Akademika, Bil. 14/1979, 31 – 42

"Sex, ethnicity and the professions in West Malaysia: some preliminary considerations."

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SINOPSIS

Adalah dianggapkan bahawa di Malaysia terdapat perbedaan kelas, jantina dan etnik bagi peluang mendapatkan pelajaran tinggi, serta juga pilihan pekerjaan berdasarkan pelajaran tadi. Dalam kertas ini, kelas, jantina dan keetnikan dilihat sebagai angkubah-angkubah bebas, tetapi adalah berhubung rapat. Kertas ini ingin meneliti sejauh mana jantina menjadi angkubah penting dalam memahami stratifikasi sosial di Malaysia Barat. Pengaruh-pengaruh kelas dan keetnikan akan disentuh dimana perlu.

SYNOPSIS

It is postulated that in Malaysia there are class, sex and ethnic differentials in such life chances as access to higher education, as well as in options and opportunities to utilize this education. Class, sex and ethnicity are seen here as independent but interacting variables. This paper examines the extent to which sex is a significant variable for understanding social stratification in West Malaysia. The influences of class and ethnicity will be referred to where necessary.

Education is the main means of recruitment into the better occupational roles in the modern labour force. Higher education[1] has long been regarded as a "manpower" resource for development. There has been a generalized belief that in the underdeveloped countries of the Third World, employment opportunities will exist for those who receive higher education, irrespective of any other social characteristics they may possess. That Malaysia is a plural society, wherein there is a fusion of ethnicity and economic function is widely documented (Furnivall 1966; Freedman 1960; Milne 1967; Roff 1967; West 1972). The overwhelming dominance of race as a category for social analysis has, however, tended to obscure the significance of class as a basis for the distribution of scarce societal resources. Moreover, the androcentric nature of both society and the social sciences has generally led to a neglect of any criti-

cal analysis of sex as a separate dimension of social stratification. It is postulated that in Malaysia there are, in fact, significant class, sex and ethnic differentials in such life chances as access to higher education, as well as in options and opportunities to utilize this education.

Class, sex and ethnicity are independent but interacting variables, and to focus on any one category to the exclusion of the others, is to produce a limited, one-dimensional explanation of Malaysian society. This paper comprises an examination of the extent to which sex is a significant variables of social stratification in West Malaysia. The influences of class and ethnicity will be referred to where relevant.[2]

ELABORATION:

In Malaysia, there are structural and attitudinal barriers which limit access to form and content of higher education, depending on one's ethnicity. Similar constraints determine gender-specific patterns of higher education. The different ethnic groups hold different occupational expectations, and these expectations are positively correlated with such educational choice as is available. Moreover, men and women, as gender groups hold differing expectations concerning their range of occupational options, and these similarly influence educational choice. Expectations are shaped by structural and ideational factors: by class, experiences of reality, and cultural values. People rarely perceive themselves capable of, or want to enter educational or occupational fields which are known to be "closed", or are held in low esteem.

Higher education is a scarce resource in Malaysia, as elsewhere. In 1971, only 1% of the population aged 19 years and above were enrolled in university-level education (Ministry of Education 1973: 3). Even at this elite level, some are more equal than others. There was a progressive decline in the number of males and females enrolled at each successive level of the educational hierarchy, but the decline in the number of females are more marked than the decline in the number of males. In 1972, there were more than two and a half times more men than women enrolled in university-level education in West Malaysia (Fatimah Hamid-Don 1975: 11). In ethnic terms, Malays comprised 53% of the population of West Malaysia, and 50% of all tertiary-level enrolments in 1970. Chinese comprised 36% of the population, and 43% of all tertiary enrolments. Indians 11% of the population and 5% of all those enrolled in tertiary-level education (Prime Minister's Department 1973: 23-24). Not only were there differentials in the rates of enrolment at the tertiary level, but sex and ethnic differentials in the form and content of such education as was received. Women as a gender group, and the Malays as an ethnic group were more likely to be educated at the tertiary level in arts, humanities or education than in any other subject area. Men as a gender-group, and non-Malays as ethnic groups were more equally distributed throughout the various fields of study, and more likely to be enrolled in the "demand" areas

of science and technology (Ministry of Education 1975). These variations can be explained partly by reference to the colonial impact, partly as a consequence of policies adopted by the post-colonial government, and the patriarchal nature of Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures and society.

