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**Culture, Power and Resistance:
Post-Colonialism, Autobiography and
Malaysian Independence**

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A thesis submitted to Durham University
as a requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Applied Social Sciences
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Declaration

None of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in the University of Durham or any other university. None of the material contained in this thesis is based on joint research. The content of this thesis consists of the author's original individual contribution with appropriate recognition of any references being indicated throughout.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between the representation of colonial history and the elite claim of authority in Malaysia. Specifically, it investigates the claim that Malayan independence was achieved through a peaceful struggle. In order to address this claim, it was important to examine:

1. The representation of the colonial period in national history
2. UMNO¹ dominance in politics, economy and culture, and its claim of almost total authority for the achievement of Malaysian independence.
3. The extent to which the UMNO claim has hindered the development of democratic forces.

The excavation of supplementary and alternative narratives of Malaysian history has been central for this research. In particular, the mainstream representation of history is challenged through autobiographical revelation.

The thesis focuses on the formation of the dominant representation during the colonial era, showing how the process suppressed other perspectives. ‘Radical’ nationalism during anti-colonial struggle in the period after the Second World War, from 1945 to 1957, is explored. The perspectives and experiences of radical nationalists are used as the basis for a critique of the dominant discourse of the post-independence political elites. In particular, the emergence of autobiographical fragments has enabled exploration of mundane but abiding resistance. While some notable differences are found in the character of resistance, there remains a persistent theme of democratic aspiration in the counter-narratives of Malaysian politics and society, alongside the persisting elite structures of politics and culture extending from the colonial through to the post-colonial eras. The analysis of the autobiographical reflections of radical nationalists demonstrates levels of cultural resistance which have not been recognised until now.

¹ The United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) was founded in March 1946 by Onn Jaafar, a son of Johor’s Chief Minister and an adopted son of the Raja of Johor. He was Johor’s Chief Minister from 1946-1949. The party’s leadership was drawn from the aristocratic and traditional elite and this still remains true today. The party slogan was *Hidup Melayu* (Long live Malays) which was in contrast to its main competitor at the time, the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) that advocated *Merdeka* (Freedom).

ABBREVIATIONS

ABIM	Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (<i>Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia</i>)
AMCJA	All-Malaya Council for Joint Action
API	Youth Movement for Justice (<i>Angkatan Pemuda Insaf</i>)
AWAS	Women Progressive Corps (<i>Angkatan Wanita Sedar</i>)
CO	Colonial Office
DAP	Democratic Action Party
HICOM	Heavy Industries Corporation
ISA	Internal Security Act
KEADILAN	People's Justice Party
KMM	Young Malay Nationalist Party (<i>Kesatuan Melayu Muda</i>)
MARA	People's Trust Council (<i>Majlis Amanah Rakyat</i>)
MAS	Malayan Administrative Service
MATA	Supreme Religious Council of Malaya (<i>Majlis Agama Tertinggi Malaya</i>)
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MCP	Communist Party of Malaya
MCS	Malayan Civil Service
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party
MPAJA	Malayan People's Anti Japanese Army (communist guerrilla group)
MU	Malayan Union proposal
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (formed in 1949)
NEP	New Economic Policy

NOC	National Operation Council
PAS	Islamic Party of Malaya/Malaysia (<i>Parti Islam Se-Malaya</i>)
PERNAS	National Trust Agency (<i>Perbadanan Nasional</i>)
PETRONAS	National Petroleum Corporation (<i>Petroleum Nasional Berhad</i>)
PKM	Communist Party of Malaya (<i>Parti Komunis Malaya</i>)
PUTERA	Central Force of the Malay People (<i>Pusat Tenaga Rakyat</i>)
RIDA	Regional Industrial Development Assistance
SEDC	State Economic Development Corporation
Suhakam	Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (<i>Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia</i>)
TELECOM	National Telecommunication (<i>Telekom Malaysia Berhad</i>)
TNB	National Energy Corporation (<i>Tenaga Nasional Berhad</i>)
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation

GLOSSARY

<i>Adat</i>	custom
<i>Bumiputera</i>	‘son of soil’. A reference to Malay and native communities in Sarawak and Sabah
<i>Dakwah</i>	missionary activity
<i>Hidup Melayu</i>	Long Live Malay
<i>Imam</i>	expert/authority in religion
<i>Kerajaan</i>	a polity based on the sovereignty of a raja
<i>Kesateria</i>	warrior/fighter
<i>Kaum Ibu</i>	Women’s Section (of UMNO)
<i>Madrassah</i>	religious school
Malaya	A pre-1963 name for Malaysia; before Sarawak, Sabah and Singapore joined in the Federation.
<i>Merdeka</i>	freedom or independent
<i>Mufti</i>	a scholar in jurisprudence
<i>Penghulu</i>	district chief
<i>Rakyat</i>	common people from ordinary class
<i>Tanah Melayu</i>	Land of the Malays (i.e. Malaya/Malaysia)
<i>Ulama</i>	religious expert

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INTRODUCTION

The narrative of colonial history in Malaysia usually begins with the introduction of British colonial rule in Malay states in 1874.¹ In Winstedt's² *History of Malaya* (1948), the author described the initial British intervention as being "concerned with the protection of Malaya's brawling and lawlessness state".³ As a result of the British expansion, the country saw a significant improvement including the building of communication routes across different states, the protection of immigrant rights, and the replacement of the previous administration of "interested amateurs" with the "rule of disinterested specialists". The culmination of the British contribution to the nation was the formation of the spirit of nationalism. Winstedt argued that Malay nationalism would not have happened without the 70 years of British protection (Winstedt 1948, 149-150).

The emphasis on benign rule in the representation of colonial history continues in the post-independence Malaysia, only this time the role of UMNO nationalists as the principal actors alongside the colonial British administration was added to the representation. This post-independence representation is illustrated by a series of posters on display in the National Archive of Malaysia.

¹ Prior to British intervention, Malaya did not exist as a single nation-state entity. It consisted of separate *kerajaan* (states) that were not strictly defined by territorial borders. Instead it was defined through the rule of the raja who became the head of state and had immediate control of its subjects and resources. British rule was therefore formalised through treaties with different *kerajaan* at different stages. Prior to its formal intervention in the peninsula, Britain secured a monopoly of the region through the Anglo Dutch Treaty (1824), followed shortly by the formation of colonies in Singapore, Malacca and Penang that were administered as Straits Settlements (1826). The Pangkor Treaty (1874) was the first treaty that guaranteed British presence and protection in the state of Perak. Colonial expansion was followed by treaties with different states that culminated with the Federated Malay States administrative unit (1895) and the Unfederated Malay States (1909).

