

A dangerous inception of the Malaysian dream
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COMMENT What is the most resilient parasite? A bacteria? A virus? An intestinal worm? An idea. Resilient, highly contagious. Once an idea has taken hold of the brain it's almost impossible to eradicate. An idea that is fully formed, fully understood. That sticks, right in there somewhere. [Points to his head] - Dom Cobb, Inception

We dream dreams; asleep or awake. And according to Christopher Nolan, when we dream, we risk being planted with ideas from self-interested individuals. It is reverse espionage at its best. Nolan called it Inception, and made a blockbuster movie out of it.

Malaysians too have dreams, and each of us dream dreams of a better, more conscientious, more developed, more equitable, more harmonious and a more prosperous nation. Some people apparently have a different idea, an idea that is injurious to the better notions of our dreams. Which is why they work very hard to spike us with their injurious ideas while we are dreaming.

The dream trespassers and their ideas

They, I call them dream trespassers. They know that "the seed we plant in [a] man's mind will grow into an idea. This idea will define him. It may come to change...well, it may come to change everything about him".

In the altered dreamworld of these dream trespassers, Malaysians are neatly pigeonholed into mutually exclusive categories of race and religion. Each is a Malay, Chinese, Indian and lain-lain for those who cannot not fit into these primary labels.

Other than the indisputable fact that we are living together in this land, national pride is almost non-existent and in fact, not encouraged. This is because a common feeling of pride for Malaysia will shatter the dream trespassers' idea of strict communal segregation.

This is the idea which the dream trespassers are trying to implant into our Malaysian dream.

Mr Charles and the invisible enemies

Of course, they are smart enough to know that this idea is counter-intuitive and will not be easily accepted. Which is why the dream trespassers sometimes use Mr Charles.

Mr Charles who? Go watch Inception, seriously.

Mr Charles is, according to Inception, "a gambit designed to turn [a person] against his own subconscious". The dream trespassers first pose as our friends. They claim to be friends of the Malaysian dream, to make Malaysia a better nation. They show us "proof" and "evidence" that they want to help us.

And then, when they have gained our trust, they begin to tell us of invisible enemies who, according to them, want to destroy our Malaysian dream.

Now, these enemies are not only invisible, they are elusive. Sometimes, they tell the Malays, the Chinese are the enemies. Sometimes, they warn the Chinese against the Malays, and they whisper to the Indians how the others are conspiring against them. To

these dream trespassers, our differences are weapons to turn Malaysians against one another.

The real world

The truth is, in the real world, contrary to the idea of the dream trespassers, social categorisation is much more dynamic and variegated. I remember how a Malay Singaporean friend told me he can identify better with Chinese Malaysians than with Malays in Malaysia because of our status as minority in our own country.

And Chinese Indonesians can probably relate better with the Malays than with the Chinese in Malaysia because of their proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia-Indonesia.

A Malay in Kuala Lumpur and an Indian in Penang probably can speak NONEfluent Cantonese or Hokkien and have more in common with urban Chinese than a Malay in the kampung, who in turn probably has more affinity with an Indian from Sabah or a Chinese in Kelantan.

And I can go on and on about how class, religious and vocational factors affect our social dynamics over and against the communal ideology of the dream trespassers.

So as you can see, in the real Malaysia, we have more differences within us than between us. Our categories, if they are at all, are not mutually exclusive. In fact, we are more inextricably bound to one another than we can imagine, to use the words of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. It is not zero sum: on this ship we float or sink together.

Wake up, now

The paradox of the dream trespassers' idea is that while they pigeonhole Malaysians, they do it in the name of our Malaysian dream. What I am trying to say is, there still is a Malaysian dream. And that is the better homeland we aspire for, a country we all can feel proud of.

If you look hard enough into the idea the dream trespassers are trying to implant, you will notice this paradox. Deep inside, no one can deny or undo the aspiration for making things better, not even the dream trespassers. They know that. They do not try to take that away; they tell us they will make things better.

But if we allow them to implant their idea of the altered dreamworld; if we allow them to make us achieve a better Malaysia their way, we will soon realise that we are regressing more and more from where we began. And, I believe, the state of our country today clearly shows such regression.

The dream trespassers are dangerous and we can see why. But how do we escape their inception? I think the first thing we need to do is to realise that somebody is messing with our dream. It is not enough to have a personal realisation. If we are to float or sink together, we need to spread this realisation to our neighbours as well.

All of us, Malay, Chinese, Indian, Iban, Kadazan and Dayak. We have a common goal of making things better. Let us build up our defence system to block the dream trespassers from destroying our common goal.

We must block their dangerous idea from being planted in our minds. That means focusing

hard on the reality of our commonness. Look at our flag, our national song, our Rukun Negara - these are the reminders that there is a bond so strong in all of us that we float or sink together.

Of course, the best way to block an inception is to wake up. Let us wake up now and take control. This is our Malaysian dream, not that of the saboteurs.

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