The expansion of modern economic activities in the Malay peninsular in the nineteenth century was accompanied by the expansion of a bipartite system of education. Under the British, English education was generally available to the elites of all ethnic groups, destined to enter the modern occupational world. Vernacular education, of an elementary nature, was provided for the peasantry. This latter "education" did not lead on to occupational opportunities in the modern labour market, but was designed to strike a balance between blatant neglect, and the movement of Malays away from rural, agricultural activities. Official policy was to maintain intact the internal structure of Malay authority and social organization — or the semblance of same — and English education was designed to produce a Malay administrative cadre from the ranks of the Malay (male) elites (Chelliah 1947; Emerson 1964; Roff 1967; Gerhold 1971; Wong 1971; Chai Hon-Chai 1977).

During the colonial period, non-Malays were generally denied access to the administrative services of government, but were welcomed into the professional and technical services. No such constraints operated at the lower levels (Roff 1967; Puthucheary). Most non-Malays were located in the towns or nearby areas, whereas most Malays lived in the rural areas. The class position of the non-Malays, their geographic location and official policy resulted in more non-Malays than Malays having access to the English education necessary to fulfil these modern occupational roles. The historical association of the Malay community with bureaucratic and other government functions, the exclusion of non-Malays from the administrative services, (if not other sections of the bureaucracy) and the under-representation of Malays in urban commercial activities led to an extreme fusion of ethnicity and sectoral and occupational specialization. In general, Malays into the public sector, Chinese into the private and Indians in both. Malay administrators and politicians, non-Malay managers and professional practitioners. In the past, the combination of limited educational opportunities and occupational expectations meant that those Malays who were educated to the tertiary level were more likely to be enrolled in arts and humanities because they were destined to be "generalists". By contrast, Chinese students were most likely to be enrolled in commerce, or those science-based courses leading on to a range of professional and technological occupations. Indian students were fairly evenly distributed throughout arts and science, more affected by class differentiation within the group, than by ethnically-based occupational expectations (Nathan 1921; Vlieland 1932; Del Tufo 1949; Fell 1960; Ministry of Education 1968, 1975; Hirschman 1975).[3]

Under the division of labour pertaining in most societies, a woman is assigned prime responsibility for childminding and domestic labour. These are

generally held to be a woman's "prime" roles. Those which should take precedence over any other "additional" roles. In some areas, childminding and domestic labour are part of the means of production. Under capitalism, and with the advent of industrial technology, not only is there a structural separation of "home" and "work", but a woman's traditional domestic role is no longer regarded as productive labour. The work and the worker have no social value (Oakley 1974; Mitchell and Oakley 1976; Barker and Allan 1976). The ongoing socialization of women into the expectation that they will marry, have children and perform this domestic role is directly contradictory to their participation in the modern occupational labour force. A career for a women is considered to be of lesser importance than a career for a man. As a wife, the adult woman is expected to be supported. Although this ideal is generally only attainable by the upper classes, the reality of economic necessity amongst women has had little impact on cultural imagery. As a husband, the adult man has prime responsibility for the economic well-being of himself and his family of procreation. Such normative expectations have a variety of consequences: When financial resources are limited, education is given, by preference to male children. State sponsored education may provide children from working class or peasant backgrounds with sufficient education to equip them for the most menial occupations. Such children rarely continue their education beyond the stipulated school-leaving age — if that — and the situation is more acute in the case of girls than boys (Ministry of Education 1968, 1975; Gerhold 1971). When a family is sufficiently wealthy as to be able to educate all children equally, a girl may be educated, even to the tertiary level. The daughters of the bourgeoisie tend, however, to be educated in a manner designed to improve their marriage-ability, or their ability to perform the roles of wife and mother. Those women who do continue to the tertiary level are most likely to be enrolled in those traditional "female" subject areas (arts, humanities and education) leading on to the acceptable, but lower-rewarded occupations such as pre-school and primary teaching, that are dominated by educated women. In general, not only parents, but those girls who have internalized the notion of motherhood as a vocation, are less likely to want to continue their education to the higher levels, should the opportunity present itself. Most are content to gain sufficient education to equip them for a stop-gap job until marriage and/or childbearing and childrearing. Even then, they are likely to find that the better work roles are given, by preference to male "breadwinners" (Mitchell and Oakley 1976; Barker and Allen 1976).

