes' that will facilitate attitude change among people. The members of Group 10 (Indian labourers) commented that the 'we can attitude' approach recommended by the government (Mahathir, 1994b) was excellent and the right approach for the Malaysians

The Malay professionals (Group 1), the Perak farmers (Group 3), the Indian labourer group (Group 10), and the Sarawak Malay group of Batu Lintang (Group 12), accepted the fact that '*hyrah*' is a good strategy to enhance ones life. But

regretted that it has been carried out without proper planning and strategy. They said that the poor people were practically left unguided. The groups thought that the government or the authorities concerned should provide the potential target groups with some useful information as to the different types of *hyrah* they can attempt and the sources of help they can refer to when the needs arise.

The farmers of Perak (Group 3) commented that in order to facilitate positive and correct attitudes for our nation society, the relevant government agencies especially those from the Ministry of Youth and Sports should plan for more 'enlivening programmes' for the youth groups and adolescent-aged children. These programmes, they said, would act as the channels through which new progressive values appropriate to the needs and demands of the Vision 2020 could be instilled. They claimed that the younger generations are the ones who need to participate in the '*hyrah*' programmes, more than the already-matured existing generation. This is to enable them lead a better life in the future, and more importantly, prepare themselves to receive the 'baton' in the leadership relay passed from the present leaders.

Attitude is that part of human personality that requires time and effort to change. Knowledge, experience and the environment are some of the factors that can help change someone's personality from one state to the other. In due course *hyrah* became a popular concept in talking about development in this country, but unfortunately there were little supporting avenues provided to the people who are involved physically. While the people are encouraged to do *hyrah*, the activity itself is backsliding because the supporting system is inadequate. Thus, the challenge to creating a psychologically liberated society is still high on the run.

- v) Religion and development. The challenge of establishing a fully developed and moral society with strong religious and spiritual values.

Religion has been dragged into the process of development in this country through the effort of PAS, the political party that uses 'Islam' as its survival. Because Islam is the key word in the politics of PAS, development is therefore judged and discussed by PAS mainly from the perspective of Islam. This creates

the non-ending conflict between the present ruling party, the *Barisan Nasional* and PAS towards how the Malaysian nation should be structured and built.

The conflict between UMNO and PAS in particular, has been driven for the worst when PAS claimed that 'only PAS is Islam' and 'Islam means PAS', and with that, it means that UMNO, the other major political party of the Malays, is automatically not designated as Islamic. This naturally outraged the Malays in general when the religion of all Malays in this country is none other than Islam. When UMNO was judged as un-Islamic so were the development policies and programmes. As a result, PAS members rejected all UMNO ideologies and hence all of its policies. As one of the Kelantanese participants said, 'PAS will recognise UMNO as Islamic unless it accepts Islam and comply to all of the principles in managing the state'. Political tensions between PAS and UMNO heightened when the only PAS government in the state of Kelantan wanted to replace the existing criminal law in that state with *Hudud*, the Islamic-based criminal law. The political debate went on for quite some time until the federal government put down its feet to call off the intention of the PAS government.

The attitude of the participants of Group 4 was identical with that of the PAS government. The rejection of the UMNO government in allowing Kelantan to practice *Hudud* had caused a reciprocal rejection of the PAS followers, the members of Group4 included, toward the development strategies proposed by UMNO. The group's insight was that 'Malay poverty would continue for an unseen number of years, and remains to be a challenge to the Vision 2020. The rationale given was the 'unIslamic' nature of our development programme would frightened or refrained the Malays from participating, thus the attainment of development goals would be far more difficult'. The group also criticised the Islamic Centre for not playing an effective role in 'Islamising' the government and its development policy so that all Muslims in this country can participate and benefit from them.

Islam was also an issue among the Non-Malay Bumiputra members of the focus groups, particularly by the professionals from Sarawak, who perceived Islam as a source of discrimination. Specifically, the Non-Malay Bumiputra of Sarawak felt that they have been denied of the many benefits the Malays from the Peninsula

because they are not Muslims. They even claimed themselves as the Bumiputra minorities or subordinates.

The Sarawak Malay students of Group 12 did not deny the fact that Islam had caused the indifference among the Malay and the Non-Malay Bumiputra members. They said that the Malays look at most of the cultural practices of the Non-Malay Bumiputra groups as anti-development. For example, they said that the social drinking culture among the sub-ethnic groups in Sarawak is certainly regarded as contra-productive. A minimal development output is thus expected in a culture that accepts drinking as an important ritual because the people are often out of their mental balance, they argued. Socially, such a culture could create negative effects on the younger children because they would imitate those behaviours and parents would have no way of stopping the children from being curious about the product, they added.

The Sarawak state government had recently recognised the negative value of social drinking among the Non-Muslims in that state, and as a result, the Non-Muslim politicians called to stop the ritual if development and economic growth in that state is to maximise. This is consistent with the idea of the government that the politicians are supposed to lead the people by examples.

From the dominant perspective, Islam is just a way of life of the Muslims, or how the Muslims should behave, including how the Muslim leaders should exercise their power or govern the state. The government does not believe that Islam should be politicised either by the Muslims themselves or by the others, but rather be treated as a source to moral and spiritual needs. These are the challenges the country is facing in relating religion to development and in establishing a fully developed and moral society with strong religious and spiritual values.

- vi) 'Politics' of education. The challenge of establishing a progressive society.

The participants from Sarawak brought up this issue in the discussion. The professionals (Group 11) claimed that the standard of education in Sarawak is far behind that of the Peninsula. The Malay student group (Group 12) argued that

teachers' dedication is an important factor in introducing a standard but has turned to be a life-long issue among the newly as well as the long serving teachers. The group gave the example that many of the qualified teachers especially those with urban background had refused directives to teach in the rural. Modernity is therefore, claimed as hard to come by to those children of the rural society because those who teach at the rural schools are basically rural and traditional, lacking much experiences and exposures themselves.

Understanding the situation, the state government has newly introduced a system of enriching the knowledge and experiences of the local teachers, in the hope that this effort will eventually enrich the experiences of the school children. It was learned that the newly graduated teachers from Sarawak are to serve their first few years of teaching at the schools in the Peninsula as a way of widening their experiences and skills. At the end of the term, they are supposed to be a better group of educators and able to relate the newly acquired knowledge and exposures to the local school audiences. For a long time, qualified teachers from the Peninsula have been sent to the rural schools in Sarawak and Sabah, aiming more at social integration. However, both ways, the group members hoped that the standard of education in Sarawak would be enhanced.

The Non-Malay indigenous members of Group13, demanded that the government should place education as a top political agenda too. As one of them said, "education is a prerequisite to progress and development and a society without a chance is a dead society". The group then urged the government to create that chance by calling for a political strategy, in which, education must be seen not only from the context of personal survival and growth but ethnic survival too. The group also explained that if the government and the Bumiputra society overlook this perspective, they fear that the Bumiputra would still have a long way to go before becoming a professional, commercial and industrious society.

Many of them believed that 'anti-nationals' in Sarawak have refrained Bumiputra from getting to the universities or acquiring professional knowledge and skills. These anti-nationals were said to have worked their way by scaring them and creating in them a lack of confidence in science and technology and encouraged them to compete in an education field that brings them to only a doom, for

example, taking the national Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination National examinations are meritocracy-oriented and with the present system and standard of education in Sarawak, many would only become failures, the group explained. The group added that the Chinese who are known to have a better socio-economic base usually make the grade and hence will grab the chances to the universities. While the Bumiputra HSC dropouts will end up in the teaching colleges, of which the requirement needed for the entrance is only a Malaysia Certificate of Education (MCE).

The anti-nationals or anti establishments have also been said to have discouraged the indigenous people from joining the *Institut Teknologi Mara* (ITM), a college offering professional courses that has been constructed solely for the Bumiputra people. The group quoted a good example whereby many of the indigenous students who had joined ITM for some professional courses were made to abandon the courses. They were told that ITM would be unable to secure places of work for them after graduating because ITM's objective is to let its graduates compete for the jobs in the private sectors. Besides, the scientific and technological approach of ITM was an unrealistic dream or goal for them, especially in cases where even basic needs are scarce. Hence, the teacher-training colleges became a popular spot for the dropouts.

With that, the teachers-to-be participants together supported the idea that education should be politicised too so that equal education opportunities especially the college and the university education, be allocated proportionately to the Bumiputra students without disregarding their academic merits. This is crucial, because the academic survival of the indigenous in this country depends seriously on the politics of education.

Everyone agreed that education is a prerequisite to a progressive society. But the socio-economic situation in this country is not putting every ethnic group at the same status along the starting line of progress. If the government feels that the socio-economic status of the Bumiputra need to be redressed before the objectives of the Vision could be realised, the Bumiputra feels that one of the items to be dealt first has to be education. Politicising the education practice in this country is a challenge indeed to a progressive Malaysia.

vii) Caring values The challenge of establishing a caring society

The focus group participants in general were concerned about the caring values and culture that the government has intended to instil in the heart of the nation. Much of this has been discussed in the Vision 2020, which aims at establishing Malaysia as a nation with a caring culture. This could be due either to the Islamic or the eastern values and culture that the groups inherited from their forefathers. The professional Malay group (Group1) valued the effort of the television in highlighting the caring gesture through the building of houses as shelters for the poor. The Malay students of UPM (Group2) remarked that the task of eradication poverty should not lie in the responsibility of the government alone. They called those who have succeeded to give a hand to the poor especially by donating to the existing charity foundation so that the needy can be assisted in monetary terms or in kind.

Being intellectual, the Indian students from UPM (Group9) felt that the caring gesture shown in the television was humane. They said that the educated Malaysians in general have never disputed the concept of caring culture as proposed by the Vision 2020. The labourers (Group10) however, condemned those activities of applying ethnic discrimination in implementing the concept. As one of them said, "if you care, care for all. Poverty has no ethnic boundary". The Sarawak professional group (Group 11) however, was outward and trans-national when they said that the country should preserve this value to make the Malaysian nation different from many other developed countries of the world. Finally, the indigenous students of Rajang (Group13) felt that the teachers should treat this concept as basic and plant it in the minds of the children right from school age. Most of them felt that the government was right in offering help to the poor and urged that the new Malaysian nation should internalise the value of caring in the society. The MAS officers however, suggested that while the value is good, the Malaysian society should never become a society that survives on the concept of charity or welfare.

While everyone thinks that caring values should be implanted into the culture of every Malaysian, yet, some of the groups thought that there are preconditions to

be laid to the “givers” and the “receivers” There is yet a need to create awareness among the society members that helping the needy is a part of social responsibility At the same time, the beneficiaries need to know that they could not be too dependent too long The government on the other hand, recently reminded the implementers that the policy the government makes is not meant for them to spend according to their whims and fancies but the objectives of the organisation set up These may be some of the conditions to be considered prior to the setting of the caring society

- viii) The ‘television’ as an ideologically reproductive agent The challenge to achieving the objectives of the Vision 2020

In developing countries, the television is commonly regarded as a development tool, to disseminate development messages to the society In Malaysia, the television is doing more than just that, it also acts as an ideologically reproductive agent for the government to transmit its hegemonic ideologies

The Malays naturally were happy with the fact that the television ‘belongs’ to the government, particularly Group2 who said that ‘the control of the television is justifiable because the government certainly needs a media apparatus to enable its ideologies are heard and its status quo to be enhanced’ Members of Group 1 however, argued that the Malays were focused in the television programme not because the television was biased but rather the present development policy is one that is attempting at assisting the Bumiputra attain economic growth They added that the television was only presenting a certain issue (poverty) in context of the national policy, and the Malays happened to be the main players

The Malay students of UPM (Group2) and the farmers (Group3) together felt that although the reproduction of political ideologies in the television worked legitimately but the Malay-biased messages could have affected the sensitivity of the other ethnic groups They said, for the good of everybody poverty should be dealt as a universal phenomenon

The Chinese students of UPM (Group6) and the Indians staff of USM (Group8) said the highlighting of the Malays gave the image that the government pampers

the Malays. Being a development tool, the television should have discussed poverty along the spirit of humanitarian not politics, they added.

The portrayal of the government assisting the Bumiputra achieve their new socio-economic status in the television programme was indeed an example of the reproductive role of the television on the dominant policy and practice. Any form of contradiction to such an effort could be read as forms of challenges to achieving the objectives of the Vision 2020.

A summary of the development-oriented meanings made available from the first level of analysis can be found in **Table 6(a)**. These meanings posited how the different ethnic groups understudy perceived or interprets the television programme, "*Miskin*."

Table 6(a) A Summary of Development-Oriented Meanings Aailed from
The First Level of Analysis

Development Oriented Meaning – First Level of Analysis	
i	Development is ethnic-oriented and thus the challenge is to ensure Malaysia experience an economically just society
ii	Communalism in television The challenge is to establishing a united Malaysia
iii	Government and its policies as sources of strength and weaknesses The challenge of establishing a prosperous society
iv	'Poor' attitude of the poor The challenge of creating a psychologically liberated society
v	Religion and development The challenge of establishing a fully developed and moral society with strong religious and spiritual values
vi	Politics of education The challenge of establishing a progressive society
vii	Caring values The challenge of establishing a caring society
viii	The television as an ideological apparatus The challenge of achieving the objectives of the Vision 2020

6 2 2 The research-decoding pattern based on Parkin's Theory of Meaning Systems (1971)

In television viewing, when an audience member relates himself or herself to a programme text, he or she would normally be engaging in a certain decoding position. The choice of this position is much influenced by the decoder's discourse, the textual discourse and the contextual environment in which the communication occurs. During that engagement, the meaning to the content is

eventually produced. As mentioned earlier, this study adopted Parkin's Theory of Meaning System (1971) which introduces three types of meaning: the dominant, the negotiated, and the oppositional meaning. In this study however, the system was applied only for the sake of analysing the decoding of the development-oriented issues.

However, we are aware that the *value* of each decoding position varies from one decoding to another. To indicate the difference in value, each decoding position was assigned with a numerical tag reflecting its degree of dominance. The value assigned to each position ranges from (+3) to (-3), with (-3) carrying the *least value* of dominance. In that way, the decoding pattern could be constructed in a more consistent manner.

The process of making the *verdict* 'which group takes what decoding position and with what value', was subjectively determined by the researcher. The basis of this determination was very much dependent on our intuition and feeling as we relate to the participants' responses towards the chosen programme text.

The question is, what is so important about knowing the decoding position of the groups? It is unquestionably important because in reception analysis studies, the decoding positions of the audiences manifest out of the media texts they are in contact with. Since the concept of 'economic ownership' and the concept of the media as 'ideological reproductive tools' were much defended in the critical school of thought, the meanings the audiences produced would therefore imply an important piece of information to the study.

In this particular study, supposing the majority of the groups were to have taken the dominant positions, it would only imply that TV3 has been effective in defending the government policy and programmes, in which way, the status of the government could undoubtedly be enhanced and strengthened. However, it is only natural to expect some contradictory decoding made by our participants because the groups were not only heterogeneous ethnically, but economically and politically too. What matters then is the implications these contradict decoding have on, first, the roles of the televisions in this country, and second, the political power of the dominant class (in this case, the Malay Bumiputra group), the ruling

government and the whole socio-economical and political structure of the system. This is the area that will finally spell and address the issue of ‘effects’ of the televisions with regards to the Malaysian audiences’ consumption of development-oriented television programmes.

The decoding positions assigned to the various ethnic groups under study have been tabulated and summarised. Each position, either dominant, negotiated, or oppositional, was attached with a numerical ‘value of dominance’ running between (+3) to (-3). Please refer to **Table 6(b)** on the summary of decoding positions of all groups. From this sun-unary table, we managed to plot a graphic pattern of the groups’ decoding according to the degree of dominance assigned to each decoding position. **Figure 6(a)** on the other hand, illustrates the pattern of the groups’ decoding indicating the value of dominance of each decoding position. (With that, **research objective #2** of this study has been dealt with.)

However, the next question to be addressed is, what does this pattern mean? Interpretation of the decoding pattern is therefore necessary. Firstly, the pattern shows that the different ethnic groups were seen involved in all of the three decoding positions. Majority (7) of the groups were found in the negotiated domain of the decoding position, while the rest are either in the dominant (5) or the oppositional domain (2). Secondly, how different are their decoding and why?

From **Table 6(b)**, it was noticed that the professional Malay group (Group1), the Malay students of LTPM (Group2), the Malay farmers of Perak (Group3), the Indian labourers (Group10), and the Sarawak Malay students (Group12), were found to be taking the *dominant* decoding position with various degree of dominance.

The MAS executive officers (Group5), the clerks (Group7), the technicians (Group8), the Indian students of LJPM (Group9), the Sarawak professional group (Group11), the Sarawak indigenous student group (Group13), and the Ibans from the long-house (Group14) on the other hand, were found taking the *negotiated* decoding positions. But, the levels of dominance vary from one group to another.