² Richard Winstedt (1878-1966) served in various administration positions in the Malayan Civil Service (MCS), namely as Advisor to Johor state and a member of the Federal Council (1927). His significant contribution was in the field of scholarship. He was responsible for documenting the classical Malay text, *Salasilah Melayu* (renamed as Malay Annals) and compiling a dictionary of Malay-English vocabulary. His achievement however was undermined by his attitude towards Malay education. He suggested that Malay schools' curricula should be designed to ensure that "Malay peasants did not get ideas above his station". This meant teaching schoolchildren basket-weaving and gardening in order to educate them in the "dignity of manual labor" (Roff 1967, 140).

³ The lawlessness refers to the feuds between competing factions led by the reigning ruler Raja Abdullah on the one hand, and on the other, by his rival Raja Ismail. Their rivalry was initially sparked by the issue of tin mining areas and was later complicated through their manipulation of rival Chinese factions. To end the bitter dispute that had stretched into four rounds of war, Raja Abdullah asked the British to intervene by supplying arms and men. In return, a British Resident would be appointed to administer the state on behalf of the Ruler.

In the UMNO's version, colonial history was represented by the theme UMNO *Lambang Martabat Bangsa* (UMNO: the symbol of nation's honour). The posters described the political process leading up to the formation of UMNO in 1946.⁴ The main message of the presentation is the sacrifice made by UMNO nationalists in fighting for Malay rights and freedom. This suggests that the relatively comfortable situation today would not have happened were it not for the sacrifices of these nationalists.⁵

The new description emphasises the primary role of UMNO as the founder of Malay nationalism. Nevertheless, the image of beneficent colonial rule was retained. UMNO formed a partnership with the British who, in return, had prepared the ground for self-rule and subsequent independence. This cooperation enabled Malaya to achieve a smooth transition from colonial to post-independence indigenous rule led by UMNO nationalists.

These depictions of colonial history have two implications in understanding politics and society in contemporary Malaysia. Firstly, they demonstrate a continuity of the colonialist perspective of history. They can be construed as "colonialist" because they represented the British as the "principal actors in the period, the initiators of action" (Milner 1987, 774). This could raise the question of whether the pattern of continuity evident in historical discourse could be traced in other areas.

Secondly, such representation of history has a political implication. UMNO authority was based on its claim that it had fought for Malay rights and freedom, and is further cemented through its uninterrupted success in 11 consecutive general elections. The prosperity of the country is attributed to the success of UMNO, and for this reason the nation should feel grateful. In this regard, historical representation is invested with political interest that favours UMNO as the principal actor in the process.

⁴ This includes important events like the return of the British in the post-war period, the struggle against the Malayan Union proposal, and the formation of UMNO. See Appendix p. 246.

⁵ This spirit of gratitude is conveyed through the celebration of UMNO Day on May 11 every year. The purpose is, according to the Deputy Prime Minister, "to enable the people, especially the younger generation to appreciate the contribution and sacrifice of the party in uplifting the status of our religion, nation and country" (*Utusan Malaysia*, 13 May 2005).

There is plenty of historical evidence that supports UMNO's power-claim, namely that it has acted for the best interest of the Malays.⁶ The compelling nature of this evidence is not in question. Nevertheless, it is the use of history to conceal narrow interests, while at the same time claiming its legitimacy, as the sole protector of Malays, which is the subject of interest of this research. I argue that history is used to consolidate power, and in the process results in the suppression of others' views. The predominance of UMNO's interest in historical representation has rendered other perspectives as aberrations.⁷ Historical discourse in Malaysia is inclined towards political views that are friendly to UMNO's interest.

My research suggests that the preponderance of UMNO's perspectives has increasingly come under pressure. This comes as a result of emerging oppositional politics that are oriented towards democratic agenda. Integral to the process is the exercise of revisiting the past in order to uncover a different side of history. Against this background, this research furthers discussion of state uses of history to include history from different perspectives. This is carried out through reading memoirs written by radical nationalists, whose stories were marginalised from the mainstream. In particular, I suggest these memoirs were a form of historical representation from the margin of politics and society. To revive their stories means to enlarge the representation of the colonial past and, simultaneously, contribute to the democratisation of history-representation.

This research is relevant for understanding contemporary politics and culture in Malaysia. The growth of non-government organisations,⁸ the assertion of religious

⁶ Among major historical events was a successful UMNO-led protest against the Malayan Union proposal (1946) because the proposal sought to subject Malaya into a crown colony, and hence reducing the Malay rajas to mere subjects. In the post-independence era, the communal riots in May 1969 resulted in the state endorsing a set of preferential policies that reinforced Malay rights in politics, economy, administration and education. Moreover, new laws were set up (Sedition Act 1971 and Internal Security Act 1970) to prevent any discussion that may lead to the rights of the Malays being questioned.

⁷ In the editorial page of *Utusan Malaysia*, pro-UMNO newspaper, the editor has criticised the exercise of reading history from different interpretations. In reference to the trend of re-evaluating the perspective of left-wing nationalists, the writer stated, "social scientists would have to wait years and years before they could uncover the real truths of any events". In terms of the left-wing nationalists, their contribution to the country's independence was, according to the author, undermined "through their association with the communists from Indonesia" (*Utusan Malaysia*, 22 August 2008).

⁸ Examples of NGOs that promoted the values of liberal democracy and human rights include ALIRAN, Sisters-in-Islam, and the Bar Council.

and cultural values and the result of the 12th General Election on March 2008⁹ are among the significant indicators of the emerging trends towards democratic reform in politics and culture. This research contributes to the process by drawing attention to the potential consequences of democratic reform within the field of history. This refers to the inclusion of the history-actors who were previously made unknown or suppressed by the dominant version. Discussion of their life-narratives offers a perspective of history that was not only different from that of the elite, but more importantly, reveals the continuing struggle against the conservative force in politics and culture.