Higher education and certification are the general requirements for those who would enter the professions. In Malaysia, sex and ethnic differentiation in the rates of participation in higher education, and similar variations in areas of specialization, means that there are sex and ethnically differentiated "pools" of those eligible to be recruited into the various professions. Given the under-representation of Malays and Indians amongst tertiary-level

enrolments, and the over-representation of Chinese, we might expect that the former groups should be somewhat under-represented in the professions, and the latter somewhat over-represented. Malays and other indigenous people comprised 50% of the professional and technical labour force in 1973, and this is consistent with their under-representation in higher education. Chinese comprised 39% of the professional and technical workforce. This represents a higher rate of participation in this occupational category than their proportionate share of the population of West Malaysia. It is, however, less than one might expect, given their 43% of tertiary-level enrolments. Although Indians comprised a low 5% of tertiary enrolments in 1970, they formed 11% of the professional and technical labour force in 1973. A figure that is congruent with their share of the population as a whole. Gender variations within the ethnic groups are not known, as such statistics had not been calculated at the time of writing (Prime Minister's Department 1976: 153).

The anomalies as detalied above can be explained by reference to the fact that many of those performing professional and technical occupational roles in 1973 gained their qualifications at a time when ethnic imbalances in educational opportunities were more pronounced than in the early 1970's. Further, the link between ethnic distributions in education, and similar differences in labour force participation is made more tenuous by the fact that many professional people obtained their education and certification abroad. (Such a practice often being necessary, due to lack of local training facilities, particularly in the past. Aslo preferred by many of those who could afford it, because of the prestige such education conferred). In addition to the reasons cited above, an examination of the types of occupations included in the professional and technical category reveals many work roles that would be better classified as semi- or sub-professional. For example, the category includes engineering

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONS IN SELECTED PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS, BY ETHNICITY. MALAYSIA, 1973

	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Total
Chemists and physical scientists	41	272	40	353
Medical doctors	145	948	703	1,796
Dentists	32	253	61	346
Veterinary surgeons	50	39	69	158
Architects (including Town Planners) and Surveyors)	104	349	32	485
Engineers	303	1,569	287	2,159
Lawyers	164	379	242	785
Higher Education Teachers	691	642	299	1,632
Totals	1,530	4,451	1,733	7,714
Total %	(20%)	(58%)	(22%)	(100%)

NB: The category "Others" was excluded from these calculations.
(Derived from, "*Third Malaysia Plan*..." (op cit, 1976: Table 8-11, 153)

assistants and technicians; nurses; medical, dental and veterinary assistants; primary and secondary teachers, none of which require tertiary education, but can be performed by those with secondary-level qualifications. When we exclude these lower-level occupations, and examine the ethnic distributions in the "true" professions (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1964), and those occupations requiring tertiary-level education, a different picture emerges:

The foregoing table reveals that Malays, comprising a mere 20% of these upper-level occupations, are extremely under-represented. Chinese, comprising 58%, and Indians 22% respectively were extremely over-represented. This data accords with the known structure of educational opportunities and class differences within Malaysian society, prior to the introduction of the New Economic Policy, and government sponsorship of the educational and occupational aspirations of the Malays.