Finally, the Kelantanese (Group4) and the Chinese student (Group6) were seen as taking the *oppositional* decoding position in interpreting the television programme, “*Miskin*”

Table 6 (b) A Summary of the Groups’ Decoding Positions

Decoding Position & Degree of Dominance	Dominant Ranging from +1 to +3	Negotiating Ranging from –1 to –3	Oppositional Ranging from –1 to –3
Group by ethnic			
<u>Malay</u>			
Gp1	+2		
G2	+1		
Gp3	+2		
Gp4			-3
<u>Chinese</u>			
Gp5		-3	
Gp6			-2
Gp7		-1	
<u>Indian</u>			
Gp8		-2	
Gp		-2	
Gp10	+1		

<u>Sarawakian.</u>			
Gp11		-3	
Gp12	+1		
Gp13		-1	
Gp14		-1	

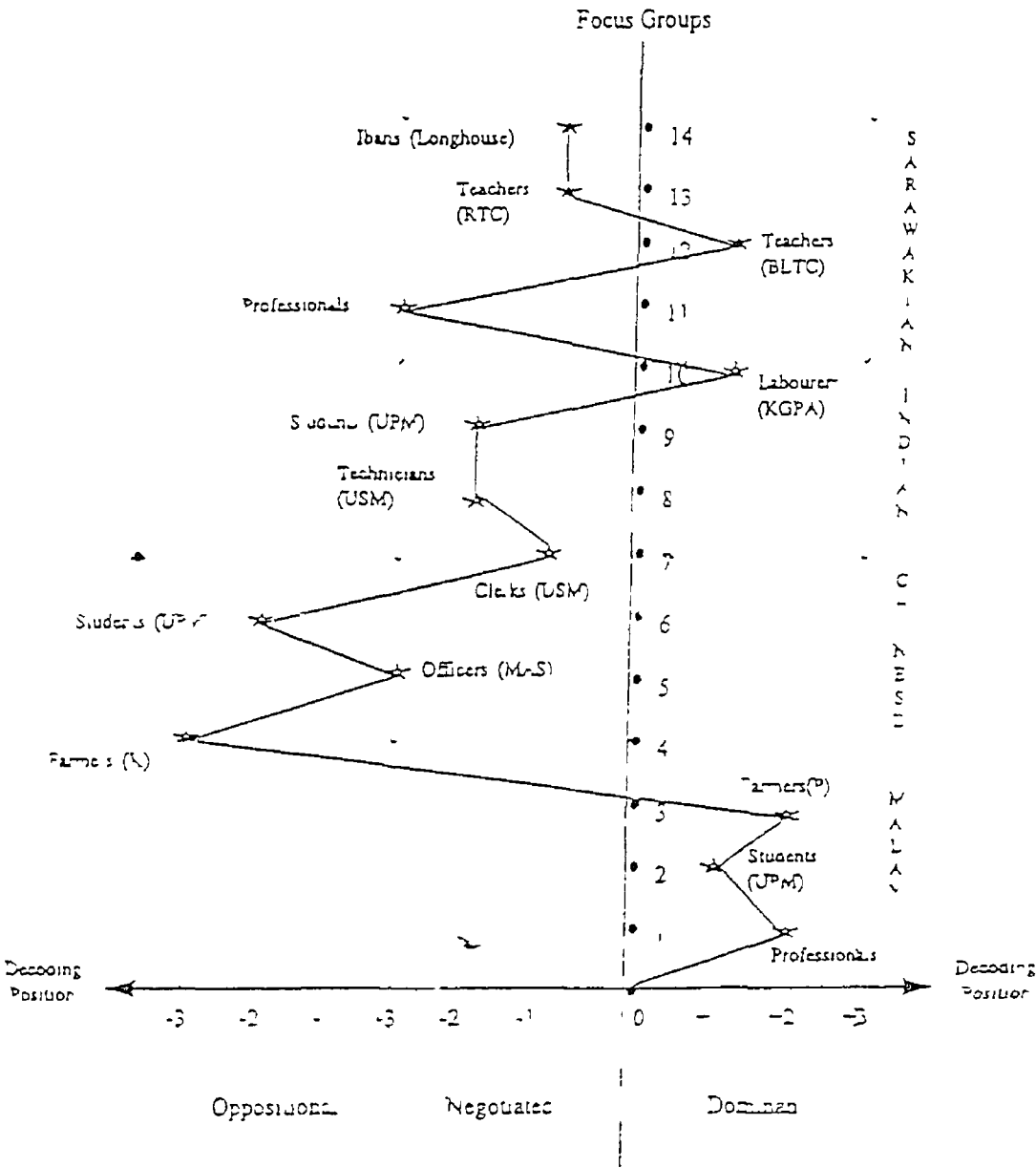
6.3 Second Level of Analysis

Examining the decoding of the different ethnic groupings towards the programme “*Miskin*”

In this section we intend to separately examine the decoding of the four ethnic groups. Consequently, a decoding pattern for each of the individual group could be drawn and comparatively analysed. The aim of this comparative analysis is to highlight the most salient issue ever being brought up by the different ethnic groups. In order to achieve that objective, salience is measured in terms of the total score in ‘frequency of mentions’ a particular issue receives from the focus groups carried out in this study. In other words, a particular issue that receives the highest number of mention from the focus groups is ranked as the most important issue.

This issue will be the ‘perspective’ of our reception study and against which a match against the relevant challenge of Vision 2020 will be carried out. This makes our study a holistic one, in particular, trying to examine an inter-ethnic reception towards a selective development issue, relevant to the groups’ existence in this country. The following will describe the individual ethnic group’s performance in decoding the television programme “*Miskin*”.

Figure 6(a) A Graphical Pattern of Groups' Decoding Position Indicated by their Value of Dominance



6.3.1 The decoding of the different ethnic groupings

A) Summary to the MALAYS' decoding

The Malays emphasised a total of *ten* development-oriented issues during the discussion. The professionals, the students, and the farmers perceived that the television programme "*Miskin*" had generally strengthened the fact that development is a political item in this country, while the television is merely a reproductive agent of the government, with a prime role of supporting and reproducing the government ideologies.

To ensure that efficiency is maintained, they strongly felt that any forms of malpractice should be stopped. To be progressive, responsibility in nation building should not rest on the shoulder of the government alone but the people too. They fully supported the idea that other corporate organisations and successful individuals implement the caring culture. This will be an 'added value' to the society that Malaysia is building.

Although they agreed that *hyrah* is a good strategy for overcoming poor attitudes, the Malays felt that the government has yet to provide the appropriate system to back and facilitate the process of an attitude change because the poor may not have the means to do it themselves. To ensure a balance development among the Malays, they also wanted the government to create some economic-based programmes specially meant for the lower-economic groups so that they do not have to compete for businesses with the existing, strong economic-groups, and able to participate the economic activities with minimal risks. However, the Malays expressed satisfaction on the government's effort in redressing the socio-economic status of the country, which in return they said had strengthen the present hegemony.

The PAS sympathisers, on, the other hand, saw the politicising effect of development have deprived them further from participating in any national economic activities. Table 6(c) lists down the development-oriented issues generated by the Malays.

Table 6(c) A summary of Development- Oriented Issues Generated by the Malays in Interpreting the Television Programme

Development-oriented issues	Gp1	Gp2	Gp3	Gp4
i) Development is politicised	√	√	√	√
ii) The television is an ideological apparatus	√	√	√	√
iii) Attitude problem of the poor	√	√	√	
iv) Implementation problems		√	√	√
v) Sympathy towards the government	√	√		
vi) Caring values	√			
vii) Involvement of States government			√	
viii) Malay hegemony				√
ix) Widening of economic gaps	√	√		

B) Summary of the CHINESE' decoding

The three different Chinese groups raised a total of *seven* development-oriented issues, as they watched the television programme. All of them perceived the government as being rather 'unjust' in carrying out the development programmes and in portraying the poor in the television, in whichever case, the Malays were given more attention compared to the other races. The neglect on urban poverty in the television programme was believed to be political. They were also concerned about the unprofessional behaviour reported at the implementation site and suggested that programme evaluation be carried out periodically. The

Chinese groups clearly stated that the television should portray the real thing the viewers want to see but not what the viewers ought to see

The group called for a more democratic approach to development, meaning getting rid off the subsidy policy the government is giving to the Malays and the Bumiputra groups. In other words, the Non-Bumi participants generally implied that the past experience has not been meritocracies enough.

The Chinese saw meritocracy as the better way of acquiring progress because they said it will drive the people to work harder for a success. This indirectly facilitates an opened, competitive economic opportunity for all individuals in their acquisition of an economic prosperity. But then, none of them discussed the basic condition for an attainment of meritocracy, that is, whether or not the different ethnic groups in this country have been exposed to a simple socio-economic justice? What would happen then if the Malays/Bumiputra groups known to be lagging behind the other races economically were to loose the game again? Will that induce another racial riot? and if that happens, who is going to take the responsibility and accountability of that riot? Meritocracy in its smartest form, thus, ought to be measured by using the participant's own national scale, not the universal or international scale. **Table 6(d)** summarises the issues raised by the Chinese counterparts.

Table 6(d) A Summary of Development-Oriented Issues Raised by the Chinese in Interpreting the Television Programme

Development-oriented issues	Gp5	Gp6	Gp7
i) Development is politicised	√		
ii) The television is not bjective		√	√
iii) Negative attitudes of the poor		√	√

iv) Problems with the implementors	√	√	√
v) The television programme as s propaganda	√		√
vi) Economic gap is widening	√	√	
vii) Poverty ruins the country's image			√

C) Summary of the INDIANS' decoding

The pattern of decoding for the Indian groups did not conform to our expectation that the dominant decoding belongs to the dominant society. For example, the workers at KGPA had taken a dominant decoding, which was contrary to the positions taken by the other Non-Malay groups thus far.

The Indian ethnic group developed *seven* different development-oriented issues from the television programme. All of them agreed that the development policy had been politically influenced while the television was meant to support the dominant political ideas. Unlike the Chinese, the Indian groups, managed to see some good values from watching the television programme, like, caring for the needy and creating an awareness among the viewers about poverty. The student group in particular, thought the programme contained an important educational information with regard to what poverty implies.

This implied that the Indian groups were not too tightly-bound by the political ideas that surround the development-oriented issues, and instead were willing to seek at other usefulness of the programme content if there were to be any. With that, the Indian groups were found to be less radical or critical compared to the Chinese counterparts as far as development in the country is concerned. Like the previous groups, a summary of development-oriented issues produced by the Indian ethnic groups was developed. The following Table 6 (e), explains the issues generated by the Indian groups in interpreting the television programme.

Table 6(e) A Summary of Development-Oriented Issues generated by the Indians in Interpreting the Television Programme

Development-oriented issues	Gp8	Gp9	Gp10
i) Development is politicised	✓	✓	✓
ii) Television is not objective	✓		✓
iii) Negative attitudes of the poor	✓	✓	✓
iv) Caring values		✓	✓
v) The television programme as a propaganda	✓		
vi) Economic gap continues to widen		✓	
vii) The television programme as source of awareness		✓	✓

D) Summary of the SARAWAK groups' decoding

The Sarawak groups' decoding looked quite a good mixture. Being indigenous, they are therefore given the Bumiputra status but then, as a minority (due to population size and cultural dominance). With that status they earn the same special privileges as the Malays do. Although they are only a Bumiputra minority their ethnic identity and dignity stand tall. The state of Sarawak is just like any other states, such as Selangor or Kelantan, but the people are multi-ethnic and therefore multi-dialect and multi-cultural. This background summary has to be highlighted again because it seems that it has created a good variety to the meaning the Sarawakians make out of the programme. *Miskin*

The Sarawak groups came up with a response or decoding pattern different from that of the Malays from the Peninsula. Although they are regarded as the Bumiputra, they have been quite critical. One factor that can be used to explain the difference is the fact that the Sarawakians are not Malays, and thus, they are not as dominant. As and when they found that their ethnic-based interests did not correspond with what the dominant has agreed upon, conflicts arise. For instance, the students of BLTC who were representing the Malay component of the Sarawak population had inclined to opt the dominant position because ethnically they belong to the same clan as the Malays from the Peninsula. The rest could not find that much similar degree of “fit”.

The variation in decoding indicated that the Sarawak groups have applied various types of decoding strategy in interpreting the ideologically loaded development-oriented television programme “*Miskin*”. In this study, the Sarawak groups managed to bring up three new interesting issues on top of those that have been mentioned by the rest of the groups. They are the concept of ‘Bumiputraisim’ which touches the status of the Sarawak indigenouness versus the Malay indigenouness, the ‘politics of education’ which they need for their development objectives, and their dissatisfaction over the uneven development between the different regions, particularly between the eastern region and the western region.

The Sarawakian groups have been observed to highlight fifteen development-oriented issues. The different groups have had their ways of arguing the concepts raised. The groups believed that the imbalance in socio-economic status does not occur only between the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra groups in this country but apparently within the Bumiputra groups too. The Bumiputra members in Sarawak they said, have a lot to catch up with the achievements of their Bumiputra counterpart in the Peninsula.

All of the groups insisted that the economic gap between the Peninsula and the two states (Sabah and Sarawak) in the Borneo island be narrowed, so that the people would have no basis for feeling unhappy or thinking that they are being ‘side-stepped’ by the Federal government. They also demand that more rural development projects be brought into the states so that the general population could also enjoy similar economic enhancements.

On the other hand, the groups demanded the Sarawak State Government to play a more active role in developing the rural sector so that poverty could be eradicated. The groups complained that the vast lands they owned have given them practically no economic return. This is because they said the local government has never brought any development projects to the people. Although they realised that the condition of the infrastructure in Sarawak inhibits economic investments, the government nevertheless, should treat infrastructure as a priority. This would be the more effective way of transforming the state ‘natural’ wealth into a ‘real’ economic wealth.

One significant contribution made by the Sarawak groups relates to the fact that the Sarawakians need to look at education as a political goal. This is because they said development in this country has been drafted within the framework of inter-ethnic relationship. In other words, the Sarawakians now are able to see that the educational goal in this country should be more than just to acquire knowledge; it must be designed to meet the objectives of the development policy too. A summary of development-oriented issues raised by the Sarawakian groups was also developed. Please refer to **Table 6(f)** below.

Table 6(f) A Summary of Development-Oriented Issues Generated by the Sarawakian Groups in Interpreting the Television Programme

Development-oriented issues	Gp1-1	Gp1-2	Gp1-3	Gp1-4
i) Development is politically-linked	√	√	√	√
ii) Television is controlled by the government	√	√	√	
iii) Negative attitudes of the poor		√	√	
iv) Problems of the implementors		√		
v) Caring values	√	√	√	

VI) Involvement of private sectors	√	√		
VII) Uneven development between regions or states	√		√	√
VIII) Abuse of term 'Bumiputra'	√		√	√
IX) Politics of education	√	√	√	

6.3.2 Frequency of mention on the development-oriented issues generated by the four ethnic groupings

The four ethnic groups had each produced its own perspective in interpreting the television programme. The development-oriented issues raised were grouped into *fifteen* (15) types of development-oriented meanings. This section intends to study which of the 15 fifteen issues receives the most number of mentions by the sample, to enable it be referred to as the most salient issue of the study as far as development is concerned in Malaysia. Research wise, this particular issue is regarded as the 'point of contact' the groups had with the programme text. This could mean that, when the Malaysians talk about development they could not refrain themselves from associating it with politics. This issue thus, is the group-binding issue as far as development is concerned that affects their existence and relationships among the group members. (With that, **research objective #4** could then be answered)

It would be interesting to know what sort of attitude exactly each group has on this particular issue? This will be our next task, which attempts at examining and analysing the way this particular issue affects inter-ethnic relationship. **Table 6(g)** below shows the matrix on the frequency of mention of the development oriented issues generated by the four different ethnic groups.

Table 6(g) A Summary Table on the Frequency of Mention on Development-Oriented Issues Generated by the Four Ethnic Groups

Development-oriented issues	Malays 4/4	Chinese 3/3	Indians 3/3	Sikhs 4/4	Total 14/14
1 Development is politicised	4/4	3/3	3/3	4/4	14/14
2 The television is controlled by the government	4/4	2/3	2/3	3/4	11/14
3 The negative attitudes of the poor	3/4	2/3	3/3	2/4	10/14
4 The problems of the implementers	3/4	3/3	0	1/4	7/14
5 Sympathy towards the government	2/4	0	0	0	2/14
6 Caring concepts	1/4	0	2/3	3/4	6/14
7 The television programme as propaganda	2/4	2/3	1/3	0	5/14
8 Involvement from the private sector	1/4	0	0	2/4	3/14
9 Malay hegemony	1/4	0	0	0	1/14
10 Economic gap	2/4	2/3	1/3	0	5/14
11 Poverty ruins nation's credibility and image	0	1/3	0	0	1/14
12 The television programme as a source of awareness	0	0	2/3	0	2/14
13 Economic imbalance among region or states	0	0	0	3/4	3/14
14 Abuse on the term 'Bumiputra'	0	0	0	3/4	3/14
15 The politics of education	0	0	0	3/4	3/14

From the above summary table, the four ethnic groups have given their interpretations of the television programme *Miskin* from which a total of fifteen (15) issues were raised. Each ethnic group had picked on issues that they thought have relevance only to the members' existence. In this study, it is possible to find a case where only one particular ethnic group has seen only an issue as important. For example, the Sarawakians have seen the abuse on the term 'bumiputra' (no 14) as important, because it undermines their bumiputra status. The rest of the groups did not discuss this issue because it did not concern their welfare. In a different case, all of the ethnic groups thought that the political character of the development policy and programmes (no 1) has affected every group's welfare, in one way or another. Thus, that particular issue was analytically discussed by every ethnic group, making it the most salient factor above all others.

One important observation made out of the summary informed us that all of the ethnic groups were indeed concerned about the fact that the development policy and programmes in this country are politically linked. It therefore, represents the 'meaning' that binds or relates all the four ethnic groups together. The content of their arguments basically rested on their perceptions towards the extent of freedom that the different ethnic groups have on development opportunities in this country. In another way, they argued over the extent of influence the affirmative development policy has on the character of the development activities. The introduction of the affirmative development policy, the NEP and the NDP had changed the tradition/pattern of how development could to be acquired by the different ethnic groups in this country. The groups' responses or decoding were basically centred on how they feel about these changes, and the impact the changes might have on the existing economic chances of the different ethnic members.