With this in mind, I examine subaltern memoirs as the field where the state and the radicals' interpretations of the independence struggle were formed and contested. In this regard, Chapter 1 provides the political, economic and social context for this research, attempting to explain the determining influence of colonial structure, as well as its reconfiguration in the post-independence era. It is observed that the emergence of state authoritarianism is largely a response to the inheritance of pro-western administration, economic imbalance and racial polarisation which was formed and sustained during the colonial era. However, the impact of economic modernisation has increased public criticality towards state predominance. In relation to this, the aspect of religious resurgence will be examined. The research suggests that religious attitude and consciousness in some ways repeated the trend that had occurred in the colonial past. Religion had been used to challenge the authority of the conservative front of the social and religious elite. Sensing the destabilising role of religion has prompted the state to resort to authoritarian measures to deal with the perceived threat of religion. Having outlined the contemporary context of state power, this chapter will later examine the historical formation of state authority. It argues that the authority was formed and sustained through a discourse of national history. The aspect of 'peaceful' independence will be used to illustrate this argument. The notion of history as the field of struggle of authority and opposition will be further examined in the following chapter.

⁹ The 12th General Election is, according to an opposition politician, the beginning of a "political tsunami" in Malaysia. For the first time, the coalition of UMNO, MCA and MIC (under the banner of the National Coalition) was being severely threatened by the opposition coalition known as the People's Coalition (led by the formerly disgraced Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim). The UMNO coalition won 140 out of 222 parliamentary seats and for the first time their 2/3 majority was reduced. For the first time as well, the opposition ruled in four states in the peninsula.

Chapter 2 will develop a framework in which state dominance in history-interpretation, as well as the challenge of counter-narrative, will be theorised and analysed. There are three steps involved in the formulation of the theoretical framework applied in the research. First, the main theoretical source for this research is Edward Said's *Orientalism*. I argue that the notion of the power-knowledge nexus developed in the book can be usefully extended to the examination of national history in Malaysia. Next, the attitude towards the field of post-colonialism from Malaysian academia will be discussed. The exercise of investigating colonial discourse and history has been pursued in Malaysian academy since 1960s. However, the indigenous criticism of colonial ideology has not been taken very seriously by the west. In this sense, the contemporary perception is that the works of *Orientalism* and post-colonialism are tantamount to a western attempt at reinserting a neo-hegemonic agenda. Such criticism however, ignores the contribution of post-colonialism in setting the agenda for political intervention through scholarship. Finally, three concepts essential for the analysis, namely culture, history and subaltern, will be developed. The framework argues that the activity of anti-colonial resistance in the field of culture adopts the language of liberalism and democracy as counter-ideology to the state's rhetoric of exclusive nationalism.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology employed in this research. It explores the methods used to gather information regarding the representation of colonial history such as archival research, interviews and memoirs. It will also discuss issues associated with these materials. Chapters 4 and 5 will examine the subaltern memoirs in detail. The memoirs provided an alternative perspective to the way colonialism was conceived and represented. Chapter 4 will provide a description of each of the narratives. It will pay attention to the politics that underlined the production of the memoirs and also the significant episodes in the autobiographers' narration.

In Chapter 5, a theoretical examination of the narratives is presented. It returns to the cultural resistance framework developed in Chapter 2 and 3 and develops a critique of colonial discourse from perspectives of culture, identity and gender. The argument is made that the work of autobiography is a social enterprise. It highlights the politically and socially constructed nature of the narrative in which the subjects' historically located experiences, identities and perceptions are presented. In addition, it is

observed that the memoirs have become the occasion for individual exploration of autonomy against the background of feudal and colonial cultures. In all, this research presents a study that offers a perspective of resistance which integrates the element of power hegemony into the experience of resisting subjects which is only now coming to be appreciated.

CHAPTER 1

Culture, Power and Politics in Colonial and Post-Colonial Malaysia

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the historical and contemporary context for the analysis of cultural resistance in Malaysia. I start by examining the structures of politics, economy, society and religion with particular focus on the formation of state authoritarianism. State authority is referred here as the concentration of state power in diverse areas of institutions such as bureaucracy, legislation, education, economy and media. These structures have been shaped, to a considerable degree, by the interaction between historical forces and immediate socio-political exigencies. By historicising the current state power-practice, the assumption of ‘culture’ as the main reason for the weakening of democratic values and institutions in non-western societies is questionable (c.f. Huntington 1993). Instead, the complex interplay of history and socio-economy accounts for much of the rise and consolidation of authoritarian practice in those countries, with Malaysia as an example. The persistence of state authority can also be evaluated in the realm of culture which will become the focus of the final section. I suggest that the exercise of state power can be seen in the representation of national history that is dominated by the theme of ‘peaceful’ independence. However, the state-sponsored interpretation of history has come under pressure as a result of the expansion in media such as internet and autobiography. This discussion sets the scene for later chapters, where alternative perspectives to ‘peaceful’ independence from marginalised political subjects will be presented. This thesis suggests that the process of reinterpretation of the nation’s past relates to the broader pattern of democratisation in politics and culture.

1.2 Decolonisation and the End of Empire

In what follows I attempt to outline the broader picture, of international and regional context, which followed from the conclusion of the World War II. This endeavour, I believe, is essential in order to appreciate the implications of global events in the formation and development of post-colonial Malaysian politics, economy and society.

The aftermath of the war had witnessed the destructions of lives and physical infrastructures in Europe as well as in Japan. Weakened by the war the imperial powers such as Britain, France, the Netherlands and Japan were further pressurised by the legitimate demand for self-determination among various colonies in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The latter process, encapsulated under the term 'decolonisation', sparked protracted and, in most instances, violent struggles among colonial subjects who were inspired from the defeat suffered by the imperialists formerly thought as invincible. In Indonesia, despite the Japanese-assisted proclamation of independence in 17 August 1945, the Dutch and the British security forces' intention to re-occupy Indonesia had resulted to the ferocious battle in Surabaya. Although the pro-independence groups were severely weakened by the war, their cause had received supports and became inspiration for anti-colonial uprisings in colonies like Malaya. Britain finally supported the independence claim by withdrawing its troops in October 1946, while the Dutch recognised the independence in 1949.

The rising optimism and self-belief was further enhanced by the institutionalisation of anti-colonial ideology, first in the Bandung Conference (1955), and later in the United Nation's General Assembly Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960). The Bandung communiqué supported the "universal declaration of human rights and the principles of self-determination", while making explicit that "colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should be brought to an end" (Tarling 1992, 103). Five years later, on 14 December 1960, the UN declaration was issued that "the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights" (UN General Assembly 1960). In all, decolonisation was considered an important phase of history as it ushered in a new era whereby "state sovereignty (potentially) changes the economic and the political 'rule of the game'" since "a world system composed of sovereign states maybe quite unlike one made up of empires" (Strang 1990, 846).

