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The Rise of Constitutional Patriotism in Malaysian Civil Society

Political events in Malaysia such as body-snatchings of putative Muslims by Islamic department officials, the derailed attempt to establish an Interfaith Commission (in 2006) and the Lina Joy case, have led anthropologist Clive Kessler to describe Malaysia as going down the long road to desecularisation. But contrary to disappearing in a supposedly post-secularist moment, Habermas' notion of "constitutional patriotism," is alive and well in Malaysia, partly as a growing response to corruption and the concatenation of Islamization and the discourse of Malay ethnic supremacy (*ketuanan Melayu*). Conscientious individuals and civil society invoke the discourse of citizenship and constitutional rights to counter the dominant politics of race perpetuated by the National Alliance (*Barisan Nasional*). I argue that constitutional patriotism is a strategy to assert a multiethnic democratic nationalism through alternative websites, peaceful street demonstrations, citizen blogging, digital filmmaking. Simultaneously, this paper also suggests that such a strategy is not sufficiently cosmopolitan.