In this study, the racial dichotomy between the Bumiputra party and the Non Bumiputra party became significant. Each one had its own way of telling about poverty or otherwise economic development. This is probably due to the fact that the political nature of the NEP and NDP had treated both factions (Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra) rather differently, although the government responsible might have a handful of reason for doing so.

By order, the perception of the Bumiputra groups (Malays and Sarawakians) towards 'development' should not differ, but the reverse was true. This could be explained by the fact that, the level of ethnic/cultural dominance attained by both groups is not the same. The Malays by virtue is indisputably more dominant than the Sarawakians'. Using this cultural framework, the Malays had generally given a particular way of describing about the television programme compared to the indigenous people of Sarawak, thus resulting in a diverse pattern of decoding within the Bumiputra group itself.

The above findings indicated that every ethnic group has its own way of looking at the television programme, "*Miskin*" or the present development system. The reason being, each has its own 'political' reasons for explaining the members' existence in this country. More importantly, the varied historical conditions and backgrounds of the different ethnic groups participating, helped shape their discourses that eventually influence them to decode poverty or development just as varied as their conditions are.

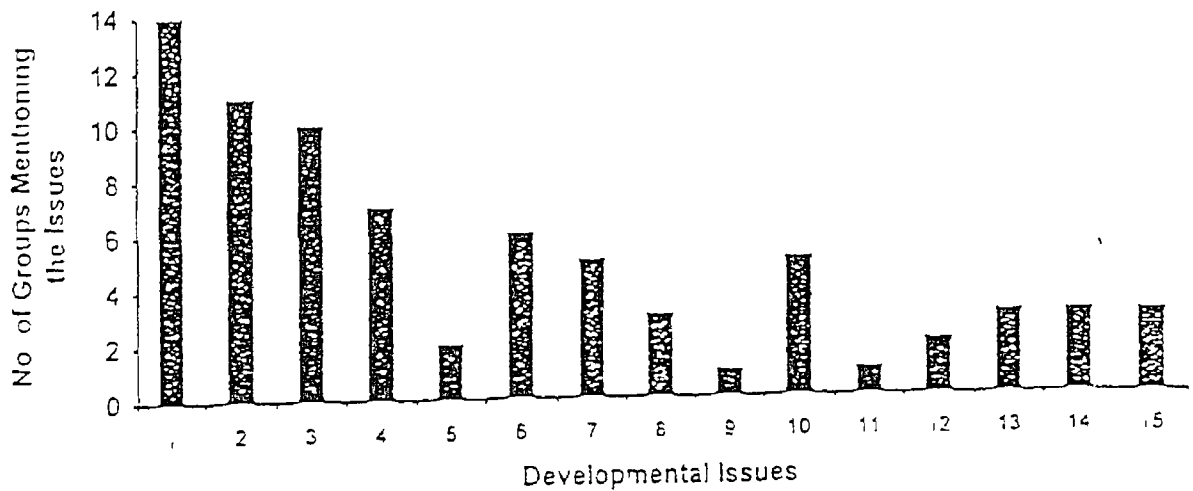
The performance of the television and the attitude of the poor both managed to attract the groups' attention. The style of reporting in the television programme had raised a significant issue about the unobjective nature or partiality of the media. While the groups were in favour that the poor must learn how to be more responsible towards their own life by acquiring some new progressive attitudes, the groups were also wearied with the government for leaving the poor to act pretty much on their own in performing *hijrah*. The government was called to give more than just asking the poor to change, like, providing the suitable environment or creating the opportunities for the poor to make a change. Many of the groups agreed that the bottom line is, it is not easy to change people's attitude.

There are several issues that were discussed by some but not others. Some of the issues are characteristically general while others are quite ethnic-related. These issues are important but do not have that much influence on inter-ethnic relationships.

Summary on the most frequent mentioned issue of the study

One significant information the frequency table had enlightened us with is the grand score for issue #1 **that development is politicised**. The score indicated that the groups had perceived this particular issue as the most important. To illustrate this point further, please refer to the *bar chart* in **Figure 6(b)**,

Figure 6(b) A Frequency Bar Chart on Development-Oriented issues by the Four Ethnic Groups



Keys

- 1 Development is politicised
- 2 Television is not objective
- 3 Negative attitudes of the poor
- 4 Problems with the implementers
- 5 Sympathy towards the government
- 6 Caring concept
- 7 Television programs as propaganda
- 8 Involvement from private sectors
- 9 Malay hegemony
- 10 Economic gap is widening
- 11 Poverty ruins nation's credibility and image
- 12 Television programs as sources of awareness
- 13 Economic imbalance among regions or states
- 14 Abuse on the term 'Bumiputra'
- 15 Politics of education

6.4 Third Level of Analysis

Analysing the different ethnic groups' attitude towards the most salient issue

Using the most salient issue as the 'common denominator' our next task is to find out what would be the groups' attitudes, feelings or general discourses on it. More importantly, the objective here is to find out what underlies these interpretations and why. In other words, watching "*Miskin*" had taken them far beyond the programme itself to the more realistic question of political intervention in the structuring of the development policy. This intervention, they thought had affected or undermined their life in some way or other and their inter-ethnic relationship with the members of the society. The choice of this theme would allow us examine further into how this issue relates to the well being of the different ethnic groups, especially in terms of attaining an economic development, and in terms of relating themselves with each other. This issue serves as the 'yardstick' against which the interpretation of the groups' decoding would be given. (With that, **research objective #5** could thus be answered)

6.4.1 The issue that 'the national development policy is politically-driven'

What is the issue? The issue is that the national development policy is politically and ethnically biased. The Non-Bumiputra generally agreed. But, the Bumiputra had looked at this point rather favourably although the different sub-groups within were not in consensus at how the policy had been implemented.

The first national economic policy, the NEP, and later succeeded by the NDP revealed that the government needed to act affirmatively in its social engineering activity. The bases used in the structuring of this 'untypical' economic or development policy were as has been understood, historical and environmental, that, unless the people are fully aware about these factors they certainly would respond in a way that is not consistent to the dominant ideology.

The effects of such a politically structured economic and development policy were felt even greater as the television institutions in this country are being kept

under the full control of the Ministry of Information. The situation had unconditionally allowed the television system to act as the 'enforcer' of government ideologies. "*Miskin*" is a good example of a television programme that translates and transmits the dominant ideology about poverty or development.

The next question is what prompted the government to structure the national economic policy in a particular way? Indeed, it is true and easy to pinpoint at the 1969 racial riot, as the factor that drove the government into introducing the 'political wave' in the present national development policy. The NEP, which started in 1970, was formulated to 'correct' many of the past 'wrongs' created by the then government. Although the Malays then really went out for a 'war' with the Chinese (mainly), on the ground that the Chinese were described to have gone beyond what the Malays thought as the 'limits', the warring relationship was indeed a peak of an iceberg. Development analysts and critiques discovered that the newly independent Government then (1957-1969) actually 'took off' on the wrong premise (Mahathir, 1970).

According to Mahathir, it was a mistake to believe that there had been a racial harmony in the past and to consider that the Sino-Malay co-operation to achieve Independence was an example of racial harmony. He also said that the government made a mistake of believing that the Chinese were only interested in business and acquisition of wealth, and that the Malays had wished only to become government servants. He summed up that the leaders then were so deeply buried in the glory over the newly acquired strength. To some extent, this has them to forget about the people they need to serve, especially the Malays themselves, whose existence and status stood so low compared to that of the Chinese, who by then (Independence Day), were already controlling the nation's economy.

The government was awoken by the brutal move and quickly learned that the Malays were not happy with the 'public sector' or 'government servant' image and at the same time wanted to retain their hegemonic dominance. For that purpose, the present government, under the leadership of Mahathir, urgently redressed the socio-economic sector so that the imbalance between the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra socio-economic status could be 'corrected'.

This naturally requires more than just an ordinary reformation of a development policy. Likewise, the UMNO-based government now demands that the dominant Malays' economic needs must be served and protected until they can sit and stand at par with the other races especially the Chinese. Under such a circumstance, the social orientation of the national development policy could not survive the challenge unless it is supported by political regimentation.

At this point, the Chinese and the Indians are still sceptical about the government able to make them out of prejudices although economic, education and other social plans were publicly laid as meant for all.

6.4.2 Cross-analysing the different ethnic groups' decoding in relation to the issue

A) Analysis of the Malays' decoding

The Malays in this country were generally being divided into two political segments: those who supported the UMNO-based ruling government, and those who supported PAS, the opposition political party. For examples, the professional group, the UPM students, and the Perak farmers shared much of the views of the dominant power, particularly the views of the UMNO-backed government, which fights for nationalism and the Malays' survival. On the other hand, the Kelantanese villagers preferred the alternative political framework led by PAS which argued about people's struggle only from the context of Islam. The latter, however, represents the thinking of just a very small Malay minority (less than 10%) of mainly from Kelantan. As discussed in Chapter Two earlier, not all Kelantanese are followers of PAS although PAS rules the State of Kelantan.

1) Assistance to the Bumiputra communities must continue

The professional group, the UPM students, and the Perak farmers generally regarded the *Majalah3* programme, '*Miskin*', as a source where they were reaffirmed about the government's kind attitude towards the poor. They could see that the government really cared for these people, to the extent of building a house

each for the very poor families and providing them with the basic utilities. Although relative poverty among the Malays, they said, had increased due to the improved living condition of the hard core poor, there are still many Malay families who live below the subsistence living standard, they concluded. They demanded from the government that the special assistance given to the Malays be continued even beyond the year 2020, because poverty still affects a large portion of the Malay population. Unless this point is taken, they said the target of NDP would not be fully achieved.

The speech by Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Tun Haji Abdul Razak, the President of the UMNO Youth Movement, which was delivered at the UMNO Youth General Assembly (1991), confirmed this fact when he said that 'although the Malays have managed to fill up the good quantity of the work force, but the quality of work the Malays were given were all the lower-rank jobs'. He argued that the Malays are yet to get into those professions that require high technical skills like doctors, lawyers, economists, and engineers. Thus far, he said that the Bumiputra only managed to grab about 2/3 or 70% of the total equity allocated for the Bumiputra in the corporate sector. This is an evidence to show that the Malays must work harder in order to catch up with the advancement of the other races. At the same time, the group reminded that the government's job in assisting the Bumiputra has not finished yet.

It was also shown in the record of Registered Professional of 1990, that the achievement of the Bumiputra community in holding some key professions in the country, was still far behind that of the Non-Bumiputra especially the Chinese. For example, from the bar chart in **Figure 6(c)** on the involvement of the Bumiputra, Chinese, Indians, and others in the field of Accountancy, about 80% of the opportunity available had been taken by the Chinese while the Bumiputra owned only about 10-12 % of the share. As a matter of fact, the figure showed that the Chinese came up top in almost every profession. The suggestion given by the three groups in our interviews was therefore, justifiable, because the achievement of the Malays is still below the requirement for the formation of a Bumiputra commercial, industrial and professional community the focus of the NDP and the Vision 2020.

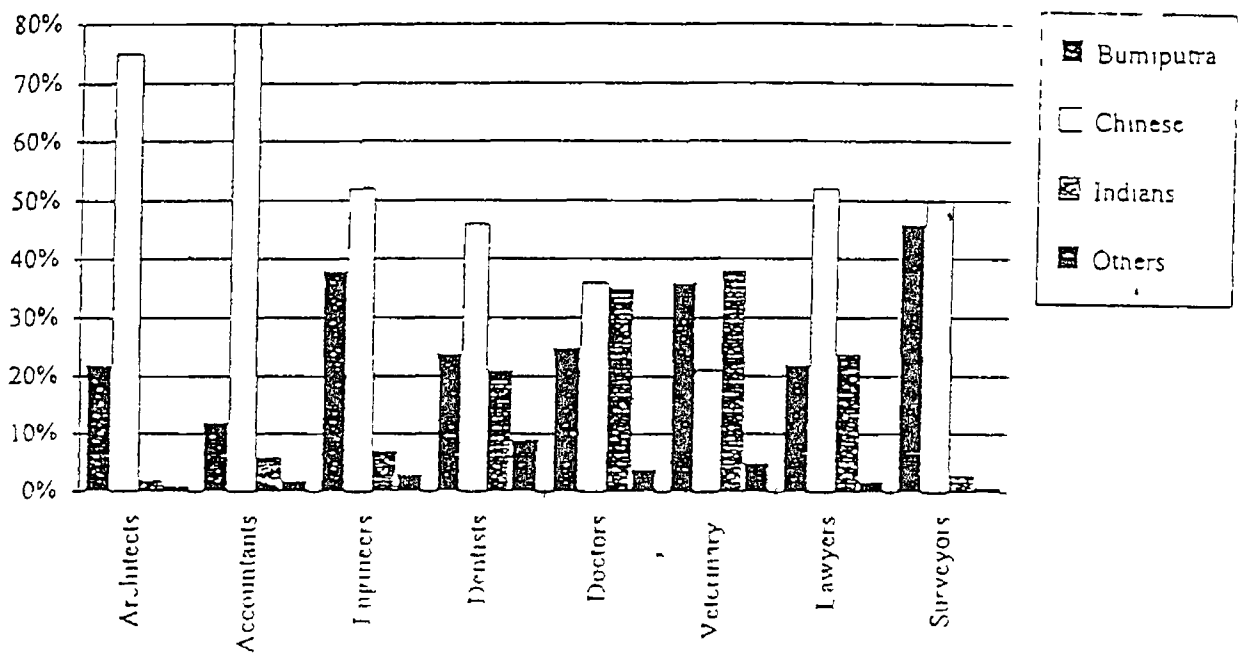
ii) National stability

The professional group, the LJPM students and the Perak farmers also saw that the government's intervention in the planning and the implementation of the national development policy as paramount to national stability. They argued that this country had proven that stability could be destroyed and ruined by socio-economic injustice. This is more likely to happen than when those who receive the injustice come from the dominant group they are a part.

The groups also confessed that the Malays in general were very much welcome to the effort of the present government in redressing the Malaysian economy because they felt that the economic system the country inherited from the Colonial government has never given them any advantage. The new approach that attempts to improve the socio-economic strength of the Bumiputra would automatically help to install national instability.

The groups disagreed with the stereotyping of the Malays by the non-Malays, because no consideration was made that the Malays were deprived of the progressive environment in the past. This is a strong factor for the Malays to renew their pride and maintain their rights as 'the son of the soil'.

Figure 6 (c) Percentage Distribution of the Different Ethnic Groups by Key Professions (1990)



Source: Sixth Malaysia Plan

iii) Racial equality

In the opening sentence to Chapter Five (The Meaning of Racial Equality) of his controversial book entitled, "*The Malay Dilemma*" (1970), Mahathir made a strong claim that 'in this country, racial equality is a prerequisite of racial harmony'. He argued that as long as there is no social equality, there will be no social harmony. It is important to note that in the process of acquiring that harmony, there will always be tensions and strains in the previously 'harmonious' relationship because the task involves a gain for the 'have-nots' and a loss for the 'haves'.

The Malays apparently have acquired new values after the Independence and this resulted in the rejection of the then *status quo*. Although the present government realised that the affirmative development policy has created a strain in inter-ethnic relationship, but conflicts are impossible to be removed, they said. The government's move to help the Malays/Bumiputra is certainly regretted by the Non-Bumiputra communities, but at least, one recognised cause of people's dissatisfaction has been discarded, the Malays thought.

This is the basis of his argument when the Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr Mahathir put his 'hands' on the policy that attempts at removing the inequality between the have and the have-nots in this country. The need to restore an economic equality became more crucial as the Malays population learned that they were denied of a fair share of the 'economic cake' due to poverty.

iv) Humiliation for being dominant but poor

The Malay groups in this study perceived that the intervention of the government has provided an answer to a serious problem relating to the existence of the Malays. Being dominant, they should *not* be the ones who would be neglected from the economic mainstream. This indicates how much structural injustice had befallen on the Malays from the colonial administration. The question is how could the Malays (living on their motherland) be so poor? Such was regarded as a 'political' humiliation. Hence, at the time when the Non-Bumiputra members were showing a larger 'appetite' in empowering the economy, the Malays rose to

confront the Non- Bumiputra groups To the Malays, the introduction of the affirmative development policy by the UMNO-back government was indeed a work of pride and they all gave the support

v) Power for the elected government

The other question raised by the Malays pertained to how could the structural economic misfortune that befallen on the Malays and other Bumiputra members be corrected, if the government has never affirmed itself in managing the development needs of the people? The Malays thought that the government must be given the right to do what the government thinks is best for the people In a democratic system, a government is elected because the public is confident that the government is capable of delivering the 'goods' and renders all responsibilities But, this is only possible if the people (after the election) allow the government to function as a leader to lead the people and correspondingly getting the due support from them who are being led That was the basis of the Malays' argument when they tried to defend the affirmative development policy instead of the other alternatives, which the Non-Bumiputra members thought are projecting more democratic or meritocracies value in a global sense of the words To the Malays, the affirmative development policy thus, symbolised the *power* " the people had given to the government to enable the government carry out its functions, especially at the time when the country is in the midst of correcting its economic structure As voters, the Malays had given the power to the government, as much as the government wants that power to enable them to rule and develop the country, the way the government feels best for the nation The Malays were never in favour of an open economic structure where the different ethnic groups would be competing on equal basis

vi) Responsibility

The Malays also viewed this intervention as a form of a social responsibility and thus, it should not be perceived as an act of aggression or empowerment of the powerful over the powerless, this group said The Malays claimed that the government had always been sensible and fair This is certainly in agreement to what the Prime Minister had advocated In his opening speech at the National

Front party convention, in 1995, he announced that the forty-year ruling period of the coalition government, served more than what was required to show how efficient the government was in carrying out its responsibilities in taking the people to a civilisation. The reason for signing of the BN Convention then was basically to enhance the commitment of the component parties and not to forget their responsibilities to serve the country, the nation, and the people.

vii) Racial harmony

A racial harmony is generally accepted as an absolute necessity in enabling the country proceeds with its development programmes. The Malays regarded the effort of the government in redressing the socio-economic imbalance as a 'heartfelt' move towards a racial harmony in this country. Although in some ways, the process had caused a 'disharmony' in the Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra relationship.