The illusion of sovereignty and equality among nation-states was of course, quickly realised as the Cold War began to dictate the "rule of the game". Far from being a 'sudden' ideological rivalry between two superpowers, the US and the USSR, the seeds of the ideological competition stretched back from the earlier success of the Marxist revolution in Russia in 1917 and the peaked of industrialism and

technological innovation in America at the turn of the century. It was only during the dissolution of empires and the surge of new nation-states that the rivalry occupied a concrete form. This can be explained by looking into the geopolitical and geo-economic framework in which the US and the USSR infiltrated and dictated the international system (Berger 2003, 425). A new system of alliance such as NATO in Europe and Five-Power Defence arrangement (consists of Malaya, Australia, New Zealand, Britain and Singapore) in Southeast Asia ensured a pro-Western, or more accurately, a pro-American interest, was safeguarded.

The issue of economic development was not confined to the post-war Europe. The idea of development was widely perceived in nationalist rhetoric as a necessary requirement of an independent nation-state (Berger 2003, 425). Writing in 1954, Rupert Emerson noted the contradiction of Asian nationalism. The ideology of nationalism, specifically the “achievement of national unity and independence”, was of Western origin and consciously adopted by the colonial subjects, since “the strength of the West was a thing to be copied and studied” (Emerson 1954, 138). The strength of the West was interpreted to include the elements which synonymous to Western modernity such as rationalism, scientific outlook and technological advancement.

But what is the analysis of Western-derived nationalism tells us about the aspiration for equality and autonomy among the decolonised nations? As noted earlier, economic development was seen as necessary prerequisite for nation building. Alongside overseas funds supplied by the former imperial nations, international economic institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund provided grants and economic aid as means to realise the goal of development. Implicit within these economic assistance programmes was a transplanting of western ideology of progress as universal solution for the new nationhood (Berger 2003, 423). If the pattern of development is situated in the context of the Cold War, it was not hard to see the ease with which American hegemony was embedded and internalised into the very language of development so deeply aspired by the nation-states. American investment experts and economic planning occupied important positions in Indonesia and Singapore, while administrative elites were sent for training in America to prepare the task of modernising their home country. This trend, according to

Caldwell (1973), “lays the foundation for the transformation of Malaya (and the region) from a British post-colony to an American neo-colony” (1973, 11). It was no coincidence that as the US stepped up its military measure in Southeast Asia from 1962 onwards, American oil and investment firms assumed stronger position.

Integral to the incorporation of American economic hegemony in Asia was the perceived need for military defence of the region from the “red menace”. Immediately after the World War II, it was generally held that the issue of defence and economic rehabilitation of the colonies were left to the imperial powers. However, it soon became clear that the political will and resources were no longer sufficient to contain the threat of revolutionary uprising and the tide of communism. The fall of China to the hands of the Red Army in 1949 and the rising influence of communism during the presidency of Sukarno in Indonesia (1945-1965) sent urgent signals that Southeast Asia required strong western interference to halt the tide of communism. Malcolm McDonald, British Commissioner-General to Southeast Asia, argued that the Southeast Asian region was too important to be left to its own device. He invoked what is later coined as the ‘domino-theory’: the inability of Western democracies to counteract to the rising communist influence in Burma, Indonesia, and Malaya could spell a “prelude to the loss of a large part of the rest of Southeast Asia” (Ovendale 1982, 450). Hence, from 1961 onwards, as the British military presence was reduced, American military aid was gradually increased to reflect their commitment to contain communist influence. America’s military involvement in Vietnam which started in 1960 responded to this containment strategy.

But the presupposed rivalry between the two superpowers was, according to Wallerstein, true only superficially. Instead, the US and the USSR “engaged in a highly structured and carefully contained, formal conflict”. The Cold War was organised under the condition that the sphere of influence between the USSR, which covered Eastern Europe, and the zone protected under American hegemony, was to be respected. Such arrangement worked “marvellously well” in maintaining order and stability in the post- imperial order (Wallerstein 1991, 1103). Wallerstein further argued that despite its pro-liberal rhetoric, America had never actually lent an active support for any Eastern European states a way out of Soviet hegemony. In this sense, what emerged was a mutually convenient power arrangement to fulfil respective

interests for stability and order crucial for the recovery of Europe and economic expansion of America.

The previous discussion provides an international perspective in which the issue of security, nation-building and economic development became the focus in the aftermath of the war. The influence of anti-colonial struggles in Indonesia and India were immediately felt in Malaya, although the revolutionaries did not quite achieve the level of success adequate for immediate independence. It will become clear throughout the chapter that other factors, especially the longstanding alliance between the British and the conservative elites, had ensured colonialism was to stay for another 12 years before Malaya finally achieved its freedom in 1957.

1.3 Economy

In this section the emphasis is on two aspects. Firstly, the continuation of economic arrangements from the colonial structure that emphasised foreign capital had widened inter-communal socio-economic disparity. This had encouraged the feeling of distrust between communities and against the state. Secondly, the perception that the state did not do enough for its people (viz. Malays) has led the state to adopt a proactive and interventionary role in the economy. The practice of state intervention is not new as it was already a practice of the colonial state. It is argued that the difference this time was the scope and measure the state had undertaken to lift the Malays out of their traditional sector and into the modern economy. Although the result shows real improvement in the Malays' material situation, the state intervention in the economy has its political dimension. The state political power is now intertwined with its economic function, to the extent that its political legitimacy is implicated with economic performance. Thus, the state capitalist function is immediately political.

The discussion on the economy is organised on two contexts namely, the colonial and post-communal riot of 1969. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the colonial arrangement of the economy has destabilised the country's economy and society. Nevertheless, the colonial economy, which emphasised primary production such as rubber and tin, was carried over in the post-independence period. As a result, Malaya's economy continued to be controlled by foreign capitalists. More

importantly, the majority of Malays continued to be excluded from the economy as was the case during the colonial period. Secondly, by situating the economy in a specific historical formation, I try to trace the state's current dominance in the economy. The study of Malaysian economy, therefore, must take into account the investment of political interest.

1.3.1 Colonial Economy

The Malayan colonial economy was characterised by exploitation of raw materials, namely tin and rubber. These remained by far the most profitable colonial industries. Malaya contributed almost £20 million to the imperial revenue in 1928 (Bowie 1991, 42). The success of capitalist enterprise in Malaya was measured by the ability of the colonial administration to optimise economic production and revenue collection.