The lower-level education of women in Malaysia is reflected in their under-representation in the professions. In 1973, they formed only 37% of all those engaged in "Professional, Technical and related" occupations (Prime Minister's Department). Unfortunately, ethnic distributions within this occupational category are not known.[4] The most recent labour-force publication, the 1967/1968 Socio-economic Sample Survey of Households (Choudhry 1968) is of limited value as regards the finer distributions of occupational activities in West Malaysia, due to the particular methodology employed, and a variety of statistical errors. It does reveal however that women comprised 33% of all persons in the labour force of West Malaysia at that time, and 32% of those engaged in "Professional, technical and related" occupations. In ethnic terms, Malay women comprised 13% of this occupational category, Chinese women 14% and Indian women 5%. (As percentages of the female labour force at that time, Malay women comprised 40% of all those in the professional, technical and related category, Chinese women 45% and Indian women 15%). The proportion of the female labour force in the "professional, technical and related category in both 1967/68 and 1973 was not unlike the proportion of the male labour force performing such occupations at those times (Choudhry 1970).

Women, like Malays, were more likely to gain tertiary education in the fields of arts, humanities or education than in any other subject area. The under-representation of women in the faculties of law, science and medicine was less marked than in the West, but Malaysian women had similar low-level enrolments in such non-traditional subject areas as engineering and related technology-based fields (O.E.C.D. 1970; Ministry of Education 1975). It is not surprising therefore, that 70% of those Malaysian women engaged in "Professional, technical and related" occupations at the time of the Manpower Survey in 1973 were working in the field of education, mainly as teachers at the primary and secondary levels. The majority of the remaining 30% were working in the field of Health and Welfare, mainly in such sub-

professional roles as nursing and midwifery, rather than in the high prestige occupations as doctors and dentists:

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN SELECTED "PROFESSIONAL, TECHNICAL AND RELATED" OCCUPATIONAL FIELDS, WEST MALAYSIA, 1973

Occupational Area	Males % (N–78,069)	Females % (N–45,310)
Health and Welfare	6.38	23.71
Education	57.72	68.69
Science	7.21	2.41
Engineering	15.53	0.47
Architecture and Building	5.36	0.64
Commerce	3.12	0.84
Law	0.81	0.16
Religion	0.50	0.15
Arts and entertainment	1.69	0.52
Miscellaneous professional, technical and related	1.68	2.41
Totals	100.00%	100.00%

(Statistics calculated from data supplied by the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Kuala Lumpur which was collected during the "*Manpower Survey, 1973*".

The above table reveals that women were concentrated in a more limited range of professional occupations than men. A further examination of the "*Manpower Survey, 1973*" data reveals that whilst there was a tendency for the majority of persons within each gender-specific labour force to be sedimented towards the bottom of the various occupational hierarchies, this tendency was more pronounced in the case of women than men.

Ethnic variations in sectoral and occupational specialization can be explained by reference to Malaya's colonial history, differentials in the ownership and control of the Malaysian economy, and the cultural values of the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Gender variations in occupational specialization appear less idiosyncratic. The rates of participation of women in selected professional occupations in Malaysia were compared with the rates of participation of women in similar occupations in selected Western countries. Such juxtaposition revealed a remarkable degree of similarity between the distribution of women in the professions in Malaysia and in the West. There was, however, a higher proportion of women amongst doctors and lawyers in Malaysia, and a lower proportion amongst primary and secondary teachers, authors, journalists and social welfare workers:

The similarity in the position of women in Malaysia and the West is not altogether surprising, given the similarity of content of gender-specific socialization and patterns of education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Moreover, most modern occupational roles have been "import" into Malaysia

TABLE 3
PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATIONS, ENGLAND AND WALES, 1961 AND 1966. AUSTRALIA, 1966. WEST MALAYSIA 1973. (AS % OF ALL PERSONS IN THAT OCCUPATION).