The Malays said that the Non-Bumiputra had no reason to be unhappy about the special assistance because the government had never intended to reduce the earnings of the Non-Bumiputra so as to strike the balance. Instead, the government had created even more opportunities in order to accommodate Bumiputra participation. In this context, the Malays agreed on the Prime Minister's anecdote of *Robin Hood* kind of justice (Mahathir, 1995a). According to Mahathir, Robin Hood justice has never been a true justice, it de motivates people from acquiring more wealth, knowing well that if they do, the wealth will be stolen again. Everybody then prefers to remain poor.

However, the Malays comforted the advance economic groups that the government is not practising the Robin Hood justice, nor is it favouring the quest of Capitalism (Mahathir, quoted in Golvin Alagasan, 1994). According to Mahathir, if absolute capitalism were to be allowed, economic growth would have been faster, but, the Prime Minister was sure that it could not last because the extreme disparity of the pure capitalist system would have resulted in the political upheaval. The Malays thus, believed that the government's intervention was to achieve a racial harmony among the different ethnic groups in this country.

viii) National pride

In a more emotional tone, the Malays regarded the NEP/NDP as a saviour to the nation's pride as well as the personal pride of the Malays. Many incidents have contributed to the loss of pride either to the nation or the Malay communities *per se*. The nation was humiliated when the government had to render its power to the West in several occasions: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and the Japanese experiences. The Malay community was particularly hurt when they turned to be so backward a community as a result of the British colonialism.

For example, the 8.5% economic growth Malaysia is experiencing today is indeed a remarkable recovery of the lost pride (Mahathir, 1994b), the government claimed. As had already been mentioned, the 20.3% out of 30% target for Bumiputra ownership of capital equity in corporate sectors is indeed another remarkable recovery for the loss of pride of the Malays and other Bumiputra members (Mahathir, 1991). More importantly, the quality of wealth the Bumiputra had acquired had improved tremendously to the extent that some successful members have even managed to buy over giant companies from Non-Bumiputra members. That was an outstanding success. The Malays were certain that these successes and many other un-stated successes owed much to the justice of the affirmative NEP and now the NDP.

These favourable outcomes had qualified Malaysia to be called as one of the rising stars in the Far East. The nation now claimed that the per capita income for an individual Malaysian has risen more than four times since 1974. The statistics showed that after about twenty years after the introduction of the NEP, the per capita income had increased incredibly from US\$730 to US\$3,300. Another remarkable note about the Malaysian economy is that Malaysia has been placed as the nineteenth (19th) in terms of world trade (Mahathir, 1994a).

The Malays believed that the main ingredient in the success is none other than the strategic economic policy that advocates an equal distribution of the economic wealth among the different ethnic groups in this country.

ix) Islamic values in development

Although the PAS followers had claimed themselves as the champion in the struggle of Islam in this country, the UMNO-based government had not neglected Islam in the process of developing the country. This is the argument made by all of the groups with regard to the relationship between Islam and development. The professionals, the students, and the Perak farmers who did not speak for any particular political party commented that the general Malays looked at Islam as *addeen* or a way of life, that in anything people do, the practice must be Islamic. Thus, what matters then would be the values that the policy imparts to the society, the groups concluded. With that, it is safe to imply that the Malays, whether they are sympathisers of UMNO or PAS, consider Islamic values as the 'breath and soul' of the national development policy.

B) Analysis of the Chinese' decoding

The Chinese participants were generally critical in their responses over the orientation of the development policy in this country. Although it has been made known that the existing development policy was formulated with the intention of creating a 'balance' in the socio-economic experience, the Chinese in particular, could not get away from the idea that the activities were encroaching into their business territory they have nurtured for so long. That caused the great anxiety among the Chinese and is affecting the relationship between the Chinese and the Malays in particular.

The concerns of the Chinese members basically touched on the 'new' status of the Malays (not so much of the other Bumiputra) who are the recipients of the development policy. This is well reflected in the 'dream' of creating a handful of Malay millionaires to be the bases of the new upgraded group and the widening of the upper second class Malay citizens.

i) Ethnocentrism

The Chinese participants described the post 1969 era in the history of Malaysia as one in which ethnocentrism became increasingly important especially among the

Malays There was logic to their opinion because that was the time when the NEP was introduced, in which remedial measures to remove the causes of the racial riot were fixed According to them, the NEP made the Malays think that their existence is more important than the other ethnic groups, and that the riot was something that the nation must learned about the dominance of the Malays in this country In short, they referred to the NEP as the turning point and a new leaf for the Malays

ii) Discrimination in eradication of poverty

Referring to the role of the government in its attempt to eradicate poverty, the Chinese felt that the focus has been on the Malays mainly This was seen as a form of discrimination and against the philosophy of the NEP itself which proposed that poverty must be eradicated from this country irrespective of race of those affected With that, the groups confirmed that the national development programme in this country, is not only ethnically linked, but politically biased too

According to the Chinese participants, the old political myth that the Malays are the most backward community is still being used today to justify the government's assistance Such a move was regarded as unbecoming because many of the Malays have turned millionaires

iii) Rural versus urban poverty

Discrimination did not only concern itself with race relationship but geographical setting too Whether it is urban or rural, did matter to them because the Chinese mainly live in town areas, and the treatment given by the government, they said, is much determined by it

To the Chinese focus groups, the stress on rural poverty in the television programme was much of despise They said that the hardship suffered by the urban poor is equally bad or worst than those living in the rural areas They argued that the rural people could always bring food from the 'jungle' or consume food at lesser cost than what they have to pay for the same thing in the city This suggests that the government have to pay attention to the urban poor the same

way it has given to the rural poor. If the government has committed itself with the task of eradicating poverty, every poor person therefore deserved to be given some kind of help, they argued, until unless the task is influenced by the tricks of politics. In this study, the participants highlighted the 'danger' posed by the scenes of squatters living in between the skyline building which they fear would affect the good image the country is building internationally.

iv) Subsidy culture

The MAS officers, on behalf of the Chinese majority, voiced out their fear that the sponsored-economic mobility programme, such as the NEP, would only make the Bumiputra a more 'dependent' community. They said, it encourages a subsidy culture rather than a working culture, which brings a reverse effect of a development programme. In searching for a better socially-based economic solution, the government was urged to provide alternatives to the present affirmative development plan to ensure that the people have a choice to decide on which plan that fits their needs well rather than being forced into one that misfits. The Chinese are more in favour of the 'participative-type' economic plan whereby the people's participation and hard work are preconditions to a successful living. Their argument says, when survival is due only for the fitters, people will work hard to be fit. They claimed that this type of plan would appear to be more democratic.

v) Development is for the supporters of the government

An interesting point brought up by the Chinese clerks from USM concerned with the government's biases in the process of implementing the policy. They argued that development for the people depends much on who (politician) represents the area. Thus, development is meant mainly for the supporters of the ruling party. Conversely, it may imply therefore, areas that come under the opposition political parties would not have much hope in getting assistance from the government. From their experience, some of the constituencies that belong to the opposition block did not even have enough street light, they claimed.

C) Analysis of the Indians' decoding

With regards to the issue of the national development policy being influenced by the political system of the state, the responses from the Indian groups were paralleled to the responses of the Chinese groups, that is, the national development policy is indeed less of the Bumiputra but Malay-biased. They also well acknowledged the understanding that the UMNO party which had strive for Malay politics in this country long before the new nation was born, empowers the dominant coalition ruling party, the Barisan Nasional (BN). With that as a background, the demand from the economic-depressed Malay community for a socio-economic justice in this country, naturally came handy, the groups claimed.

It was related by the groups that the earnestness of the then government in handling the plights of the economic-oppressed Malays was deliberately illustrated by the brave act of the government in making amendments to the then existing act. They said four amendments were gazetted, and they were not to be discussed even within the Parliament. The amendments include the special rights of the Malays/Bumiputra, the issues related to *Bahasa Melayu* (the Malay language) as the National language, the rights of the Malay Rulers and issues related to the question of citizenship. The groups recalled that the Indians as well as the Chinese were practically shunned from expressing their feelings about the new reform. While the Indians thought that the reformation was actually testing the roles of democracy in this country, the Malays argued that it was necessary to keep a civil order.

It nevertheless explained why the late Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein (the then Prime Minister) was approached by some human right champions because the new act was interpreted as going against the 'freedom of speech' the group commented. In his response, he was reported of saying, "the nation cannot have a system that permits anybody to say or do things that are likely to endanger racial tensions" (1978, quoted in Abu Hassan, 1991, p. 4). That was the 'weapon' he used to mark the beginning of the political intervention in the process of developing the multi-ethnic Malaysian society.

Today, the Indians have learned that the present Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Mahathir bin Mohamad, working along the same principle this country needs its own style of democracy. He contended that 'democracy is not for the sake of democracy, and believing it as so, is disastrous'. This is because he said that 'democracy has its limit and therefore not an absolute entity'. Believing in Mahathir's principle, many of the Indians today especially those with the Malaysian Indian Congress (a component of the BN) showed their consideration and tolerance to the existing societal system.

However, the issue of poverty among the Indian estate dwellers could not be taken out from the concern of the general Indian people because a bigger portion of the Indian society is still living there. The participants informed that the living condition experienced by the estate dwellers is incomparable to the worst cases ever picked by the television programme. The groups condemned the politicians because they said the politicians were normally seen concerned only at the time when the people's votes are needed to restore their power.

1) Discrimination in the eradication of poverty programme

Holistically, the issue of politicising the development policy as seen by the Non-Bumiputra, is hinting at the discrimination act of the government in its attempt to remove poverty. They said the Non-Malays were practically left to handle their own problems. The majority of them argued that development should have been approached from the humanitarian perspective and this means, having to go above the issue of race, colour or creed. The Indian participants, therefore, urged the government to remove poverty at all possible cost and without any interference from politics.

11) The commercial, industrial, and professional Bumiputra community

Some of the Indian participants also realised how much ethnicity had influenced the NEP. Specifically, the BN is now committed to creating a Malay Bumiputra commercial, industrial and professional community of some significance by the year 2020. By deploying the political and economic resources of the State

towards this goal, the effort of the government has created a lot of resentment among various categories within the NonMalay/Bumiputra communities. The Non-Bumiputra members claimed that the NEP affects certain aspects of their businesses and industries especially those that are related to expansion, recruitment, and promotion. It seemed that it has also formed a direct bearing upon capital ownership, distribution of shares, and marketing and sales activities. In short, the business world once monopolised by the Non-Bumiputra is now changed to accommodate the business force from the Bumiputra segment of the society.

To realise the deployment exercise, the government had introduced a higher quota for the Malays/Bumiputra to enter the higher studies institutions. This is to ensure that the shortage of qualified manpower within the Bumiputra category in the field of business as well as the other critical professions be overcome. The issue of ethnic quotas in the universities has in fact been a subject of debate among the political leaders even within the BN. To the critics, what has kept the coalition together until today is merely the glue of power, not the common values or goals (Chandra Muzaffar, 1984).

iii) The 'special position' led to communalism

Many critics have said that the 'special position' created for the Malays/Bumiputra has been used by the government to enhance and strengthen the social position of the Malay/Bumiputra component. The government wants them to experience a social mobility destined towards the middle and upper classes of the society. They said the formulation of the NEP thus, has been structured towards that effect. The Indians, especially the students, saw this as a form of a capitalistic movement in the Malaysian economy, and if allowed to prolong they said, would only produce a reverse effect to the inter-ethnic relationship.

The NEP hence, has turned the society into a competitive society, in which, the existence and significance of the individual ethnic group is driven by an economic strength. The Indians particularly feared that this would evoke communalism, where each ethnic group would eventually think and serve business interests only

for its own members' sake. The country thus, is involved in some kind of an 'economic race' between the different ethnic groups. According to the participants, economic race is a common feature of a capitalist economy that emphasises the acquisition of commodities, maximisation of profits, and the pursuit of wealth as an end to itself. As and when such values and attitudes intrude interactions between the different communities, these Indians believed that these values would soon distort the underlying human ties.

The Indians participants here saw that, the riches of a handful Chinese had become the motivation for the Malays in creating a Malay commercial elite group. Such a move had resulted in the birth of a few Malay millionaires. What resented the Indians most is the fact that this goal was achieved at the expense of the many other poor Malay/Bumiputra families who have, since the history started, been deprived of economic chances. At this point in time, there are still many who can be categorised as the hard core poor and they certainly need the government's assistance to survive, the participants commented. Thus, communalism does not occur only inter-ethnically but intra-ethnically too, where the higher social-ranking group would normally take care the interests of its own members only, while 'outsiders' have to think of their own ways to survive. Problems have thus grown to be multi-layered and more complicated.

iv) The 'we can' attitude

Interestingly, not all Indians would think that the politicising of the economic policy had given a reverse effect on the well being of the Non-Bumiputra communities. The question is, which Indian group would make such a supposedly ethnic-free opinion about development? This study showed that the low-income group represented by the KGPA labourers took a dominant decoding position in relating themselves to the ideology-loaded television programme. Being 'poor' themselves, they would naturally think that economic-related needs as more important than any other higher-level types of needs, such as those related to ethnocentrism or self-esteem. In other words, the thinking framework is more of an economic-value laden rather than cultural-value laden. Hence, they were compelled to produce a dominant meaning

because the government's move had improved their social existence and well being

What had came out to be a more important contribution of the KGPA workers' decoding, is not just the highlighting of the 'self-survival' interest, but, the ability of this group to sense the value of having a 'correct' attitude as a prerequisite to the securing of development and progress. They said that although the slant of the economic policy has been Bumiputra-biased, no one Non Bumiputra is denied of an economic enlightenment if he so wished. Above all they said that the Malaysian must have the confidence and the will power to change and progress. The 'we can' attitude promoted by the Prime Minister in encouraging industrialisation was described by this particular group as timely.

The "*kita boleh, Malaysia boleh*" or translated as the 'we can and Malaysia can' attitude, is the new slogan towards changing the spirit of the people in attempting to meet the objectives of the Vision 2020. The labourers believed that the present successes that Malaysia is experiencing are all because of this logically correct, non-ethnic-biased attitude accepted by the general Malaysian public. The progressive public, they said, managed to place their focus on the more important issue rather than the trivial racial-biased issue. The government and the Malays in particular would welcome such an open-minded attitude because it symbolises tolerance and consideration of the other ethnic members in achieving a common goal. If this prolongs, they said, a national unity is something that is not impossible in the near future.

D) Analysis of the Sarawakians' decoding

Although the general pattern of response of the Sarawak groups was found to be more towards the negotiated decoding, but on the subject of development being politicised, the Sarawakian groups were in full defence. This is not unusual because they belong to the Bumiputra group, and who in the Constitution, were provided with a special position.

In many ways, historians, anthropologists, and academicians, have described the Sarawak indigenous people as quite similar to the Malays from the Peninsula.

This is because they came from the same ancestry's root. However, the language they speak easily informed us about their origins. Although many of the indigenous Sarawakians have embraced Christianity or Islam, there are still many who are animists. In practice, the legacy of animism is still 'thick' even among those who have acquired the religions. Thus, the indigenous people of Sarawak, and Sabah for that matter, may look physically the same as the Malays from the Peninsula but socio-psychologically and customarily they are different. More importantly, the two types of Bumiputra could further be differentiated along the dominance level each group earns in the societal structure. The Peninsular Malays, due to some circumstances, feel more dominant than the indigenous people of Sarawak and indeed the Sarawakians acknowledged their subordination in many ways. That has given an important bearing on how the Sarawakians decode the television programme, "*Miskin*"

1) The contra-cultural economics

The concept of Bumiputraisms binds the Sarawak indigenous and the Malays together and together they demanded the government to protect their socio-economic interests against the emigrants. They feel that they are now experiencing a contra-cultural economics whereby the locals are subjected to the whims and fancies of the Chinese or other races in determining their income.

The Non-Malay indigenous teacher-training students of RTC, welcomed the government's intervention in the formulation of the national development policy, such as the N-EP, because they believed that the Bumiputra-biased policy would certainly help to protect their economic interests. They wanted to see the 'servant-master' relationship they established thus far in business with the Chinese be displaced by the indigenous monopoly. This they believed could only be achieved if the government could create more business opportunities for the Sarawakians to participate. As it is now, they thought that the government had not done enough, and had been criticised for being regionally biased because the Peninsular states had received more opportunities than Sarawak.

They also criticised the local government for the lack of emphasis on native needs and in designing the economic enhancement plan for the people of Sarawak. For some good reasons, the Chinese were given the business opportunities. Comparatively, they noticed that there has been a higher degree of awareness on this matter with the people of West Malaysia. Part of the credit was given to UMNO for creating such awareness. They said something has to be done even though Sarawak is without the presence of UMNO.

ii) Heterogeneity causes ethnic orientation in development approaches

The Sarawakian groups believed that the government had always wanted to look for a 'magic' solution in formulating a development policy for this country. Even if the outcome is something that pleases one ethnic component and not the rest, the government still had to choose what, in the knowledge of the government, is thought as the best for the whole society in the long run. Taking the riot as a lesson, and looking at poverty of the Bumiputra groups as a challenge to the smooth running of the Vision 2020, the government had no choice but to be affirmative and ethnic-biased in its policy.