The economy of scale was achieved through the practice of monopoly and the policy of massive importation of labour. The colonial state held the monopoly of ownership in terms of access to land and natural resources (Jomo & Gomez 2000, 279). As colonial economy was primarily aimed at primitive accumulation, which favoured the commercial interest of British capitalists, the market was neither competitive nor efficient (Jomo & Gomez 2000; Nonini 1992). As such, economic policy was skewed towards protection of foreign interest. This could be seen in the taxation policy. The mining and plantation companies were exempted from taxation which was instead levied on consumption goods. This meant the masses, in particular the immigrant labourers, were forced to bear the tax. Furthermore, the profits accrued from the mining and rubber industries were repatriated to London. Half of the assets that amounted to \$125 million in 1928 were transferred to London (Bowie 1991, 43). This resulted in the deprivation of development in the colony in favour of the metropolitan.

Another character of colonial capitalism was the massive immigration of labour. In order to facilitate the export-oriented industry based on primary production, a cheap and steady supply of labour was required (Emerson 1937, 26). The policy of mass immigration from China and India was encouraged in order to get labourers working in the mines and estates, clearing jungle, building roads and developing urban spaces. At the initial stage, these labourers were considered as guest-workers and their

employment depended on the economic fortune. During the period of Depression from 1929-1931, an estimated 240,000 Indian labourers were sent home, while 450,000 Chinese labourers were unemployed but yet remained in the colony (Bowie 1991, 45).

Despite the huge numbers of immigrant workers, the colonial authority insisted that their presence was temporary. Such assumption can be explained by various factors. By downplaying the possibility of settlement, the colonial authority had avoided the attached political responsibilities such as social security and education (Stenson 1980, 5). More importantly, the administrators could maintain the working relationship with the rajas, whose trust they endeavoured to keep. In the pre-war period the priority was always to retain the Malay character of the colonial state interpreted as follows:

So long as Malaya remains politically unsophisticated and is firmly controlled by British administrators... it is possible to call it a Malay country and assume that Chinese and Indians are aliens without implying any intention to take drastic action against them. (Silcock 1949, 456)

In the post-war period, this strategic labour policy proved to be untenable as the substantial and affluent non-Malay communities began to see Malaya as their permanent home (Stenson 1980, 88; Finkelstein 1952, 10).

Overall, the general orientation of colonial economic policy encouraged undue reliance on the capitalist sector while ignoring the fundamental base of the economy.¹⁰ The agricultural sector of the economy, which 80% of the Malay peasantry were dependent on, was left to its own devices. The result was that the agricultural sector could not supply enough food for the Malayan population at the time due to the outmoded production technology compared to the ever-increasing population growth. The solution to this problem was the importation of foodstuffs

¹⁰ Although rural reforms had been initiated by the colonial administration at the insistence of UMNO, these reforms were defined within a “framework of capitalist growth” (Nonini 1992, 119). This means supplying what was seen to be important for rural development such as infrastructure like roads, schools, and irrigations. What appeared from this supposedly developmental goal was the putting in place of a patronage system in which rents were distributed to the village leaders in return for political votes. See S.Husin (1975), Shamsul (1986) and Rogers (1969) for the role of political patronage in the economy of rural Malay villages.

from neighbouring states like Thailand and Burma. This was considered a lot cheaper than developing the sector domestically. Forty to eighty percent of Malayan rice consumption from 1918 and 1957 was imported from these countries (Nonini 1992, 72).

1.3.2 New Economic Policy (1970-1990)

Given the relatively prosperous nature of the colonial economy (although confined to the export-sector), there was no incentive to develop the internal economy or to radically alter the structural arrangement already in place.¹¹ In fact, in the first ten years since Malayan independence, the colonial economy was further encouraged and supported.¹² The continuation of colonial policy was made possible in two ways.

First, the continuation of British-trained administrators who ruled the country after colonial departure in 1957 would mean they were merely continuing the policy already in place. This was a logical outcome for the leadership that was put in place by the help of the previous colonial regime since it was within their interests to continue the previous policy to ensure continuation of British support in the post-colonial era. Thus, the post-independence government continued the pro-capitalist policy that was “to create a favourable investment climate and to leave the project to be undertaken entirely by private enterprise” (Bowie 1991, 69). In the late 1960s, 63% of investment stakes in the Malaysian economy was owned by European capitalists, primarily British companies (Esman 1987, 402).

The second factor that facilitated a smooth continuation of colonial economic policy was the “politics of compromise” reached between communal elites in the Alliance front (Chua 1995, 244; Cheah 2002, 51). This meant the structural inequalities of the colonial economy were sustained well into the first ten years of the post-independence

¹¹ Higgins (1982) and Dodd (1969) argued that the practice of colonial economy in post-independence Malaysia had been responsible for the economic progress because it offered stability and continuity.

¹² Since the early phase of independence, the unexamined adoption of the colonial approach towards the economy has been criticised, in particular the continuing neglect on rural sector. The proposed fiscal policy for 1956-1960, that cost US\$452 million in foreign aid, was allocated mainly to the rubber plantation industry. Only 5% of the fund went for medical schemes which included rural health (c.f. Parmer 1958).

era. The maintenance of the status quo, namely the monopoly of foreign and Chinese interest in the commercial sector has resulted in several tensions.

Firstly, economic development in post-independence was essentially colonial in the way that it reflected colonial interest and structure. Up until 1970, 62% of the capital stock was owned by European, mostly British companies, while some 70% of the profits generated within the domestic economy were owned by foreign interests (Chua 1995, 245; Bowie 1991, 75). Moreover, economic policy favoured foreign capital investment. The Industrial Incentives Act (1968) offered tax relief and tariff protectionism for companies operating in the primary-related sector. As the state did not foster the growth of its domestic industry, such privilege was enjoyed by the already well-entrenched and well-equipped foreign companies (Dodd 1969, 446).

Secondly, the maintenance of the status quo of the colonial economy resulted in the further impoverishment of Malays who were still largely rural based.¹³ Although the state allocated 52% of its development expenditure on infrastructural development and 23% for rural and agricultural sectors, the impacts on the rural peasants were minimal (Bowie 1991, 69). This was because the state defined rural development through provisions of infrastructural facilities like drainage, irrigation and land development. The problems of small land plots and price volatility were not addressed (Nonini 1992, 121). The state pro-capitalist approach to the peasantry had failed to uplift rural Malays' socio-economic condition, as the poverty rate showed that 75% of the poor were Malays (Chua 1995, 246). On the other hand, what was seen as physical improvement in rural areas, such as building schools and clinics, and putting in electricity, were used as a political illustration by the state (viz. UMNO) of their attention to rural Malays' plight (Jomo & Gomez 2000, 284).

