

After the apology over the keris
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We must resolve the keris controversy generated by Umno Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussein, who has brandished the keris at the party's annual assembly twice now.
MCPX

At last year's meeting, Umno Perlis delegate Hashim Suboh said at the end of the debate on economy and education issues: "Datuk Hisham has unsheathed his keris, waved his keris, kissed his keris. We want to ask Datuk Hisham, when is he going to use it? [...] Force must be used against those who refused to abide by the social contract."

This was in relation to Hishammuddin's alleged weakness in dealing with demands from Chinese schools.

We live in a world in which signs and symbols of violence colonise our consciousness. From cave walls inscribed with images of Neanderthals clobbering a baby dinosaur, to production of images disseminated worldwide via the electronic media and Internet, we are confronted with violence.

umno 2007 pemuda keris 061107We are creatures of signs and symbols manipulated by those who own the means of producing static and moving images. Objects of violence - of deaths and mega-deaths, of decimation and of demolition, and of the demonstration of defiance and destruction - all these, throughout history, have become symbols of choice for those in power.

Consider those crude-looking objects like sharpened stones and rocks used by cavemen to club one another, spears used in Alexandra of Macedonia's phalanx, the spears and swords used in the Taiping Rebellion in China, cannons used in Gettysburg in the Civil War in America, and the rifle used by the Saddam Hussein in celebrating victory, the 21-gun salute in a modern military-inspired ceremony in Kuala Lumpur, the range of inter-continent ballistic missiles buried in the silos of Nevada - and finally the Malay keris.

Consider the sharp and pointed object. It involves release of inner tension, of perhaps the libido and repressed energy, of anger or frustration and of the lack of language to communicate peace.

All the energy from the body, flowing through the shoulders, the biceps, the hand, the wrist, the fist, and finally all these, the chi, the chakra or the tenaga lahir dan batin - all contained like the Einsteinian fusion-ed energy - is released through these objects of anger and destruction such as the keris. The technology of killing continues to be perfected as human beings become more sophisticated in the art and science of anger mis-management.

kerisThe traditional keris - like Malaysia's proposal of the East Asia Economic Caucus - is a weapon of mass confrontation and has evolved in this postmodern era into a symbol of mass deception. It is a symbol. It is a sign. It represents something. The keris is a semiotic subject of study and must be looked at from different perspectives of meaning.

What is the nature of repression, the untamed libido, the repressed energy, the anger, the frustration, and the bottled up fear that is encapsulated and buried in the

psycho-archeology of the keris? I hope the original creator of the Umno logo can answer this question.

Proposal for Umno

I want to propose something new. I want to invite Umno to consider changing its antiquated logo, the keris. It'll be a good branding exercise to increase marketability in line with Malaysia's corporate-ideological restructuring.

If Apple Computer can do that with its original 1970s unfriendly logo of an apple falling on Newton's head and have it evolve into something friendlier like 'take the byte off an Apple', then Umno can do so as well.

When I was a child sitting under a rambutan tree in a Malay kampong in Johor, I had this question: what if Parameswara the assassin-prince - who was watching with thrill a mousedeer kick a Rottweiler into the Straits of Malacca - had sat under a durian tree and the fruit fell. What if it hit his head and he had to be taken back to Palembang to be hospitalised for concussion?

Would Malacca have been 'founded'; would ketuanan Melayu have become an issue; and would the keris have been wielded at the Umno general assembly? I do not know.

History can be the greatest coloniser. Memories lie. There is no such thing as 'historical fact' when selective, authored and doctored accounts based on power/ideology/genealogy of truth and falsehood are used to report 'historical events' - and turned into 'facts' to be disseminated by our nationalistic and patriotic Sejarah/Tawarikh/History teachers and curriculum developers of the Biro Tatanegara.

umno keris logo typeUmno must improve its logo. It must hold a logo competition. The criteria must be this: only symbols of peace are allowed. And one must submit an essay of 500-word on why the symbol of the party is chosen.

One must first read studies on signs and symbols of violence throughout history and how they have shaped human consciousness/cognitive evolution.

And one could consider these words from an ancient Malay text:

. ...Shukur dan sabar ihsan Islam
Suci dan ikhlas hakikat dalam
Menjalankan ucap siang dan malam
Memuji Tuhan Halkul Alam.
Inilah keputusan jalan hakikat
Ibu nyawa sudah dapat
Nyawa dan badan sudah mufakat
Boleh kita membawa sifat...

A symbol of any good and friendly ancient Malay scripture that glorifies the common person and not the ancient rulers would be a good replacement. A symbol of peace is needed.

The enquiring mind is more powerful than the weapon of mass deception. A new regime must have this as a foundation. I hope to see Umno's new logo.

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