Even if it is not for the reason that they themselves come from the Bumiputra group and therefore were given the protection, the Sarawakians still thought that the government's approach is just right because it aims at striving for fairness and equality among the different ethnic groups. Ethnic orientation in the Malaysian development policy was thought of by the groups as an inevitable circumstance because the society itself is heterogeneous, if not dichotomous (Bumiputra versus Non-Bumiputra). The ethnic emphasis was even thought of as a necessity because it is the Bumiputra, the dominant and the privileged which have been affected by poverty. The question made by the groups is, if the Bumiputra-based government is not helping the Bumiputra, who else is?

The professionals rationalised the negotiational or the oppositional character of the Non-Bumiputra responses on the nature of the national development policy as caused by the inability of the Non-Bumiputra members in culturalizing themselves fully with the 'spirit' of the dominant groups. The process of

acquiring citizenship by the emigrants may have something to do with the 'unculturalized' nature of the Chinese and Indians in this country

It is important to note that citizenship was obtained by the emigrant Chinese and Indians out of a political bargain in 1948 when the Federation of Malaya was formed. The nationalistic Malays were at that time so eager to earn an independence from the British, and to accelerate the process they decided to accept the request from the British to receive the emigrants as the citizens of the Federation. Citizenship given to the Chinese and the Indians (later) was thought of as a better bargain than having to accept the proposed 'Malayan Union' (1946)-- a strategy of the British to lessen the power of the Malays when all races in it would have an equal power and rights. The Malays also thought that choosing an alternative of forming an alliance with the Chinese rather than going against them was a better plan to avoid the British from making use of the Chinese to go against the rising Malays. Considering those factors together they formed a stronger coalition called the Alliance party to bargain for an early independence. That explained how the emigrants got their citizenship and nowhere in the lines could we find the Chinese and the Indians became Malayan citizens as a result of having aculturalized into the existing local culture.

Even after about 35 years of achieving that citizenship, the society is still freshly fragmented. There is a likelihood that the further away one is from the date of independence, the more chances he/she is going to forget or insensitive to the event. Critics have pointed out that the lack of understanding on the historical and cultural background of the country among the Non-Bumiputra is one of the reasons why they turn radical (Chandra Muzaffar, 1984). The Sarawak Malay students even suggested for the nation's history to be rewritten so that the present younger generation could develop a higher degree of awareness on their existence in this country and knowing how to pay their loyalty and respect to the country as due.

iii) The special position

Indeed the indigenous of Sarawak and Sabah have acquired that 'special position' status from the first day they joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. For that

reason, they are very supportive of the government in 'ethnicizing' the national development plan. The Malay teacher-training students of BLTC demanded the government to continue assisting the Bumiputra members especially those in the rural Sarawak even after the year 2020 because the economic disparity between the Bumiputra and the NonBumiputra there is still wide. The Ibans from the long house commented that the Bumiputra groups should be given more skills to upgrade themselves. To the farmers, they wanted to experience a better technology so that they could increase their income and have a better quality of life. They noticed that much of the attention was paid to the development of youth in the Peninsula and nothing much for those in Sarawak. This has made them think that they are the second-class Bumiputra. Such a perception is dangerous indeed and the government should not allow that to empower the minds of the people.

Summary to the analysis of the different ethnic groups' decoding

The analysis indicated a mixture of status in justifying the need for the government to formulate a national development policy that is, in the eyes of the Non-Bumiputra, regarded as a Malay/Bumiputra-biased. The Non-Bumiputra specifically meant at how just the policy had been in addressing the development needs of the four major ethnic groups comparatively.

All the Malay groups, with an exception of the PAS supporters, conceived the act of orienting the development policy in accordance to the needs of the Malays/Bumiputra interests, as justified, timely, and pragmatic. The hidden agenda was for the sake of acquiring a national unity, national security, political stability, harmony, and an economic enhancement. This is rather typical because they are the beneficiaries of the policy. Based on similar factors, the Sarawak groups also supported the act.

On the other hand, the Chinese and the Indian groups, with an exception of the KGPA workers who represented the low-income Indian community, took a negotiational and an oppositional stance when relating themselves to the selected issue. They pointed out that the poor population does not carry only rural or Malays/Bumiputra identity, hence, assistance should not be discriminative. They

reminded the government that the making of a few Bumiputra millionaires is at the expense of the many poor Bumiputra and the poor Non-Bumiputra who have been neglected out rightly

All along, ethnicity was an interesting variable in analysing the different groups' decoding on the political character of the Malaysian development policy and programmes. This variable, projected by the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra dichotomy, illustrated how the decoding came about to be pro-dominant and anti-dominant. It was the Bumiputra groups who were generally in agreement with the dominant ideology contained in the programme, while the Non-Bumiputra did not. (Our **research objective #6**, which attempts at understanding the codes used by the anti-dominant groups, could then be attempted)

However, the political factor that influenced the decoding of PAS supporters and the self-survival factor that shaped the opinion of the KGPA labourers, could be interpreted as isolated cases

To illustrate further the distinction in meanings made by both, the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra, on the said issue, please refer to **Table 6(h)**

Up to this level of our analysis, the knowledge obtained from this study had met our quest in trying to understand how the multi-ethnic Malaysian society interprets or decodes "*Miskin*", the ideologically loaded programme from *Majalah3*. The study managed to produce a formal 'truth' that qualifies the notions that 'the audience in modern mediated-societies is complex and contradictory. That mass cultural texts are also complex and contradictory, so much that the multi-cultural audiences who use the multi-layered meaning media texts, produce a culture of equal complexity and contradiction'

In this study, one thing for sure is that the second hypothesis is supported. The Bumiputra who form the dominant group in the Malaysian society had decided on the dominant decoding position from the programme, and the reverse is also true. This is well proven in the following table

Table 6 (h) A Summary of the Types of Meaning by the Bumiputra and the Non- Bumiputra Groups in Relations to the Issue that the National Development Policy is Politicised

Type of meaning	Bumiputra		Non-Bumiputra	
	Malays	S'wak	Indians	Chinese
<i>Pro-dominant</i>				
1 Assistantance must continue	√			
2 National stability	√			
3 Racial equality	√			
4 Humiliation of being dominant but poor	√			
5 Power for the government	√			
6 Responsibility	√			
7 Racial harmony	√			
8 National pride	√			
9 The 'we can' attitude			√	
10 The contra-cultural economies		√		
11 Heterogeneity causes ethnicity in development		√		
12 The special position		√		

<i>Against dominant</i>				
1 Development is for supporters	√			√
2 Discrimination in eradication of poverty			√	√
3 Rural vs Urban				√
4 Subsidy culture				√
5 The commercial and industrial community			√	
6 The special position led to communahsm			√	

6 5 **Fourth Level of Analysis**

Analysing the different ethnic groups’ decoding in relations to the 8th challenge of Vision 2020

The closing note from the previous analysis had compelled us into a more abstract level of analysis, the ‘macro’ analysis. The different ethnic groups in this study, termed as the ‘interpretive communities’, have been seen to experience some contradictions in their reading of the television programme. This implies that some forms of political tension and an ideological dilemma (though silent) are present among the different ethnic groups when relating themselves to the present national development system in which eradication of poverty is, but a part. This analysis thus, would allow us to articulate the social relations of power, which the groups and the television have been contained in. (It is this perspective that would fill up the **research objective #7**, which attempts at focusing on the groups’ responses in relation to the challenge of the Vision 2020)

Ang (1990) had raised the status of reception analysis by perceiving the activity of media reception as a focus of cultural critique. This makes the status of the critical approach to reception studies somewhat different from those of the positivist approach. The more important reason to distinguish is to avoid reception from being an essentially a psychological process, but rather to conceptualise it as a politicised, cultural one. This makes every reception study a 'differently-tailored' study, unique only to the culture and environment where the study takes

According to her, the added value to a cultural critique is made possible because reception analysis manages to explain the ways in which people actively and creatively make their own meanings and thus create their own new-born culture. That is the underlying thesis of cultural studies, in which consumers are indeed seen as cultural uses of mass culture. With that, reception analysis has successfully secured a central place in cultural studies.

In this particular study, the prevailing issue that is controlling the Malaysian environment is the **Vision 2020** which signifies the way forward for Malaysia in order to become a fully-developed nation by the year 2020. The process of nation building is using its own locally prepared ingredients to suit the various tastes of its own multi-ethnic members. Although "*Miskin*" probed originally into how the different ethnic groups interpret and give meaning to that development-oriented television text, but it was the broader political scenario (the prevailing cultural condition surrounding the activities of Vision 2020), that was affecting the 'thinking' of these ethnic groups.

Politically, the Vision 2020 had created a feeling of dissatisfaction among some groups, the Chinese in particular. They were not happy specifically about the idea of middle classing of the Bumiputra, the creation of a commercial, industrial and professional Bumiputra community, and more significantly, the 30% target for Bumiputra ownership of capital equity in corporate sectors. The Bumiputra groups have been identified as the direct recipients to the present national development policy, but it should not be at the expense of the economic expansion of the Non Bumiputra members, they claimed.

The affirmative nature of the development plan allowed the state to deploy all resources available towards its goals. The Non-Bumiputria felt that the swing more or less had affected their current businesses and industries. The act of ethnicizing and hence politicking of the national development was read as responsible in creating the 'resistance' among the Non-Bumiputria groups towards the objectives of development and hence the Vision 2020. These notes illustrate some of the central as well as the controversial issues emerging from the national development plan constructed during the post 1969 era.

In a political-cultural term, this could be understood as an act of disempowerment on the dominant discourse by the minority.

The purpose of this section is thus, to analyse the responses from the four ethnic groups in relations to one particular challenge prevailed in the Vision 2020, that has a direct relevance to the issue of socio-economic development in this country. The identified challenge is the need to *establish Malaysia as an economic just society* (8th Challenge of Vision 2020). Before embarking, we now find out what is the 8th challenge of the Vision.

6.5.1 The Eighth challenge of Vision 2020

That Malaysia aims at establishing an economically just society in which there is a fair and equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation, in which there is full partnership in economic progress. Such a society cannot be in place so long as there is the identification of race with economic function, and the identification of economic backwardness with race.

(Mahathir, 1991)

This challenge implies that, Malaysia will never become a fully developed country, the way it wanted to be, as long as there is no justice in the distribution of its wealth among the different ethnic groups residing in this country. Happiness and hence peace will never be achieved as long as identification of race is linked to some economic functions. This was the situation in which Malaysia was

placed before the 70's. The government de-toured the old practices through its new economic plan, the NEP. The dominant and official state discourse was in full confidence that this new pathway would bring the country to a new destination as one contained in the objectives of the Vision 2020. But, with one condition though, that the other contributing factors to the current state of the art must remain constant or remained under control. This was done through the amendments on some of the related Acts mentioned previously.

The watching of '*Miskin*' certainly proved a research-worthy because the content managed to ignite the interests of the participants in responding to the issue of poverty, a core problem in the development programme. These responses are their reflections to the particular challenge of the Vision.

6.5.2 Where nation building is the quest in a multi-ethnic society: development and the struggle for an economic justice

Nation building is Malaysia's prime agenda during the state of post independent. Power relations in inter-ethnic relationships are eminent because the country went through a state of socio-economic imbalance. The tagging of Bumiputra and Non-Bumiputra revived nationalism among the members of the dominant society and tore inter-ethnic relationships.

There is no doubt that the country is striving for a development but what was prevalent in the process of achieving it is the struggle for an economic justice among the different ethnic groups. For example, the Malays wanted to be at par with the progressive Chinese, where as the Chinese wanted to protect their existing business territory that they have earned. It would be safe to conclude that the conflict takes place between the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra.

In relating itself with the struggle for an economic justice in the pursuit of development, this section will describe it in two sides of the arguments. The *first* part will discuss the forms of resistance given by the Non-Bumiputra and the *second* part will highlight the counter-points why the affirmative development policy orienting to the interests of the Bumiputra was un-provocative and instead constructive to the process of development.

1) The forms of resistance

The research questions in reception remains the same who is saying what and why. In this study, the Non-Bumiputra groups, namely the Chinese and the Indians, as well as the Non-Malay Bumiputra of Sarawak, were seen as slanting more towards the 'negotiated' decoding position and into the 'oppositional' position. In their response to the intention of the government in bringing the nation out of backwardness, these groups thought that the government was practising unfairness in its attempt to install the so called 'justice' or 'equality' among the different ethnic groups. For example, on the issue of eradication of poverty, they said the government discriminates the poor Non-Malay communities, either they are in the rural or in the urban. They noticed that specific locations where these people are commonly found, such as, the agricultural estates for the Indians, and the major towns and cities for the Chinese, were not part of the agenda. Even the Non-Malay Bumiputra were wearied by such a gesture and claimed communalism at some degree has emerged within the Bumiputra faction itself.

The new social reform led to the expansion of the higher social classes especially the middle and the upper middle classes of the Bumiputra society. This raised the anxiety of the Non-Bumiputra groups. The attempt of the government in middle-classing, commercialising, and industrialising the Bumiputra groups was perceived as an act of intrusion into their business and industrial monopoly. The Chinese-owned business organisations were required to allocate at least 30% of their manpower to the Bumiputra. The Bumiputra also complained about the kind of job they were asked to do, which was basically unskilled or routine-typed. The imposed 'business partnership' between the Bumiputra and the Non Bumiputra thus, took place on an insincere basis.

While they had no chance of reversing history, especially referring to the 'political bargain' made between the Malay political elite and the Chinese leaders during the formation, of the Federation of Malaya in 1984, they could only now looked back at the event by biting their pointing finger. They realised that the 'special position' given to the Malays/Bumiputra groups in exchange for the citizenship, had served back as a 'boomerang' because it is being used now by the

Malay/Bumiputra groups as a mechanism for some political gains. The Indians on the other hand, argued against the 'special position' of the Malays/Bumiputra because it deteriorates the existing practice of communalism.

The other form of resistance was interpreted from their views against the counter-productive culture, termed as the 'subsidy culture'. The Chinese said that this culture is a resistance to the process of development itself because it teaches people how to be dependent. To counter that unproductive act, the Chinese in particular, voiced out in favour of an alternative policy which is based on participation of the people. What they meant by it is that if the people participate and participate rationally well, they are sure to gain something out of their 'sweat and tears'. The principle of meritocracy which is the main ingredient of the proposed policy will encourage people to acquire better skills and technology all the time to enable them compete constructively, they said.

ii) The pro-arguments

The government, in the interest of performing its social engineering work, believed in the principle that every citizen should have an equal access to the national resources and wealth. Extending this idea to the national arena, the government insisted that no one ethnic group should be deprived of the mainstream economic activities. Learning a lesson from the 1969 racial riot, the government had a powerful reason to introduce the affirmative development policy (NEP) to allow the Bumiputra or the Malays in particular, to use their potentials. To enhance Bumiputra's development process the government boosted the environment with relevant programmes and activities, encouraging levy system, scholarships for studies and training, and many other supportive moves.

The Bumiputra or the Malays on the other hand, felt that this move was a mandatory, that the government must take them out of poverty by whatever means. Generally, the Bumiputra participants were in full agreement to the dominant ideology unless they were already opposing the government due to some other reasons prior to the study. For example, the PAS followers were

already against the government even before the study was carried out. They were standing on a political platform different from that of the government.

Contrary to the PAS idea, the Malay members in particular, looked at the development changes as a great psychological booster to be dominant and to be rich and powerful. All what the government wanted to remove was the main cause of the riot, which is, the humiliation felt by the Malays for being dominant but poor.

The Bumiputra groups demanded the existing style of the economic policy to be maintained, until the struggle for a socio-economic justice is truly achieved. So far no research has been formally done on the effectiveness of NEP but the general feeling is that NEP has not reached its objectives thus far. The beneficiaries certainly want the plan to be extended as long as it can.

To break the Chinese monopoly in businesses and industries, the Sarawak participants in particular, perceived the present national development policy as the only way to counteract the experience of contra-cultural economics. They said it's high time that the indigenous people come forward to the frontier to master the state of the art of doing business and trade.

However, the dreamed 'nation' (a fully developed and industrialised) would not be realised too unless 'equality' is predetermined. In the distribution of the nation's economic resources, the Bumiputra demanded to receive a relatively equal proportion of share (30%) of the total state capital to be used as their initial asset to ensure that they could participate in the economic 'race'. The Bumiputra claimed that the economic justice they fought was for a pragmatic reason, that there would be neither peace nor harmony, unless the socio-economic justice is installed by whatever means. The 'Malay-sympathised' government chose to respond to the call through a political means of course.

In the course of struggle, the Malays had, in full consensus, sought for the highest human value that they could use to raise their spirit in the fight for their survival. That human value is their own pride for being Malays and the dominant race of the Malaysian nation. This is regarded as the most abstract level of need that

motivates the Malays/Bumiputra groups to fight for the socio-economic justice 'To gain back of lost pride' has become the UMNO's vertical aim where by it can be interpreted both at national level as well as at the international level. The Malays wanted to prove that they were not 'lost' to the other ethnic groups and by doing so they would contribute to the general success of the nation that will en-route Malaysia into one of the more successful economies of the world.