The feelings of Malay economic insecurity and the perceived threat of non-Malay submergence accounted for the communal clash in 13 May 1969. The issues of non-Malay economic dominance and the subsidisation of Malays were played up during the election campaign in 1969. Given the fragile nature of the multi-communal

¹³ In 1967/68 data, 33.7% of the workforce in agriculture was Malay, while 10% was Chinese and 1.7% Indians. In commerce, 19% of the workforce was Chinese, 8% Indians and 5.5% Malays. By 1980, 66% of workforce in primary sector was still Malays. In secondary and tertiary sectors, the ethnic Chinese occupied 51% and 41% of the workforce respectively (Zainuddin & Zulkifli 1982).

society in Malaysia, it was not difficult to understand how a political debate on entitlement spiralled out into populist demonstration and subsequently, violent clashes (Drummond & Hawkins 1969, 324-325). Both sides of the communities felt their entitlement did not square with the reality that they lived in.

As a result, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was formulated to address multi-communal integration. Simultaneously, the new policy shows the integration of economic and political interests and issues that has its origin in the colonial era. The NEP was defined exclusively as a Malay socio-economic predicament. From the May 13th event, the government interpreted that the stability of a multi-racial nation can only be sustained when the plight of the Malay majority is addressed. The ethnic analysis implies that the Malay economic status must be commensurate with their political birthright (Jomo 1991, 471). To address the Malay's economic plight, the state launched a 30-year economic plan that promoted economic growth while at the same time reducing the wealth disparity created by the previous policy (Zainuddin & Zulkifli 1982, 142). The NEP stated objectives are firstly, to eradicate poverty irrespective of race and secondly, to restructure society in order to eliminate identification of race with economic function (Klitgaard & Katz 1983, 337). The strategies envisaged to achieve the objectives were:

1. To increase employment and advancement opportunities for *bumiputera* in the corporate sector through a quota policy. This was achieved partly through the Industrial Coordination Act (1975), which stated that every manufacturing company, with capital exceeding RM250, 000 must allocate 30% of its employment or shares to *bumiputera*. Failure to do so would result in their licence being revoked. Moreover, a Foreign Investment Committee was established to ensure that foreign companies met the NEP requirement of 30% (Jomo & Gomez 2000, 289).
2. To increase the number of *bumiputera* entering into tertiary education by allocating a 60% quota in university and scholarship allocation. This was to solve the problem of manpower mismatch and unequal access to higher education and employment (Mehmet & Yip 1985, 199). Public scholarship was utilised as an incentive for students specialising in economically

lucrative disciplines like accountancy, medicine, law, commerce and engineering.

3. The formation of state-corporations and a state investment arm to raise the target of *bumiputera* share of corporate stocks from 1.5% in 1969 to 30% in 1990. The state corporations like PETRONAS (oil), PERNAS (real estate investment), HICOM (heavy industry) and Bank Bumiputera have been set up through public funds, to obtain assets as a trust on behalf of the Malays. Their financial resources were used to acquire stakes in foreign enterprise (which controlled certain domestic sectors) such as London-based Sime Darby and London Tin (Khoo 1992, 66). Moreover, the State Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) was set up in every state in order to facilitate *bumiputera* entry into small and medium scale business by awarding contracts, licenses and franchises on preferential terms (Esman 1987, 405).

At the expiry of the NEP 30-year term, the policy that initially aimed at restructuring society and eliminating poverty was concluded with mixed results. On the one hand, the *bumiputera* equity ownership rose from 2.4% in 1970 to 19% in 1990, but remained well below the 30% target. The poverty level was reduced from 52% in 1970 to 17% in 1990, while rural poverty went down from 59% to 21%.

Despite the success, the NEP mixed bag of political and economic agenda has been criticised for hampering private investment. The proliferation of large state enterprises in the economy has reduced the competition that was vital for stimulating private capital. From the period of 1979-1984, private investment fell from 19% to 14% in 1987 (Jomo & Gomez 2000, 294). Moreover, the state corporations were financed through foreign loans, which increased the budget deficit to RM 1.7 billion in loan repayment (Chua 1995, 248). It was clear that the large expenditure associated with public enterprise had not been counter-balanced by sustained private investment.

Due to the favourable export earnings bolstered by the high price of petroleum, the state involvement in the economy was continued well into the early 1980s. Thus, the state possessed considerable finances to fund the ambitious NEP targets. From 1976-

1980, development expenditure increased to RM 24 billion from RM 9.8 billion in the period 1971-1975 (Khoo 1992, 50). Even during the period of economic slowdown in early 1980s, the state continued to increase its development expenditure to RM32 billion, arguably politically motivated by election promises (Narayanan 1996, 876). It was only after the 1982 General Election, that the austerity package was introduced. The period of global recession required some disciplinary measures to curb public expenditure. This required a dual strategy of cutting down public expenditure and stimulating private investment. The state's public expenditure was cut to 30% and this affected public employment to considerable degree.¹⁴ On the other hand, its strategy to encourage private investment was pursued through a privatisation policy.

The privatisation policy has shifted from the previous state financing of the public sector. The aim was to bolster private capital in order to revive the economy previously overcrowded by state companies. A master plan was drawn up to privatise 434 state enterprises, while the quota requirement was abolished in export-oriented projects (Chua 1995, 249; Narayanan 1996, 874). The privatisation policy received a fresh impetus from the newly elected Prime Minister. Mahathir Mohammad announced a new policy development initiative with less emphasis on ethnic bias. His aim was to reduce dependence on western economies by turning to the east, and to lead Malaysia into being an industrialised nation. A "Look East Policy" was launched which was targeted at closer economic cooperation with Japan and South Korea. It was hoped to attract technology and capital transfer so crucial for the industrialisation policy. Mahathir's development policy also targeted value change among the Malays.¹⁵ Through participating in the industrial economy, the Malays would be able to emulate the efficacy of the Japanese work ethic and hence, would be better equipped to compete in the modern economy (Machado 1987, 645). During his era, the "grand vision"¹⁶ of modern Malaysia was pursued aggressively. The examples

¹⁴ The government sector was the highest employment sector in the economy. The figures show that by 1984, there were 40 government employees per 1000 persons (Narayanan 1996).

¹⁵ Some scholars attributed this thought to Mahathir's book *The Malay Dilemma* (1970). He described the Malay economic predicament as stemming from their cultural values that did not attach premium on progress and entrepreneurship. See Cheah (2002) and Bowie (1991).