Occupational group	Percentage women		
	England and Wales	Australia	West Malaysia
Medical doctors	18	12	20
Dentists	11	6	20
Engineers and technologists	1	0.3	1
Scientists (physical and life)	7	11	8
University teachers	13	19	19
Primary and secondary teachers	58	59	43
Accountants, economists and statisticians	15	9	13
Surveyors and architects	2	3	5
Barristers, solicitors and lawyers	5	5	11
Authors, journalist etc,	31	34	15
Religious personnel	23	27	15
Social welfare workers	53	63	23

Statistics for England and Wales derived from Censuses 1961 and 1966 by Fogarty, Rapoport and Rapoport "*Sex, Career and Family*" (Geo. Allen and Unwin, London, 1971: Table 1.2.,-23) Statistics for Australia calculated from Australian Bureau of Statistics, "*Census of Population and Housing*", 1966 Malaysian data calculated from data supplied by the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Kuala Lumpur which was gathered during the "*Manpower Survey, 1973*"

from the West. The knowledge associated with a particular occupation is taught by the male role encumbents from the West, to potential (and also male) role encumbents from, or in Malaysia. Particular work roles come to be seen as most appropriate, most suitably performed by those who commonly perform them. Over time, the characteristics of jobs come to be seen as the characteristics of job holders.[5] Few women in Malaysia, or the West see themselves as potential scientists, technologists or engineers, and few aspire to such occupations, as they are considered "unfeminine". Women are believed, and believe themselves to lack technical ability; to be incapable of independent judgement and rational decision making; to lack physical strength, to lack the dedication required of those performing a number of professional roles. A degree of congruency between objective and subjective definitions of roles and role encumbents helps maintain a similarly gender-differentiated work force in Malaysia as in the West. Such differentiation as exists can be partially explained by reference to cultural variations in those "outside" roles considered suitable for women. In addition, in many Third World countries, the generalized low-level of education can sometimes create occupational opportunities for those elite women with tertiary education not usually available to women in the West. Such structural opportunities how-

ever are countered by the fact that most Malaysian women gain higher education in the "generalist" disciplines, with more limited career-development prospects. Underdevelopment can both increase and attenuate employment opportunities for women.

The expansion of education, especially non-vocational education at the secondary and tertiary levels in Third World countries is frequently more rapid than the expansion of appropriate job opportunities. Research has shown that once an individual is educated, that person may be reluctant to accept employment which does not meet the high occupational expectations generated by the process of education. Although we can expect considerable variations between male and female aspirations. Being educated has come to be equated with a clean, white-collar job, yet the availability of sufficient white-collar jobs to absorb the rapidly-expanding and increasingly educated population in countries like Malaysia, depends upon the expansion of an industrial-technological base, capable of supporting a large tertiary workforce. By definition, this does not occur in underdeveloped countries. In Malaysia, the situation appears to be further exacerbated by the development of capital rather than labour-intensive industry. Whilst the uneducated have no option but to accept manual labour, and the highest educated, and those with vocational education generally have little difficulty in finding employment, those whose education has been in the literary or academic manner (e.g. women and Malays) may have high occupational expectations, but face fierce competition for the few white-collar jobs available.[6]

In the West, occupations such as teaching, clerical work and administration were once performed almost exclusively by men. Clerical work, at least, has now been largely vacated by men, and more recently taken over ,by women. Due to factors related to the expansion of industrialization in the West, the proportion of men and women in teaching is now approximately the same, although trends in employment opportunities in the 1970's have seen a return of men to teaching, and an increase in their numbers amongst social workers. Although the majority of women in "professional" occupations in Malaysia were engaged in teaching at the primary and secondary levels, or working in the fields of health and welfare in 1973, men, not women monopolized such white collar jobs as clerical work and primary and secondary teaching. Men also dominated social work in Malaysia, whereas in the West this has long been a "female" occupation (Boserup 1970). During the colonial period, men were the first to gain access to such "modern" occupations, by virtue of their pre-existing advantages. These advantages were reinforced by the patriarchal attitudes and policies of the British, and have been continued in the post-colonial era. Female deference to male demand has been well documented. The low-level of industrialization in Malaysia means that there has been insufficient expansion of new occupational horizons for men to have vacated these work areas, thus creating opportunities for women to enter occupations they now dominate in the West.