The manifestation of national pride is well built into the agenda of Malay Nationalism (1946) where the Malays moved against the idea of Malayan Union proposed by the British colonial government. As already been mentioned somewhere, the Malayan Union was an idea for creating a new Malayan nation whereby all the ethnic groups would have an equal status and right in Malaya. The proposal was rejected out-rightly by the Malays for an obvious reason politics. They claimed that they owned the land and the question of the emigrant groups being given an equal status as the Malays is only true to the British colonial government.

There is a more recent example. In 1994, at the General Assembly held at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in Kuala Lumpur, UMNO came up with a theme, '*Mengembali Maruah Bangsa, Agama dan Tanahair*', meaning 'returning the pride/esteem of our race, religion, and nation'. This is just an example to indicate how concern the government has been in building back the esteem that has several times in the past been lost to the western colonialists. The nation was told to earn a new respect from the world by acknowledging the existence of the Malaysian race.

The government is safely protecting the present development system because it has contributed a remarkable economic success to the country (8% economic growth) for the last seven years. This year (1996), it was predicted to be 8.5%. However, this success could be read at two different levels. Firstly, the whole nation could enjoy the success because the country had managed to gain back its glory considerably after being 'robbed' by the foreign powers who ruled the state for over 400 years. Secondly, the Bumiputra themselves especially the Malays, have earned back its personal esteem and pride because they managed to prove wrong the negative labelling that they have been put into by the other races.

Besides the question of pride, the Malay/Bumiputra groups were also defending the 'special position'. In this study, the groups used this concept as their 'weapon' for defending the rationale of the UMNO-backed government in supporting the Malays/Bumiputra in their desire to develop themselves. This is a spiritual 'fortress' that will block the Non-Malays/Non-Bumiputra from sitting on the same level with the Malay/Bumiputra members. Heterogeneity of the population and with a power difference made the act of ethnic the national development policy as inevitably necessary.

Despite the political intervention in the designing of the development plan, not all Bumiputra members were willing to participate. The oppositions would rather remain poor than to submit to the government that they do not have faith in. With that, poverty among the opposition Bumiputra groups (supporters of PAS and PBS) could remain a challenge to the smooth running of Bumiputra development in the 21st century. This could imply to a need for a different technique on the part of the government in order to persuade the more difficult groups to believe in the dominant ideology.

Analysis of the different ethnic groups' decoding in relations to the 8th challenge of the Vision 2020

The findings indicated that the resistance and threats still lived by the people especially the Non-Bumiputra members of the society. To them, the 'special position' makes all the difference. But, this is not forgetting that the Non Malay Bumiputra, in particular, the indigenous people of Sarawak, also have grievances and dissatisfactions. Their perception was centred on the fact that they were treated as the second-classed Bumiputra. The sympathisers of PAS, who rejected the Vision 2020 on the ground of incompatibility of political ideologies, could be regarded as a formal resistance because the territory to the problem is well defined. The general Bumiputra members may not be seen as rejecting the government ideologies but they are certainly more critical and more demanding than ever. They demanded the objectives of NDP be realised since NEP was not that successful.

In its quest for an economic-just society towards the year 2020, the findings showed that the path is still covered with blockages and barriers. The most fearful threats are those that are not obvious, discreetly functioning as a hidden agenda to some of the compliance groups. The Malays call this, "*gunting dalam selimut*" or 'a scissors in the blanket'. A scissors is equivalent to a dangerous person or a destroyer in a group of good people with a common purpose.

However, from the government point of view, the response from the people today is more encouraging compared to that was reported in the past. The evidence, is the economic progress. The success of Malaysia is the work of none others but the people themselves. This means economic development is primary in the life of the people. It has also been the wish of the government that when everyone is successful, little they care about ethnic differences or ethnic pride, but national security and unity. Despite the overwhelming support given by the Bumiputra groups (Malays and Sarawakians), the country still has a reason to be alarmed because even the smallest alarm is still an alarm. There is always a basis to be careful because the nature of inter-ethnic problems has its roots deep down in the history, social, economic and political structure of the society.

Since both factions had their arguments relevant to the issue of development, this shows that it is not a smooth sailing work when talking about implementing an affirmative policy in a multi-ethnic society. But, to what extent will this affirmative policy remains to be the main denominating factor in holding or breaking the inter-ethnic relationship? Even then, could the affirmative policy lasts its strength in holding even the Malays or bumiputra together? Will Malaysia have other emerging and more powerful cultural values than the affirmative development policy in the future, that can play a significant role in the interpretation of development messages in the developing Malaysian nation? Further research on reception of development-oriented media programmes following up this study is therefore necessary and needed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

7.0 Introduction

This chapter attempts to describe the conclusions of this study. The main intention is to show whether or not the assumptions of the chosen theories were able to explain the reception process of “*Miskin*” by the multi-ethnic groups in Malaysia. Data from the respondents were used to evaluate those theories.

The concept of ‘meaning’ is a much complex entity. To understand it, we have looked into other related theories other than the Reception Analysis theory to explain the complex meaning-making phenomenon. The other related theories identified include the Theories of Meaning Systems (Parkin, 1972) and the Theory of Encoding and Decoding (Hall, 1973). This chapter will examine the strengths and weaknesses of each theory in its process of explaining the attitudes and the discourses of the groups as far as development is concerned.

At the same time, this study is also about *communication development*. We are approaching the subject of development from the communication viewpoint as opposed to the more common approach, such as, socio-economics. Our contention is, a subject like development could also be understood using communication theories. In this particular respect, Malaysia’s development strategies were being evaluated from the way the respondents interpreted *Miskin*’--- a development oriented television programme.

The following will discuss the processes of relating the meanings produced by the different ethnic groups to the theoretical concepts, and how certain development issues seen as relevant to the groups’ life and existence, were analysed and evaluated further by using the groups’ multi-decoded responses. The ‘true’ sense of how multi-ethnic Malaysians feel about the present development system could then be explored.

7.1 Testing the Reception Analysis theory in analysing “*Miskin*”

As discussed earlier, Reception Analysis theory conceptualises a general assumption that ‘different people perceive or decode a certain media content differently’. This assumption had led to the development of the first objective of the study, which is, to examine the range of meanings produced by the different ethnic groups and why they vary. From our findings, we were able to conclude the following:

7.1.1 That the different ethnic groups make sense of the television programme content in *complex* and *unexpected* ways, thus, resulting in the production of varied meanings

This study concurred with the general notion of the Reception Analysis that mass media audiences make sense of media contents in many different ways (research objective #1). This is expected because the process is *complex* and often *unexpected*. Some of the different ethnic groups were seen to be modifying the ‘preferred meaning’ of the text and reallocated those meanings for alternative ends.

To explain *complexity* in meaning making, different levels of analysis were carried out. For example, when examining and analysing the groups’ general decoding of the television programme itself (first level analysis), the different ethnic groups were found to have generated eight (8) major developmental issues and not all of them were common to all groups. There were a number of those issues that were seen as useful by some but not applicable to many, while at the same time, and in contrast, there was one particular issue that was discussed by every group. This indicates how *complex* a reception can be. More importantly, this *complexity* increased at every level of analysis.

This *complexity* was more pro-dominant in the second level the analysis where we examined in detail the decoding of the individual sub-groups - the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Sarawakians. This complexity was important to note in this study because it contributed to a deeper and wider insight into how each

individual ethnic group looked at poverty. It also examined how the process of overcoming it (poverty) had affected the members of the individual ethnic group's existence in relations to both the existing socio-economic system and the others, whom together they make up the heterogeneous society.

For example, in comparing the analysis of the four groups together (third level), it was discovered that the different groups had developed a total of eighteen (18) ethnic-related points. More importantly, these meanings could be categorised into *pro-dominant* meaning and *anti-dominant* meaning. What makes it even more interesting is that we found a decoding pattern emerging from the analysis whereby the pro-dominant meanings belongs to the Bumiputra while the anti-dominant meanings belongs to the Non-Bumiputra. The Bumiputra groups were generally defending the political nature of the public development policy from the standpoint of twelve (12) emissions, while the Non-Bumiputra had only six (6) points to counter attack.

It is important to note here that despite the fact that the Non-Malay Bumiputra group (Sarawakian) is less dominant psychologically and sociologically than the Malays, they still stood behind the government development policy. Why is that happening? While that may be true, the fact is, political resistance from the Sarawakians and the Sabahans, was quite significant. The winning margin for the Barisan Nasional in Sarawak then was not to be proud of. Most of them who were with the Barisan did not have other alternatives. The oppositions were even hopeless.

The situation is quite different from that of the Non-Bumiputra groups, namely, the Chinese and the Indians. They expressed their dissatisfactions over the affirmative development policy, quite openly. They were not happy basically because the beneficiary groups of the new economic/development policy were directly targeted at the Malays and the other Bumiputra groups. With that, the Non-Bumiputra groups suddenly felt that they were "forced" to reduce their 'economic territory' to give way to the Bumiputra. It would not be too difficult though for the Non-beneficiary groups of the new economic policy to 'pack' the whole efforts in redressing the socio-economic status of the society as, negative, especially so with the 'special privilege' tag fixed on the Bumiputra groups.

But, as Malaysians, they (Non-Bumiputra) are all required to understand the Malaysian history, reminding them about the establishment of the state, the political consensus, and most importantly the 'tragedies'. At the same time, the present government had its own pragmatic way of moving the society towards development and modernisation. This could be some of the underlying factors why the Non-Bumiputra could not totally reject the proposal of the government.

This study had also proven true that mass media audiences make sense of media content in *unexpected* ways. The dominant response from the low-paid workers of KGPA and the oppositional response from PAS sympathisers, are two good examples for supporting this theory.

Thus, the decoding framework of Hall (1973) suggesting that television-viewing opens to different 'readings' but through the interaction between the culture of the viewers and the culture of the programme producer are well supported. The existence of historical configuration of the social practices in reception work is undeniable, because the nation's history did play an important role in determining the groups' decoding behaviours. It is no doubt that the current traditions and cultures adopted by these groups in handling their social well being had been the premise on which the pattern of decoding of "*Miskin*" was developed or the source from which their decoding codes were built.

Reception theory also proposed that interpretative communities could help mediate the flow of communication. While this generalisation was found true, the more important issue in this study is that the ethnic-based factors were more significant in determining the groups' decoding of development messages than the income-based factors. This means, as long as the issue is socio-economics, be it a lawyer, an ice-cream seller, or a driver, chances are, their opinions would be ethnocentric. Irrespective of their socio-economic ground, they will give opinions on development from the standpoint that they belong to some particular race.

This pattern is consistent with the prevailing nature of this society where national unity or integrity is still hard to come by, although the different ethnic groups could now 'eat together on the same table'. Ismail Mustaffa, an RTM officer,

commented that while it is true that the different ethnic groups have shown some considerable amount of cultural tolerance, national unity is still far from reality if the emigrants are not able to speak and comprehend the Bahasa Melayu language well enough. He also said that 'language' could help to frame one's mind. Therefore, accepting and using the National Language (Bahasa Melayu) should symbolise their acceptance to the 'rules' or social practices of this country too. The case of KGPA labourers is definitely more of an exception.

On the other hand, the findings clearly showed that the socio-economic factor referred by the groups, was found to be unrelated to the decoding behaviours of the groups, as far as development is concerned. Income is therefore not the unifying factor. The Malay group and the Sarawak group naturally were seen as 'ethnocentric' and 'nationalistic' and this would brush aside any question pertaining to class differences. The Chinese and the Indians on the other hand were also seen as ethnocentric when the Chinese defended urban poverty and the Indians defended the estate dwellers. This implied that 'class consciousness' might not be that important as yet because the society is still thinking of groups' survival. For example, the Malays/Bumiputra is still thinking of how to get a bigger slice of the 'economic cake', while the Chinese is thinking of how to defend the Chinese business monopoly. Maybe when the country has reached the fully industrialised status, class-consciousness would become more prominent. This is consistent with Morley's findings (1980) that socio-economic factor is of no importance or in no way related to the decoding of the audiences. The same goes as far as development is concerned in this country.

Hence, this study proposes that, the groups' decoding on development was determined basically by their *ethnic-based discourses* instead of *income-based discourses*. Thus, the groups' ethnic background had a stronger hold in influencing the level of complementarity and non-complementarity of codes the groups use in interpreting "Miskin". This also helped to indicate the nature of "fit" between the two discourses of our interpretative communities (research objective #3).

7.1.2 Interpretive Meanings are social and discursive

This study also supported the notion that the interpretative meanings of “*Miskin*” were social and discursive. The socially bounded factors, such as the groups’ organisational culture, working responsibility, educational sponsorships, and increased educational level among the less dominant groups were found to have contributed to the shaping of the respective groups’ decoding behaviours.

The meanings produced were *social* because they are the “fruits” of the interpretative communities whom we regard as social agents. They are usually characterised as interest-driven, and more importantly, live in a world of ‘power’. At the same time, meanings were also proven to be discursive because, as has been said earlier, they are primarily functions of the operations of discourses. The different discourses identified in this study, includes, ethnic-based discourses, religious discourses, and organisational discourses, which, when applied to the groups’ interpretation act, turned to be the sources to their interpretation strategies or codes.

Just as is in Morley’s work (*Nationwide* 1980), although the study sample were selected from the same social class, but their decoding were inflected in different directions by the discourses and institutions in which they were situated. This directly confirmed that meanings cannot be ‘read off’ straight from textual characteristics, but in conjunction with the ‘historical’ conditions of production and consumption.

The above explanation rejected the Uses and Gratification theory. Unlike the U&G, the Reception theory believes that audiences’ responses are caused more by their cultural differences and discourses rather than their individuals’ psychological factors. Besides Morley’s work, this study also supported Katz and Liebes’ “*Dallas*” (1984), Lull’s “*Family television viewing*” (1980), and the work of many other critical researchers, which proposed that cultural domination and resistance manifested in the audiences’ discourses are powerful determinants in making meanings out of media contents.

7.1.3 Conclusion on Reception Theory

In conclusion, we are of the opinion that the theory of Reception Analysis is a suitable theory in accounting for the different modes of decoding and interpreting media contents. Meaning making is not as simple as it may seem because the process involves not only the psychological aspects of the decoders but the interplay of other factors, such as, their socio-cultural discourses, the power relation experiences, as well as constraints caused by language rules and codes in the text. These factors helped to explain why a communication phenomenon might be interpreted in many different ways.

7.2 Testing the Theory of Encoding and Decoding: Who owns the 'preferred meaning'?

Reception of media content as a matter of fact, rests totally on the process of encoding and decoding, at which point in time, meanings are determined. The findings indicated that the 'closure effect' (Hall's terminology) experienced in viewing "*Miskin*", led to the development of an opinion of the groups that 'the development policy is being politicised', thus, creating a biased policy favouring the Bumiputra. This opinion is therefore accepted to be the 'preferred meaning' to the programme content, which emerged not only from content analysis but societal structure. It would be interesting though to know who actually owns this 'preferred meaning'?

In the case of "*Miskin*", it was learnt that the programme producer had encoded the concept of development from the existing societal system and structure. The source of information mainly came from the government and its agencies. This was proven when most of the officials interviewed in the programme were representatives of some government agencies involving in the eradication of poverty programmes. The messages in "*Miskin*" were thus intentionally structured and were undeniably a reproduction of the hegemonic ideologies. The 'closure effect' in a way, had helped the decoders to decode the 'preferred meaning' though they may not accept the meaning the way in which the producer has encoded it. Every decoder would usually conceive and accept this as the

'preferred meaning', and for these people, they are said to be in the dominant position. Those who choose to reject the 'preferred meaning' would then be labelled as taking the negotiated or oppositional positions. This study hence, proposed that the 'preferred meaning' is the dominant meaning and belongs to the producer rather than the decoders. This is especially true when the subject is about ideology. When ideology is regarded as central, the task of the programme producer is also to ensure that the people accept the 'preferred meaning'.

In many cases, 'preferred meaning' is hidden in the messages and emerged as a result of the interpretation process of the audiences. In the process of decoding, the different groups appeared to differ in their 'critical distance' (in Katz and Liebes' terminology) towards the programme content. Each group had its own attitude towards what had been manifested by the text. This was the moment when personal discourses play their role in helping shape their attitude and hence decide on their respective decoding positions. In other words, the way the issue was generalised or personalised differed from one group to another depending on which social group they represent. Thus, it would be safe to say that the different types of meanings produced by the groups merely represent the groups' attitudes towards the 'preferred meaning'. The different types of opinions expressed could thus be said to be answering research objective #5.

The theory of Encoding and Decoding could thus be applied in any reception studies because it helps to highlight the significance of 'preferred meaning' in interpreting media contents. Although the theory of Reception Analysis assumes variation of meaning due to the different influential factors, the theory of Encoding and Decoding focuses on the availability of one 'preferred meaning' which is covertly placed in the text. In ideological messages, the 'preferred meaning' is set by the producers. We therefore theorised that both items, 'encoding' and 'preferring meaning' relates to the issue of 'intention' on the part of the programme producer, who also acted as the encoder and writer of the programme text "*Miskin*". Unlike the BBC programme of "*Nationwide*" "*Miskin*" is a politically and ideologically loaded development programme. The source to the programme code is the government and its agencies. Therefore, it is not just an ordinary type of a development programme.

Although the programme visual of "*Miskin*" portrayed the everyday life of the poor people, the 'flavour' of the message was indeed political. It was loaded with hidden propaganda of government-biased ideologies about poverty and its eradication. The producer had no other proper mode except to present it the way poverty has been encoded in this country: poverty as a Malay/Bumiputra problem.

