

The cultural logic of Najibo-nomics
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Fashionable it may seem to credit this or that "economic miracle" episode to this or that country to the name of its leader, economist, dictator, emperor, etc. - the larger picture of the historical march of "freakonomics" is neglected.

Freakonomics is what the global society was plagued with beginning with the American sub-prime-inspired crisis; a breakdown of the world's casino-capitalist system.

Fashionable it may seem to cite this or that case-study to a proposed "Harvard" study, just like calling a university "Harvard of the East" or "Princeton of the Peripheries" or "Oxford of the Outbacks" or even "Cambridge of the Caribbean" - it misses the point of what and how casino capitalism works.

It misses the point that the world is undergoing yet another wave of perpetual revolution in the field of economic thinking.

Malaysians are into this fashionable game of assigning this or that terminology to this or that epoch of "economic cultural depression and how these are cured".

Like the style of historicising that assigns this or that age to this or that person, resulting in epochs of historical vaingloriousness, Malaysians have seen periodisation of its capitalist march, in names such as "Mahathirism", "Badawi-ism", and now "Najibo-nomics".

Not much was seen in names such as "Tunku-nomics" (after Tunku Abdul Rahman), Razak-ism (after Abdul Razak Hussein), and Hussein-nomics or Hussein-ism (after Hussein Onn). Perhaps we did not really pay attention to how the pre-Mahathir era leaders address issues. We did not see words such as "Doctrine" attached as affix to these names to read "Tunku Doctrine" or the likes.

The politics of names

History that glorifies individuals is a result of historicising that involves forced authoring of name. Hence, dynasties in China are generally named after individuals and Empires in India, after their first rulers.

In modern times, we saw terms such as "Thatcherism", "Reaganism" or "Reaganomics" and perhaps "Obama-nomics" after we saw "Obama-mania".

At the beginning of the century we saw Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Castroism, and the "Kennedy Era". Then there were Hitlerism, Bismarkian era, and Tokugawa Period. The Islamic world saw names such as Wahhabi-ism and Khomeini-ism.

Post-Independence Southeast Asia saw Marcos-era, Sukarnoism with its Marhaenism and Ganyang-Malaysia-ism replaced by Modern Day-Yudistira-ism of Suhartoism. We saw Lee Kuan Yew-styled Asian Despotism and the 22-year rule of Mahathirism.

As if there is not enough of the game of glorifying persons in history, the modern media too is continuing the politics of false-consciousness; masking the larger picture of oppression of those nameless masses in the march towards the perfection of casino capitalism.

Logic of capitalism

Philosophically positioned, capitalism takes Nature, turns it into Technology, and engineers the evolution of culture that structures the divisions of classes of people, through the

installation process of the "machine in the garden" and the transforming of human beings into labor and commodities.

Ultimately, Technology subdues Nature and thrusts Humanity into a matrix of complexities that relegates human beings as cogs in the wheels of Capital.

Capitalism is a system of predatory economics, sanctioned by the evolution of power, knowledge, and ideology. It must be looked at not by the "epochs" of rulership of these or that kings, tyrants, or despots, but culturally as a system that has a logic and its own system of periodisation.

It requires the unmasking of the psychology and culture of human control, bondage, and the abuse of control apparatuses, in order to sustain an economic system that will naturally create a complex system of ownership rationalized through yet another system of production of culture as commodity, and production of strategies of mystification that provides false consciousness and happiness to those exploited by those who own the means of economic, cultural, and intellectual production.

The evolution of tribes, nations, and countries need not be seen as linear, following Rostowian idea of developmental economics, framed by Friedmanian doctrine.

The premises underlying these ideas need to be studied, critiqued, and made culturally relevant in all of our institutions of higher learning.

We must also demand our students to master the concepts and applications of radical economic ideas that put back human dignity in the march of meaningful human progress.

In this case, why not challenge them to explore ecological socialism and sustainable developmental paradigm by having them study the economics and social systems of the indigenous peoples of Malaysia, such as the Penans, Ibans, and Kadazan-dusuns?

For too long, we have been so obsessed with creating wealth and destroying Nature rather than spreading wealth and preserving Nature.

The middle name

Back to "Najibo-nomics".

I do not think it is necessary to give birth to this name. I think there is, in the words of a research or case-study strategy, those who proposed that the name must triangulate the data of Malaysia's claim to economic invulnerability.

One must not only study numbers crunched officially and bury human beings under those numbers that are then trumpeted across the globe.

One must go back to Malaysia's timeline of economic history and look at the country from a culturally-kaleidoscopic perspective, from the lens other than what structural functionalists would use.

The world we inhabit in is not merely a celestial body tattooed culturally and stylized by economic numerology; we live in a structurally violent world of the powerful and the powerless, of the haves and the have-nots, and of increasing dehumanization as a consequence of the economic condition we are born into, exacerbated by the rapidisation of technology and the speed of politics.

In Malaysia, fifty years of glorifying this and that epoch and of periods and ruptures must, in any case study of political economy, be triangulated with data on the human and cultural consequences of development -- this "developmentalist agenda" must be perceived from a human rights perspective.

How must Malaysians study the decades of racial disintegration, incidences of ethnic violence, nature of authoritarianism, breakdown of virtually all sub-social systems, etched patterns of economic apartheid, schooling and racial discrimination, abuse of the state ideological apparatuses, and finally the steadily rising billion-Ringgit benchmark of corruption this country has gauged in her way to becoming a failed state?

Those above are amongst the variables that need to be taken into consideration when one thinks of a good case study. Let us be more sophisticated when naming names.

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