Those whose higher education has been of a generalist, rather than a specialist nature, have more limited occupational opportunities, particularly in the professions. Graduate unemployment in Malaysia is a recent phenomenon (Prime Minister's Department 1976). Although such unemployment is not, at present, such a problem as elsewhere in the region (e.g. the Philippines, India or Sri Lanka) the problem is likely to become more acute, as the gap between the supply of graduates and the "demands" of the workforce widen. Female graduates compete for jobs in a limited market, wherein there is a oversupply of "generalist" degree holders. Moreover, they must compete for scarce occupational resources with male graduates who, as potential "breadwinners", have societal legitimation for seeking such work roles. Malays now receive government sponsorship in education and the workforce. They are now supposedly given greater opportunity to obtain "marketable" education, although as noted, the majority of Malays are concentrated in the less prestigeous educational institutions, and are not equipped to fill occupational vacancies at the higher levels. Ethnic quotas in employment are designed to provide even the generalists with employment chances. No such policy has been introduced to advance the status of women, and given the patriarchal nature of the society, and the structural constraints in the workforce, we must conclude that women will continue to have more limited occupational opportunities than men. We might expect however, that in principle, Malay women, by virtue of their ethnic status, will be somewhat advantaged under the New Economic Policy; that Chinese women will continue to derive the benefits accruing from the Chinese having the highest local ownership of the Malaysian economy; that Indian women will be disadvantaged as women, and unsponsored as Indians. These and other related issues will be examined by references to original research findings in a later article.

1 Higher education is here defined as university-level education.

2 Data utilized in this paper was gathered during two periods of field research in West Malaysia in 1973-1974, and 1974-1975, as well as from subsequent communications with various government agencies. The present paper confines itself to a discussion of sex stratification at the macro level. Micro level data was also gathered, during in-depth interviews with 121 English educated men and women of Malay, Chinese and Indian extraction, who were engaged in professional occupations at the time of field research. The case study of men and women in the professions reconfirmed the macro-level structure of opportunities, as well as providing some finer details concerning variations in access to professional occupations, opportunities for promotion within the present career path.

3 The New Economic Policy, introduced under the Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-1975 and somewhat modified under the Third Malaysia Plan, 1976-1980, aims at restructuring ethnically-based educational and occupational opportunities. No full discussion of the extent to which the implementation of the Policy falls short of the founding principles is possible within the present context. Even a brief perusal of the field of education reveals some of the inherent contradictions: Under the Policy, Malays are supposed to have greater access to marketable skills, yet an examination of educational statistics reveals them to be concentrated in the less-prestigeous educational institutions. Malaysia does lack middle-level managerial skills and semi-professional workers, but the narrowing of Malay occupational horizons to these fields is to institutionalize inequality. (See for example "*Mid Term Review...*" (op cit, 1973:

Table 11-4, 193-194. Table 11-5, 195-196. Malaysia *"Third Malaysia Plan, 1976-1988"* (Government Press, Kuala Kumpur, 1976: Table 8-11, 153).

4 The Economic Planning Unit have released details of employment by race and occupation. Cross tabulations of employment by sex and ethnicity have been obtained for the private sector, not for the public. There is no way of calculating this information from data to hand, and the E.P.U. have no immediate plans to carry out such cross-tabulations themselves. It is most unfortunate that the most recent macro-level statistics are, perforce, one-dimensional in this regard.

5 Researchers studying the participation of women in productive activities in the West have found this to be so. See for example, Barron, R.D. and Morris, G.M. *"Sexual division and the dual labour market"* (in Barker, D.L.. and Allen, S. op cit., 1976).

6 For a full discussion or the relationship between education and occupational opportunities in the Third World, see for example Myrdal, G. *"Asian Drama"* (Vol II) (Twentieth Century Fund, Penguin, 1968). Blaug, M., Layard, P.R.G., and Noodhall, H. *"The Causes of Graduate Unemployment in India"*, (Allen Lane, 1969). Jolly, R., De Kadt, E., Singer, H., and Wilson, F. *"Third World Employment: problems and strategy"* (Penguin Education, 1973).

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