As such, the ideological operation in "*Miskin*" was not based on 'taken for granted' reproduction of dominant definitions or an adherence to accepted professional conventions, as one found in the "*Nationwide*" (Brunsdon and Morley, 1978, quoted in Moores, 1993) or any other ordinary, routine, magazine-type of programme. The operation of ideology in "*Miskin*" was undoubtedly the result of deliberate biases of the broadcasters or the biases of the television responsible for its production, TV3.

This phenomenon could be explained by three main factors. *Firstly*, TV3 comes under the control and supervision of the Ministry of Information, and therefore, would be required to support the government ideologies in its development-oriented programme like "*Miskin*". The 'preferred meaning' of the programme must not be in conflict with the interest of the government. *Secondly*, the concept of development itself is always politicised, thus, the production of "*Miskin*" has to follow the same manner. Although its front message was economic but the mode of 'reading' was expected to be politic. *Thirdly*, and most importantly, TV3 used this programme as a propaganda to transmit development messages, the UMNO way.

With that, we rejected the idea that the 'preferred meaning' is the absolute property of the text or the audiences. A researcher who follows the method of semiotic analysis may be able to get accessed to the 'preferred meaning' embedded in the text because text organisation and production have its standard and professional conventions and rules (Hall, 1973). However, textual production is nevertheless full of language constraints. Words are limited, thus, unable to describe the bigger and the more realistic world they wish to mean. More so, when the characteristic of the text is politicised, much of the meanings is unsaid. As Moores (1993) had argued, texts naturally exceed the interpretations, which

are made of them by consumers. Brunsdon (1989) had advanced a similar argument.

Similarly, the strong motion of Bennett and Woollacott (1987) who proposed that there is no text necessarily available for inspection outside of the 'reading formations' in which meaning is activated, was rejected. This rejection is based on the fact that media consumption is undoubtedly an 'active' practice.

To obtain a maximum effect, Hall's Theory of Encoding and Decoding should be used more in analysing certain programme presentations, which carry with them texts that are full of 'strong substantive ideological propositions'. News programme, current affairs programmes, and educational-typed programmes would be more suitable because the meanings to the texts are rather more definite. Unlike the politically-oriented programmes, or propaganda typed programmes, the 'closure effects' in the Theory of Encoding and Decoding could not fit because the 'preferred meaning' is highly likely being determined by the producer, and often with the intention of creating an awareness or brainwashing the society.

7.3 Testing the Parkin's theory of Meaning Systems interpreting the 'interpretation'

The Parkin's theory (1971) was used as our framework for defining the meanings made by the groups. The theory was primarily used in assigning the groups decoding position by differentiating the positions into, dominant, negotiated or oppositional. Nevertheless, the findings of this study showed that the three decoding positions delimited the probability of having more meanings to the programme content by the different ethnic groups. If this not checked, it would naturally defeat the purpose of generating new insights from the study. As such, this study concluded that the original three decoding positions were insufficient to account for the complexity in decoding of media messages.

To make it more effective, this study proposed giving extra three 'shades' to each decoding position, thus enabling more variables or information to be included into the findings. In this study, each decoding position was given a numerical value to reflect a certain degree of dominance to the meaning, in such a way that these

numbers would show us how far away a decoding position is from the dominant meaning. In the dominant decoding position (+1) carried the least dominant value. This means that the particular position is nearest to the anti-dominant column. Whereas (+3) carried the strongest dominant value, meaning, that position is the furthest from the anti-dominant column or in other words, is in full agreement with the hegemonic ideology. In the negotiated position, (-1) carried the least resistance value. This means that the particular position is nearest to the dominant column. On the other hand, (-3) carried the strongest resistance value in the respective position. Finally, in the oppositional position, -1 carried the least oppositional value, whereas (-3) carried the strongest oppositional value. This means, (-3) reflects a position that is totally against the dominant ideology.

This multi-layered decoding positions, will make the interpretation of the groups' analysis of the programme text more interesting and accurate, while the different shades of decoding position should be able to show us more varieties of knowledge about the groups' reception of the programme. With that, this study feels that Parkin's theory could be 'up-graded' to accommodate the complexity of decoding.

7.4 The ideological reproduction role of the media and its effects

Media effects have always been a major concern in any mass communication studies and have been approached in many different ways. In Reception studies, media effects is being conceived as an *indirect variable* and delivered through the interplay of media in creating and presenting a specific 'dominant' ideology. This happens because the conception of effects is being superimposed by the more significant role of the media, that is, the reproduction of the existing hegemonic ideologies. Specifically, effects of media are understood in term of how well the media has managed to protect and defend the dominant ideology. This could be measured by the decoding pattern of the interpretative communities: the more dominant (in Parkin's terminology) the decoding is, the more powerful the media has been in controlling the base or the people's perception towards accepting the existing ideologies. Since the government is always involved in the control and production of media contents in this country, effects are therefore translated through the extent of the media in maintaining the State's hegemony.

This research, therefore, checked on the power of television, in particular TV3, in defending the existing State hegemony. As it is, the television stations in Malaysia government-owned or otherwise, serve the nation by supporting and reproducing the ideologies of the government. TV3 for example, had declared during its birth, that its policy has been made to work within the jurisdiction of the State order. This makes TV3, a private station, no different than any government-owned television stations, in terms of its loyalty to the government and the State. Development-oriented television programmes produced by all television stations in this country have to be based on the government ideologies as their framework. “*Miskin*” was surely not an exception.

Our research thus, is a means through which we can be informed on the extent of ‘power’ the televisions have in defending the existing hegemony, obviously the Malay Hegemony. This study had proven that the Reception studies concept on effects is applicable. The question is, at what extent? Findings showed that TV3 had successfully created a full impact but only among the Malay viewers (the Kelantanese case was an abnormal data distribution). It is quite simple to understand why the Malays, irrespective of their socio-economic status, shared the thinking of the programme producer and hence, the government, as far as development is concerned. Their ethnocentrism and being the beneficiaries of the policy (the Kelantanese are also constitutional beneficiaries but chose to reject the offer) would be sufficient to prove the case.

Although the Non-Malays, including the Sarawak indigenous communities, were still in a state of ‘negotiating’ the ‘preferred meaning’ of development in this country, the condition of their resistance could be described as rather ‘mild’ comparatively. At the time, when the Malaysian social reforms were newly introduced, when the country had not much strong economic indicators to prove and when the country was attacked by a worst state of inflation (1980’s), the negative attitude of these people was even stronger.

As discussed earlier, the Non-Malays generally could not do much about the policy because the decision after all was reached through a consensus effort. The Chinese and the Indians were constantly being reminded by the leaders to

understand the nation history while the Non-Malay Bumiputra groups were reminded to work harder to remove basic obstacles, like illiteracy, before they can acquire modernity

Disregarding the KGPA and the PAS experiences, TV3 could be said to have scored only a 'break-even' point in defending the existing hegemony. However, it is felt that the possibility for the television to strike a bigger success in the future is there because there has been an indication that the slant of the decoding position of the Non-Bumiputra had comparatively moved away from the 'oppositional' end towards the 'negotiated' end. The Non-Bumiputra had relatively been able to 'forget' the ethnic-related interests and concentrate on the economic development as the country sails into the 21st century. As evidence, the country had expended its development agenda to include the Multi-Media Super Corridor programme with the full support of all sectors of the community. At the time when the Malaysian currency was badly affected (today), the people has incredibly remained united and supported the Government. The major proponent parties have shown their full confidence towards the government by believing that this problem is temporary.

This optimistic view could be realised if the government work to produce new strategies to improve the implementation sector and the creative work of the television in diffusing dominant ideologies to the society at large.

It must be mentioned however, that this study had also produced an unintended effect: the 'deviants' and the 'supporters'. It is not impossible though that this could only lead to a new reform of social control. In sum, Hall's theory of Ideology is an important theory in examining the role of the media or television in developing countries like Malaysia because the State depends on the media to support the socio cultural system and the ideologies that the State promotes. Transmission of ideologies through the media would inevitably help to influence the decoding pattern of the users. The understanding of effects thus remains with the extent of power the media had in getting the people to think alike the dominant rule.

7.5 Malaysia's Development Strategies

Malaysia's development strategies were quite similar to many other countries having colonial past. It is based on a model of development using the country's own resources, opening the country to foreign investment, which is seen as the engine for industrial growth, as well as looking for markets overseas for goods manufactured at home. This type of strategy is sometimes called "neo-liberalism". However, the country took a rather active role in the economy especially when Mahathir came to take over as the Prime Minister in 1981.

Malaysia had tried some key strategies to bring up the country economically, one of which is the NEP. It was noted that Malaysia's economic growth was generally faster than the global average, though it lagged behind the East Asian newly industrialising economies and even most of Malaysia's ASEAN neighbours (Jomo, 1994).

However, findings from our data revealed that the ethnic groups were indeed concerned about the fact that the development policies and programmes are politically linked. For instance, the racial dichotomy between the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra became very glaring as both interpreted the TV programme '*miskin*'. The Non-Bumiputra groups felt that the Government had been quite unjust in lending them support, particularly those who came from the lower income groups. All the Malay groups in our study, however, with the exception of the PAS supporters, conceived the act of orienting the development policy in accordance to the needs of the Malays/Bumiputra interests as justified, timely and pragmatic.

As argued in Chapter six, all along, ethnicity was an important variable in our analyses of the groups' decoding on the political character of the Malaysian development policy. The variable (ethnicity) as projected in the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra dichotomy, illustrated how the decoding came about to be "pre-dominant" and "anti-dominant".

While stating that the NEP programmes have contributed to restructuring of the society, it was also observed that not all policies have been effective. For an example, the ethnic disparities in poverty, as well as wealth and occupations were not addressed effectively by the NEP. Many assumed that the reduction in poverty achieved under the NEP had improved relations within and among ethnic groups. But in reality that was not the case. Even the National Economic Consultative Council (NECC) Report (1988) warned that despite considerable progress in ethnic 'restructuring', inter-ethnic economic disparities and the resentments they generate, persist.

Our data also showed that the Malays strongly believed that the government must take them out of poverty by whatever means. The Chinese in our study were generally critical in their responses over the objectives of the development. Although it has been made known that the existing development policy was formulated with the intention of creating a 'balance' in the socio-economic experience, the Chinese in particular, could not get away from the idea that the activities were encroaching into their business territory. That has caused great anxiety among the Chinese and is affecting the relationship between the Chinese and the Malays.

Ethnic discrimination in the private sector, the official emphasis on growth and a reduced role for the state, are perceived by many Bumiputras as detrimental to their interests. By the same token, non-Bumiputras resented official restrictions of access to tertiary education, land schemes and the public services. Further, the Indians among the non-Bumiputras have felt marginalized by the tendency to equate Bumiputras with the Malays and non-Bumiputras with Chinese, ignoring the particularistic interests of smaller, less influential minorities.

The same NECC Report suggests frustrations and resentments along ethnic all around. It also noted that racial polarisation has been exacerbated by the communally minded, especially politicians. Too much emphasis on ethnic unity (communal unity) has undermined national solidarity, as have racial prejudices inherited from the colonial period and colonial education policy, in effectively segregating the population along linguistic and ethnic lines. While suggesting that the exacerbation of race relations was inevitable with the NEP, the Report also

observed that the self-interest of groups who are greedy for power or wealth have made the problem worse

Despite — or perhaps precisely because of — Malaysia's ethnic, religious, cultural, regional and other differences, as well as the circumstances of Malaysia's decolonization and national formation, it has been argued that Malaysia urgently requires a progressive nationalist, as opposed to ethno-populist or neo-colonial globalist agenda (Jomo, 1989). While the notion of the Malaysian nation hardly exists in the popular imagination of most Malaysians, owing to stronger ethnic, religious and even regional affiliations, economic nationalism still seems to be a relevant project in this former British colony. Nationalism is still desperately needed to complete the tasks of nation building, national unity, and national integration (the word to describe for better relations among regions especially between Peninsula Malaysia and the Borneo states).

For the nationalist project to be viable, it will need to be accompanied by a corporatist project. When Mahathir came to power in 1981, he introduced the 'Malaysia Incorporated' concept, popularly understood as an attempt to improve government-business relations, i.e. between the public and private sectors. The notion hinted at the urgent need for national unity, a shared sense of national purpose or a national vision, particularly for achieving socio-economic progress.

After it was announced, the 'Malaysia Incorporated' concept was enthusiastically welcomed by the private sector generally, and especially by the Chinese business community and the Chinese-based political parties in the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, particularly the MCA and the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan). Although there were no public objections to the concept, some politically influential Malays have privately noted that the policy reversed previously growing Malay political hegemony, long associated with state dominance.

7.6 The Vision 2020 Policy

Before recommending alternative policies (see Chapter 8) to achieve welfare-enhancing, sustainable and equitable growth compatible with corporate economic

nationalism, it is obligatory to comment at this stage on the now virtually official 'Vision 2020' policy of achieving developed country status by the year 2020

Despite having serious problems in economic forecasting and the absence of a coherent development strategy and industrial policy, there are merits to the Vision 2020 concept and the subsequent plan documents elaborating post-1990 policy. This includes the renewed emphasis on growth, industrialisation and modernisation on the one hand, and the partial shift from inter-ethnic wealth distribution to inter- as well as intra-ethnic income distribution as the focus for redistributive efforts, on the other.

It was interesting to note that all the ethnic groups in our study were looking forward to the Vision 2020. While the Non-Bumiputra groups understood that Vision 2020 was aimed at the Bumiputras to catch up with the Chinese in particular, but everybody knew that the policy would benefit the population in the long run. Unlike the NEP, Vision 2020 to them is more balanced and implies many things including focus on human resource development and stabilising the economy.

Unfortunately, post-1990 policy may also create serious new problems, albeit unintentionally. Firstly, while it may be desirable to aim high, especially where growth is concerned, particularly to press the case for greater cost effectiveness and efficiency, the growth projections may be too high and unachievable. For instance, they seem to ignore the crucial contribution of rapidly depleting natural resources such as timber, to previous growth. For a variety of reasons, it implies ambitious investment targets, which will be extremely difficult to achieve without generating other serious problems (like environmental problem), especially in an open economy like Malaysia.

7.7 Conclusions

In concluding this chapter, we are of the opinion that the theories that were selected for this study, to explain the phenomenon of reception of development-oriented television programme, "*Miskin*" in the Malaysian society, were well supported. Because reception is associated to meaning-making activities at the

receivers' end, the issue hence, could not be alienated from the socio-psychological and cultural factors that continue to impinge on the conduct of these receivers. For instance, Reception Analysis theory supported this aspect well and therefore, rejected other audience research traditions that attempt to stress the importance of either the psychological or the social attributes in understanding reception.

However, all communications have their own environment and context that allow the communication circuit to continue its course. In this study, we have taken into account the following factors:

- a) Whether or not the message is ideologically-loaded or something that is light and entertaining
- b) Whether or not the media is enacted with a special role of reproducing the dominant ideologies
- c) Whether or not the technique of drawing a more comprehensive decoding pattern is made available to the researcher
- d) Whether or not the skill in identifying the 'preferred meaning' of the text has been learned

In addition, we have also commented on the New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced by the Malaysian Government in 1970. The NEP is widely regarded as a necessary, if not inevitable response to the May 1969 crisis, and therefore aroused relatively little opposition in principle.

However, as shown from our data, these oppositions generally came from the Non-Bumiputra groups especially the lower income Chinese. To them it is not just the Malays who are poor but there are lots of Chinese and Indians who are in the same situation. But the educated groups understood the rationale for such an affirmative policy.

Although Mahathir superimposed his own policy priorities (e.g. Malaysia Incorporated, privatisation) soon after becoming Prime Minister in 1981, the implementation of such economic liberalisation and structural adjustment are usually dated from mid-1980s. Successful economic recovery from the late 1980

seemed to have encouraged Mahathir administration to consolidate these policies after 1990

It is not clear if the economic boom since the late 1980s had attributed to Malaysian policy reforms, as other developments---especially the appreciation of the yen---appeared to have fuelled an economic boom in much of the region. In this sense at least, there has not been anything fundamentally new about post-1990 policy, compared to the late 1980s, except in contrast to official policy then, which was nominally still the NEP.

In 1991, Mahathir announced the Vision 2020 concept as the way forward for Malaysia to achieve a fully developed country by the year 2020. Close examination revealed that the nine challenges of the Vision 2020 can be seen as a reformulation and combination of the Rukunegara, or National Ideology and the NEP, both introduced in 1970. In this sense, unlike the NEP at the time of its inception, little significance in Vision 2020 is really new. Besides the orchestrated official hype, its significance lies primarily in its timing and the clear shift in emphasis and priority from distribution growth and industrialisation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RECOMMENDATIONS

8 0 Introduction

In this chapter we will attempt to describe the implications of our findings and add it to the knowledge built from the research. We divide the implications into two main areas namely, the implications of the study on the theories used and the implications of the study on the social engineering effort of the government in attempt to development the country. The second half of the chapter will describe our suggestions for future research in this field of study.

This study is about reception of a development-oriented TV programme by the major ethnic groups in Malaysia. By analysing their reception we are able to imply whether their *meaning making* goes in tandem with the government development policies. But then, does the audience actually understand the government policies? It is very crucial that the government understand the people? Will any discontentment among the races bring about instability to the country? And because of Malaysia's ethnic, religious, cultural, regional and other differences, as well as the circumstances of Malaysia's decolonisation and national formation, Malaysia urgently needs a very well thought programme towards national unity.