¹⁶ The grand vision was expressed in the Mid-Term Review of the 4th Malaysian Plan in 1984. According to Khoo (1992), the plan was described as a "penchant for things big", namely large enterprise, large population, heavy industry and strong leadership.

were a heavy industrialisation policy¹⁷, a Malaysian Incorporated policy¹⁸ and a new population policy¹⁹ (Milne 1986, 1373-1378).

The state privatisation policy has led to an impressive economic growth of 8% for the period from 1988-1997 (Jomo & Gomez 2000, 294). Despite giving some free rein for private capital to operate in the economy, the privatisation policy did not reduce the state involvement in the economy. The state continued its pledge for preferential treatment of Malays' capital and development. The Malays have occupied executive portfolios in privatised companies such as TNB (energy), PETRONAS (oil), and TELECOM (telecommunication). These new capitalists were the beneficiaries of the NEP education policy, and as such, were promoted on merit and capability. Khoo (1992) argues that the new stratum of capitalists, although smaller in number, was seen as influential due to their professionalism and non-political ambition. On the other hand, large numbers of public sector executives were still politically appointed. This simply aggravated the appearance of the public sector as a social enterprise that continued to receive state support on the basis of the Malay agenda, despite incurring loss (1992, 65).

The state's active involvement in the economy has bred another commercial culture known as the "patronage" system. Jomo & Gomez (1999) have demonstrated a patronage system fostered through a network of state and business affiliation. The state, given its economic dominance, has the capacity to distribute rents in the form of contracts and concessions in non-transparent deals. In return, these business affiliates supported the ruling party during elections. The alliance of state and capitalists cut across race divisions.²⁰ This patronage system reached its zenith during the privatisation era in the 1980s and led a researcher to describe the Mahathir reign as

¹⁷ One of the projects under this plan was a national car industry named as PROTON that was a joint-capital venture between the state and Mitsubishi.

¹⁸ Malaysian Inc has seen some privatisation of large public corporation such as in telecommunications, postal and electricity sectors.

¹⁹ The target for this policy was to reach a 70 million population by 2020, presumably an optimum growth for an industrial nation.

²⁰ Out of the top 20 richest men/women in Malaysia, only two were Indian and Malay. The rest were Chinese capitalists benefiting from monopoly and business favour awarded by the state. Most of the names in the list are associated with leading state-UMNO politicians. See "Malaysia's 40 Richest", *Forbes*, 6 April 2007.

“excessive cronyism”²¹ (Khoo 1992). Despite its claim that it works for the Malays, the term ‘race’ was abused for narrow political and market gain. This shows that the unchecked state advances into the economy led to further consolidation of political influence at the expense of market autonomy, not to mention the leakage and wastage associated with the cost to economic clientele.

The assessment of inter-ethnic redistribution was therefore dominated by instances of state abuse and inefficiency. The structure of the economy that was predicated on an ethnic agenda required greater state control and power in order to ensure unimpeded implementation. Nevertheless, state intervention has in some ways failed to contribute to productivity. It was characterised by a lack of accountability. This meant the magnitude of state power in the economy, with no accompanying political balance so crucial in maintaining an efficient economy, would most likely breed corruption.

1.4 Politics

The next discussion starts with the formation of politics which began during the colonial period. The current political practice cannot be understood without taking into consideration its historical configuration. After that, the post-colonial politics which in the beginning was basically neo-colonial will be discussed. Two political aspects stood out in this era. Firstly, the bureaucracy was administered by British educated and trained officers who had also served the previous regime. Secondly, the “politics of compromise”, engineered by the British, continues as a political formula in post-independence Malaya. As a result, there was a continuation of structural imbalance in politics and economy. However, such political bargaining proved to be untenable when communal riots erupted on 13th of May 1969. This event changed the Malaysian political landscape. More powers, rationalised as a necessary control in a multi-communal nation, were accorded to the state at the expense of civil liberty. However, I argue that although political control has managed to prevent the recurrence of violence, it has only sharpened racial division. Despite that, the pretext

²¹ The example of crony capitalism practice in the Mahathir era was the privatisation of the North South Highway at inflated price, the privatisation of loss-making Dayabumi (a commercial complex) that was previously operated by Mahathir’s sister and the bailout of national air carrier MAS at twice its market price. For further information on the projects undertaken under the patronage network see Jomo & Gomez (1999) *Malaysia’s Political Economy*.

of “communal stability” continues to be used to justify the state’s authoritarian measure.

1.4.1 Colonial Politics

Malaysia inherited its present political institution from colonial rule. The electoral system based on popular democracy, the parliamentary model of Westminster, and the constitutional form of monarchy, are some of the British institutions that were mutually agreed during the negotiation for independence.²² Another element of politics inherited from the colonial regime was the “politics of compromise”. Understanding the evolution of this compromise is necessary in order to trace the pattern of political continuity and discontinuity. The origin of this compromise is discussed as follows.

Throughout the period of Japanese Occupation, the subject of empire generated a foreign policy debate between Britain and America. The British response to American criticism was to highlight the benign character of British rule in the colonies. In a minute statement Lord Cranborne, the UK Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, stated that:

Convincing answers to American criticism require a conviction in England that our record was in general, a good and progressive one, and a conviction that the Empire was not a thing to be ashamed of, and that the British people had a useful mission to continue in the colonies....

(CO 825/35/4, no. 46, 20 August 1942)

The prospect of introducing “progressive rule” in Malaya had been a matter of practicality and ideology. For a start, the Colonial Office recognised the eventual possibility of self-rule in the colonies. Although this would become a future possibility, there remained challenges that required some deliberations. Two obstacles were identified. Firstly, the issue of Malay privilege that the British administration

²² These aspects are contained in the Reid Commission that was set up after the preliminary talks between the Alliance and the Secretary of State for the Colonies in January 1955. The commission recommends a federal form of government based on parliamentary democracy and two-house legislature.

had pledged and were bound by in their agreement with the Malay Rajas, and secondly, the issue of the permanent settlement of immigrant communities (CO 825 35/6, no. 3A, 19 April 1943). From the Colonial Office records, it is clear there was appreciation of the complexity of introducing progressive policy, which in this case would be the granting of common citizenship to all communities (CO 825/42/3, no. 27, 21 August 1944; CO 825/42/3, no. 28, 6 September 1944; WO 203/5642, 3 Sept 1945). Despite this, the Colonial Office did not retreat from its progressive stance. As a result, the Malayan Union (MU) proposal was thrust onto the rulers as soon as Malaya was re-occupied in September 1945.

