

MY SAY: Ketuanan is about guardianship

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Today the word "boss" is used pervasively. One can be called "boss" at the most unexpected of times by a parking attendant, a salesperson, or just anyone with whom you deal with. In a way, it is subtly polite and conveys a certain respect by those who utter it, without any sense of being inferior, less still to imply a subordinate or "slave" relationship, even momentarily! Somehow it is nicely done, perhaps in good fun.

Change boss to mean "tuan", and suddenly the fun is gone, especially among the political paranoiacs. All of a sudden, it conjures a derogatory meaning, not because "tuan" is "boss" but rather, because the one who utters it harbours an inferior complex that he or she is now a "hamba" or slave.

Ironically still, instead of working out their inferior emotions, they prefer to stretch the meaning of the word "tuan" beyond recognition. And worst of all, they take much for granted through their ignorance of the language, the culture and other nuances from which the word emanates. Also, they do not have the credentials to make authoritative interpretations, without creating more confusion, that is.

Hence, when we hear someone say "ketuanan" means "supremacy" — implying that "tuan" is more than just a boss, but a "supreme being" of some sort — and naively assume that this is the case, they proceed to systematically demolish the term "ketuanan". Thus, the claim that "ketuanan" is no longer relevant.

Another argument is that the term is not mentioned in the Constitution, as though the Constitution is devoid of historical and traditional context at all. Then, comes the myopic suggestion to equate the term "ketuanan" simply to "special rights" so that it can be grounded constitutionally. The logic, perhaps, is that a tuan is always endowed with some sort of special rights. If so, special rights do signify that there is a tuan, and thus ketuanan.

Despite all these, deep down, it is apparent there are people who still want to be tuan in their bid for power and position, at times unashamedly. Whether one is morally qualified seems not to matter. More glaring is the insistence to be addressed as "Yang Berhormat (YBJ Tuan so-and-so", while "Encik", which is the cultural norm, somehow does not suffice. Unless, of course, one is a "Haji" (or Hajjah), which is limited only to Muslims. In this case, it is not. So why the tuan? Irrelevant, you say. Apparently not, it seems.

In a nutshell, such is the level of political hypocrisy, and the gutter politics we see today fuelled by ignorance and emotions. In reality, "tuan" is neither master nor anything supreme. Nothing near what non-Muslims usually refer to as "Tuan Allah"— the Supreme Being! Similarly, "ketuanan" is not at all about supremacy. Not even close to the Ku Klux Klan, the self-proclaimed white supremacy group. All the fuss, thus far has been pure nonsensical, political rubbish, nothing more. Its foremost interest is to impact one small political world, where it matters, and not the world of truth. The truth, to these people, is mere political correctness. For them, it is all right to be truthfully wrong!

To those who care about the depth of the Malay culture, ketuanan is none other than guardianship. More of "tuan empunya" or "ownership" as in Persekutuan Tanah Melayu where the Malays and its Sultanates are the rightful "guardian-owners"; similarly, for the people of Sabah and Sarawak and their respective states in Malaysia, and not about special rights as some people want us to believe.

Incidentally, the bumiputeras are not proud of the so-called "special rights" which in reality are mere tokens of guilt for those who have forever disadvantaged the traditional communities. Rather, it is about alienated rights, just as the Chinese have over China, the Indians over India and the Filipinos over the Philippines. Each is indeed the guardian-owner of their country, and certainly, they are "tuan" in that sense.

As guardian-owners, they would stick through thick and thin with the country the way naval captains ("tuans!") are prepared to go down with their ships rather than abandon them like other passengers often do, in times of crisis, especially. Hence, "ketuanan" is conceptually very much alive, as it should be.

This way, the concept can be embraced by all Malaysians who wish to embrace the psyche of a tuan, which is the essence of a bangsa Malaysia. Much like Barack Obama who is now the accepted tuan of Americans (and less that of the Klu Klux Klan). In the same way, only the supremacists (racists and bigots included) among us will fail to understand, less still accept, what ketuanan is really about within the evolving historical context of Malaysia. This is all because of their shallow political views.

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