The following paragraphs will discuss the implications of the study, which will be done in two sections. The first of which is to put forward our discussions on the theories used and followed by our recommendations. The second implication of this research is to address the issue of 'national unity' — one race nation the Malaysian race. This is the substance of the Vision 2020 concept which calls for Malaysia to be a united nation, with a confident society infused by strong moral ethical values democratic liberal and tolerant, caring economically just and equitable progressive and in full possession of an economy (Mahathir 1991).

8.1 First implication of this study ---Theories

This study found that Reception Analysis Theory has great potentials in accounting for the reception of the selected development-oriented television programme, in terms of how the different ethnic groups make meanings out of the programme content, and what sort of decoding pattern those meanings produce. It has also been capable of theorising the Malaysian television audiences to account for the complex, unexpected, social, and discursive nature of their receptions. In other words, this study supported the main assumption of the theory that 'different people make different meanings from a media content'.

Our findings also accepted the fact that the codes used to interpret the programme text were obtained from the social and cultural discourses they experienced. This has allowed media reception activities to be read more as a social and cultural phenomenon, appropriate for the moral that media are part of the society and of their everyday life.

More importantly, the Cultural Studies Approach used in conjunction with the Reception Analysis Theory for studying media reception has made cultural critiques possible, and thus, making the research efforts more meaningful and actualising (the fourth level of our analysis is an application of this concept). The Cultural Studies researchers were all the way pointing at the importance of ethnographic methodology that focuses on the way culture plays its cards in determining meanings from media texts. In order to get into the issues of culture, ethnographic methodology is recommended, because, through the qualitative data that becomes its prime element, this methodology facilitates the discovery of contemporary social and cultural issues that are deeply set and embedded in the subject being discussed in the media presentation. These issues however, can be in the form of negative or positive opinions.

As we already know, media presentations are likely to cause 'controversies' in opinion among the varied audiences. The ethnographic method has a strong probability in exposing these culturally based controversial opinions to the outside world, which indirectly, provide a good breeding ground for cultural critiques. Cultural critiques, the core element in Cultural Studies tradition, in which media

reception has one of its legs stuck, also provide the opportunity for the research analysts to look at alternative opinions. It will make the analysts more sensitive to the conflicting nature of contemporary social and cultural issues.

8.1.1 Recommendations on the theories

However, there are a few areas within the theoretical framework of this study that needed some modifications. They are concerned with the concept of a) interpretive communities, b) the decoding positions of the interpretive communities based on Parkin's Theory, and c) the Genre Theory in relation to the selection of media content and the respondents.

With regard to analysing reception of multi-ethnic societies, such as Malaysia, towards development loaded media programmes, we therefore, recommend

- 1) That "level of education" and the "system of education" be considered as characteristics or constructs of the interpretive communities**

With reference to Malaysia, examining reception of the different ethnic groups towards development-oriented television programmes, like "*Miskin*", could also be approached from the 'level of education' each individual member receives. It is assumed that a person's level of education can affect the way he or she sees how development is brought into their life. Despite nominal differences in background, educated people at various levels should be able to see things in a more objective or rational manner. For examples, can the different ethnic groups understand why do the government need an affirmative economic programme in this country? If wisdom and knowledge were the objectives of any form of formal higher education system, what would be the decoding style of the educated groups when they relate themselves with the issue of development? Would they be able to see the rationales on the action of the government? Or do they become more radical instead and still want to see that their existence and personal rights as prime important. If they have been educated and trained in this country what could possibly make them think or choose to decode non-dominantly? The USM clerks and the MAS group as well as the university students of UPM are good reference

It is assumed that, those who receive higher education and more so from the national system of education were, not only were they more ready and accessible to exposing themselves to the locally produced programmes, but more importantly, they were 'sympathetic' to the government. Two reasons could be extrapolated from this. Firstly, the use of *Bahasa Melayu* as the language of instruction and conversation at the public schools has made the Non-Malay speaking public school-going children, very conversant in the language. This experience encourages them to watch the locally-produced programmes too since they can understand the contents better than those who have had little or less excess to the language. Although all school-going children have to learn *Bahasa Melayu* until they complete the school years, but the language and cultural orientation of private school is certainly English or some other vernacular. Thus, the public versus private school system could possibly determine a difference in their orientation towards our development programmes and messages.

At the same time, subjects such as 'nationalism' or 'citizenship' are compulsory in the universities, therefore, students of higher learning should be expected to have attitude in tandem with the spirit of the government or able to adjust to the local culture more easily.

In addition, the system or the culture in the government-based or public schools makes their members more tolerant of the government ways and practices. The analysis carried out on the Chinese clerks of USM, revealed that by situating themselves within a government-based organisation, they were comparatively more accommodating and tolerant towards the activities of the government compared to the MAS employees who came from a corporate organisation. The system of the organisational culture does affect the attitude of the members. Thus, it would be more promising if the future interpretive communities of a similar study were to be defined along these factors too.

It is proposed therefore, the different ethnic groups be further differentiated along the level of education and those who receive education from the national system of education and those who do not. The aim is to find out if higher education system have indeed enlightened their wisdom to be more tolerant and accommodating to the affirmative programmes? And how far the public or private

school system of education experienced by the individuals or groups relates to their far understanding, acceptance, tolerance or rejection of the politically biased development and economic policy in this country? If certain factors were to remain the same, their decoding positions should remain dominant

**ii) That a multi-level meaning systems he added to the
Parkin's Theory when analysing media reception**

It was earlier discussed that this study was being guided by Parkin's Theory of Meaning System in analysing the decoding position of the groups. There was a necessity to divide and categorise the myriad individuals or groups, in order to achieve a better social perspective of their reception process. Parkin's schema had allowed us to have three decoding possibilities: dominant (where the audiences will accept the message), negotiated (where the audience will partly share the meaning of the message), and oppositional (where the audience will reject the message). For that purpose, it was regarded as a fair system because it catered the positive, the negative, as well as the situations occurring in between the positive and the negative.

Apparently, in the actual study, it was found that the gap between one type of decoding position to the other was rather too wide to accommodate the various different shades of decoding. As a result, a detailed account of decoding variations of the groups was unable to be captured exhaustively.

In our study, we decided that each type of meaning be subdivided to accommodate three more types of meanings. This was facilitated by the use of 'numerical values' to indicate the degree of dominance or the quality of strength of the dominance or resistance of each response made. For example, the dominant decoding position will now have three levels of dominance: (+1) for the least dominant, (+2) for dominant, and (+3) for a stronger dominant. On the other hand, the negotiated and the oppositional decoding position will also have three levels of resistance each: (-1) for the least resistance, (-2) for resistance, and (-3) for a strong degree of resistance. As a result, we were able to describe in greater detail the varied ways the programme was being decoded and interpreted.

For future studies, we therefore recommend that a similar method be used to provide a more extensive picture of the variations in describing the decoding positions of the audiences. The decision on the fraction of meaning is however, the choice of the researcher, depending on how detail he/she wants the description to be.

iii) That Genre Theory be considered in reception studies to avoid programme distance

Reception analysis theory should not limit its scope only by focusing its arguments on Hall's (1973) and Parkin's (1972) theories because they are less concerned with the multi-dimensions of audience response, such as, whether or not the selected media text is relevant to the decoders' discourses. Morley's (1981) recommendations on plotting the 'purchase' (Moore's terminology) of media genre for various categories of decoders, should be given the due attention. This allows the researcher to find out 'who prefers what' before proceeding into the investigation. The purpose is to ensure that the decoders' interpretation of the text will not be spoilt due to the experience of 'programme distance'.

Genre Theory assumes that the text or genre selected for the study must suit the decoders' taste in order to give the best interpretation of the decoders' analysis of the text's 'preferred meaning'. We therefore recommend that Genre Theory be used to guide future reception studies because not only can it help one understand 'preferred meaning' deeper but more importantly it can offer the study a more effective result.

8.2 Second Implication - National Unity

The growing ethnic divide had a class texture which originated in government policy, albeit unintended (Jomo, 1994). To some extent, this was recognised by those who formulated the NEP. They saw NEP's two prongs — namely poverty eradication and affirmative action to reduce inter-ethnic differences — as offering the socio-economic conditions for achieving 'national unity'.

Our data also indicated that the Malays were generally happy with the NEP because in the late 60s and early 70s they were indeed very poor. The Chinese groups in our study might have been quite critical of the objectives of the government development policies, but given the 'coalition government' concept they have, in some cases and to a certain extent, been quite tolerant.

There can be little doubt that poverty in Malaysia, as measured by the official poverty line, has declined significantly since 1970. This has been largely due to tremendous economic growth, structural change, schooling, migration, occupational change and trickle-down from massive increase in public expenditure under the NEP.

The NEP had envisaged the incidence of poverty from 49 per cent in Peninsular Malaysia in 1970 to 16 per cent in 1990. The NEP also anticipated a rise in Bumiputera share of corporate equity from 2.5 per cent in 1970 to 30 per cent in 1990 (Jomo, 1994). Thus, the NEP has been seen as being responsible in redistributing Malaysia's wealth among the various ethnic groups, and particularly between the Chinese and the Malays, to achieve inter-ethnic economic parity.

Despite some controversy over the reliability and comparability of official data (see Jomo, 1989), reduction in poverty incidence was impressive, declining to 18 per cent in 1984 and 15 per cent in 1989 for Peninsular Malaysia and 17 per cent for the whole of Malaysia. However, the incidence of poverty is more acute for Sabah (34.4 per cent) and Sarawak (21 per cent) (Jomo, 1994).

The second prong of the NEP is committed to 'restructuring' Malaysian society to eliminate the identification of race with economic function. Although there is occasional rhetorical lip service to restructuring, most attention has focussed on positive discrimination to advance the Bumiputera, especially the Malays, economic position in the modern sector, both public and private.

The case for inter-ethnic redistribution tends to ignore intra-ethnic wealth distribution. There is no systematic comprehensive information on wealth distribution in the Malaysian economy, although some indicative evidence is available (see TanTat Wai 1982, Lim Mah Hui 1981, Ozay Mehmet 1986).

Much of the bickering in the years before the OPP period came to a close in 1990 was over ethnic quotas and other official discriminatory measure related to the NEP's restructuring prong. According to Jomo (1994) almost nobody, especially among politicians, would publicly criticise the poverty eradication measures except to condemn the more blatant abuses in implementation.

The new emphasis of post-1990 policy is clearly on growth, modernization and industrialisation, albeit with a renewed, if somewhat muted commitment to redistribution. The commitment to redistribution is still there, but increasingly subsumed by the greater emphases on growth, industrialisation and the private sector. Inter-ethnic distribution has certainly not been de-emphasised, especially by politicians and their business allies.

8.2.1 Recommendations on the issue of 'National Unity'

Our recommendations on the issue of National Unity as Malaysia's ultimate objective in development are in two forms: economic and non-economic. This is true because development is measured in terms of its social and economic engineering strategies and therefore the government should address development issues along these lines:

1) Economic Measures

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that the respondents agreed that the disparity amongst the racial groups is still wide. To them, this gap must be narrowed down to avoid mistrusts and suspicions between the groups. One key area suggested by the respondents was to look into economic measures to help to alleviate the problem of intra and inter-ethnic crisis. Even amongst the Malays groups in our study, they expressed that they would like to see specific programmes introduced to address the differences between the elite and the lower income groups.

After looking into the various possible permutations and also the roles played by the private sectors in assisting the government, we are of the opinion that the following economic measures could be considered to enhance national unity:

- a) Increase the share of the national wealth of the less well-to-do from all ethnic communities
- b) Encourages co-operatives to promote unity
- c) Develop human resources regardless of ethnicity
- d) Achieve full employment for inter-ethnic harmony
- e) Encourage entrepreneurship and build a multi-ethnic professional community
- f) Ensure private sector responsibility and sincerity in achieving national unity
- g) Ensure that the public sector is more reflective of the multi-ethnic composition of the population
- h) Strive towards 'justice for all' with a non-ethnic economic policy

ii) Non-economic Measures

From the study, we were also able to infer that various social factors mentioned by the respondents could complement the above economic measures. For instance, many of the Malays felt that some of the immigrant groups are quite reluctant to speak '*Bahasa Malaysia*' and not interested to watch television programmes using the national language. Thus the mass media like the television stations were facing stiffer challengers to try to promote national unity. Many Chinese respondents also reported that the Chinese generally would send children to a vernacular school. But the government must act cautiously to ensure that national unity can be achieved smoothly. In this respect, the following measures are recommended:

- a) Develop and promote a 'vocabulary' conducive to unity
- b) Encourage multi-ethnic sport, recreation and youth activities
- c) Promote multi-ethnic residential communities
- d) Ensure that the mass media contributes to, rather than, undermines national unity by reviewing their current programmes
- e) Reform policies to ensure that communal politics cease to undermine national unity and that 'basic' democratic rights are preserved
- f) Ensure that the legal system contributes to national unity by strengthening the rule of law, an independent judiciary and justice

8.3 Suggestion for future research in media reception

Among other things, the strength of a research lies in its ability to be duplicated in other situations, especially in those societies of similar nature. Continuous attempts on reception studies will therefore help to 'tighten' the theories and the methodologies developed, overcome weaknesses and fallacies, and discover new variables in order to provide a more realistic and social-bound findings. While at the same time, the practice will help to keep the research tradition alive and significantly prominent. We therefore, suggest the following:

- i) Development-oriented programmes should continue to be used for media reception studies in this country**

We suggest that communication development studies such as ours should be encouraged. The use of communication theories has great potential in understanding development issues. Such studies are regarded as timely and necessary because Malaysia is in a state where economic expansion is at the top of the nation's agenda. Researchers could easily help media organisations and the government point at some of the 'problematic areas' in reception of ideological messages so that entire process of understanding development could be enhanced. That will enable us to improve the existing policies related to development and nation building.

- ii) The present 'research framework' should be replicated in other developing multi-ethnic countries having a similar background as Malaysia**

Since our research framework had successfully examined the reception of a development-oriented television programme in a multi-ethnic society, we therefore would like to suggest that the same research framework be used to test on media reception behaviours in other multi-ethnic societies in other parts of the world. We predict that if a similar research is carried out in the multi-ethnic South African society, the hegemonic condition in the country could be crystallised, while the media's role could be streamlined for the benefit of the government and the people.

iii) The local television news programmes should be selected as reception analysis items to track the existing hegemony

The RTM has produced a news programme, called "*Dunia Jam -10 00* " or translated as 'World at Ten', aired every night at 10 p.m. at RTM 1 channel. It symbolises the concept of 'window of the world' where it provides the opportunity of its viewers to see and being informed about the latest development in world politics, social and economics. Sources of the programme are taken from the world leading news agencies like, Reuters, CNN, Associated Press, etc. to ensure that the news items carry credibility and authority.

But what is important here is that, the messages undoubtedly reflect western hegemony and ideology. Those who are conscious and concerned about the imbalance world information order or western media imperialism in the Third world countries, became highly agitated about the way news were being framed by the western sources, and feared that the programme could affect the minds of the local viewers. The Gulf War for example, transmitted through the programme, had produced a lot of controversial views from the Malaysian audiences. The Islamic-slant groups naturally were for Iraq, while the Non-Islamic sympathisers groups had taken the side with the US because they believed that the American, as the super power, would have the best capacity in maintaining world order.

The controversial opinions came into being because Malaysia is just a recipient party, and the viewers believed that the news that were disseminated have earlier been manipulated according to the encoders' needs and interests. While this is a normal occurrence in journalism, with the launching of MEASAT 1 and MEASAT 2 recently, the world information order would take a different form in the near future. This is not impossible especially when Malaysia is determined to take the role of an 'encoder' of the world news rather than acting just as a decoder or a recipient country.

Nevertheless, it would be interesting to imagine what would be the decoding pattern of the various social groups in this country towards some of the contemporary issues that have monopolised the news of the world transmitted through the 'News at Ten' programme of RTM 1. How would the Malaysian respond toward the ideologies transmitted through that programme? We therefore

recommend that the reception of this programme “*Dunia Jam 10 00*’ be analysed in order to find out how would the foreign-based ideologies be read in context of our local societal set up

iv) Conducting a similar study at the end of the Vision 2020 policy using similar theoretical framework

We personally feel that a follow up study of this kind be conducted in the year 2001, because it marks the completion of the New Development Plan (NDP) as well as the beginning of the 21st century. This means, in less than five years time, through another development-oriented television programme, the response or reception of the different ethnic groups in this country towards the contemporary development conditions, will be tested again. The aim is to compare the findings between the two studies. In that study, we would like to see several things, such as

- a) The decoding trend of the two major opposite groups the Bumiputra and the Non-Bumiputra (whether the degree of resistance from the Non-Bumiputra groups in particular, has reduced comparatively, whether or not the Bumiputra have become more critical)
- b) Whether the ‘income levels’ factor has any significant value in decoding of the development oriented issues by the different ethnic groups then?
- c) Other variables (would there be new emerging development variables to describe the future social character of the Malaysian society?)

However, in order to have a comprehensive analytical result, future studies should be carried out in two levels. The first part should focus on the tri-ethnic-based society consisting of the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians, who specifically represent the population character of the Peninsular Malaya. The second part should concentrate on the tri-ethnic-based Bumiputra society, consisting of the Malays and the indigenous groups of Sarawak and Sabah. The two levels of analysis, when integrated, should be able to provide a more

exhaustive account on the reception of development-oriented programmes in the multi-ethnic Malaysian society and hence, the contemporary conditions prevailing in the society then

By breaking the research into two separate levels, work could be managed more easily. The above idea would use none other than the ethnographic method, because only qualitative data would be able to show the processes involved in reception and able to draw the required results and findings that are critical enough, realistic and culturally oriented.

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