The Malayan Union proposal received widespread condemnation from the Malay traditional leadership. The proposal had also been strongly criticised by distinguished colonial officers who served Malaya before the war.²³ These former officials argued that instead of being a statement of post-war policy the MU was “in effect an instrument for the annexation of Malay States” (*The Times London*, 16 April 1946).

The most sustained and strongest challenge came from the Malay *rakyat*.²⁴ The process of forcing consent²⁵ from the Rulers was made in secret with little time to negotiate the content of the plan. Apparently, all nine Rajas of the Malay States signed the treaty that surrendered Malay States as a Crown Colony and granted citizenship to the immigrant communities. Subsequently, the inauguration ceremony of the first governor of the Malayan Union took place on 1 April 1946.

When the news of the MU broke out, Onn Jaafar,²⁶ an influential aristocrat, mobilised a nationwide protest to oppose the treaty. The protest was later institutionalised into

²³ The protest letter was signed by Cecil C Smith (Governor and High Commissioner, Malaya), L N Guillemard (Governor and High Comm.), E S Hose (Acting Chief Sec. FMS), George Maxwell (Chief Sec. FMS), Frank Swettenham (Governor), Richard Winstedt (Gen. Adviser).

²⁴ The term ‘*rakyat*’ literally means common people and will be used in this research to designate a common class from the aristocratic class in traditional Malay society. *Rakyat* acquired political significance when used to denote an assertion of autonomy from the nominal power of rajas. See Ariffin (1993) and Cheah (1988) “The Erosion of Ideological Hegemony”.

²⁵ This task was entrusted to Harold MacMichael who was given unconditional power to obtain the consent. MacMichael threatened to remove the rajas who refuse to sign the treaty, and at this stage, the issue of the rights to the throne was subjected to British “method of handling a Sultan”. See WO 203/5642, no 28/16/45, 9 September 1945.

²⁶ Onn Jaafar (1895-1962) was a son of Johor Chief Minister during the reign of Sultan Ibrahim and was an adopted son of the Raja. Alongside other sons of the Ruler, Onn was educated in Aldeburgh Lodge School in Suffolk in 1903 and return to Malaya in 1910. As result of his English education, he

an All- Malay Congress that was aimed at organising every Malay political and social body as a show of united opposition. In 11 May 1946, the United Malay National Organisation, or UMNO, was formalised as a political body that specifically aimed to thwart the proposal and make the views of the *rakyat* known to the rajas and the British. The process that led to the formation of UMNO was significant to Malay politics for two reasons.

Firstly, it exhibited for the first time, what was later designated as Malay nationalism under the sponsorship of UMNO. This signalled the beginning of “people sovereignty”²⁷ as a departure from the raja-based polity.²⁸ During the protest against the MU, Onn Jaafar accused the Rajas of ‘selling out’ the Malay birthrights, while Malay press such as *Utusan Melayu*, branded the Rajas as traitors (*derhaka*) to the Malay *rakyat*. From this event Malay nationalism was interpreted as a response to the British action that they considered ran contrary to its previous pledge as Malay protector (Winstedt 1948, 150; Means 1976, 100)

Secondly, the MU protest was also significant in terms of announcing the arrival of a new force of Malay polity. In the past, the British dealt with the rajas in administrative affairs and other issues raised were also discussed amongst them. The balance then shifted to UMNO. Impressed by its organisation and the support that it gathered from the *rakyat* and the rajas, the British realised that in order to maintain their presence in Malaya, UMNO’s demands must be satisfied (CO 537/1528, 25-26 Apr 1946; CO 537/1529, no 110, 25 May 1946). Furthermore, British concessions were also dictated by the realpolitik when anti-colonial forces and radical nationalism

became westernised, “prefers to eat bread rather than rice and often ridiculed those who read in Malay”. In 1930, he worked as an editor to an Arab-owned newspaper *Warta Malaya* in which he wrote articles about the importance of education and administrative training for the Malays. He became District Officer in 1945 and a year later started a state-based socio-political association Malay Association of Johor (PMSJ) with a slogan “Malays will never perish from the face of the earth” (*Takkan Melayu Hilang di Dunia*). This had possibly inspired UMNO slogan “Long Live Malays” (*Hidup Melayu*). For detailed information of his life and career see Ramlah Adam (1992) *Dato’ Onn Jaafar Pengasas Kemerdekaan*

²⁷ The term “people sovereignty” referred to the concept of race as the focal point of Malay identity. Previously, Malay identity was defined by its allegiance to a state under a raja domain known as *kerajaan* polity. UMNO’s role in mobilising the people to confront the rajas was perceived as the first act of collective disobedience in response to perceived threat to Malay’s existence. Prior to the MU crisis, such act of dissent would amount to treason (*derhaka*), a crime punishable to death. See Ariffin (1993) *Bangsa Melayu*.

²⁸ The pre-war Malay polity was conceptualised as a *kerajaan*-based polity, in which a raja became the source of identity and the supreme will. See Milner (1982) *Kerajaan*

began to threaten British re-occupation. UMNO was the only political organisation willing to accommodate British presence without severely threatening the status quo already in place.

Given the prevailing anti-colonial climate, the British decided to capitulate to UMNO's demands. A new arrangement was reached between UMNO and the British. This arrangement restored the Malay states to the rajas, while the term of citizenship on the basis of *jus soli* was repealed in favour of stricter requirements. The Federation of Malaya Agreement (1948) was a landmark achievement for UMNO nationalists in the sense that it had "dictated and obtained, their terms for the future nation-state" (Cheah 2002, 3). This would be the beginning of many consultations that took place between the British and UMNO that would culminate into the granting of full sovereignty.

The main challenge that faced the independence talk was the issue of communalism. One of the early steps to promote multi-communal politics was the formation of the Communities Liaison Committee²⁹ (CLC) in 1949. British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, Malcolm MacDonald, believed that the CLC would be a positive platform for enabling political differences between various communities to be ironed out. The result was encouraging. An improved term of citizenship³⁰ to the non-Malays was conceded by UMNO, while an Alliance³¹ political coalition won the general election in 1955. The method of negotiation among various components in the ruling

²⁹ This was a roundtable forum consisting of prominent leaders from the Malay and the non-Malay communities such as Onn Jaafar (UMNO President), Dato Panglima Bukit Gantang (UMNO co-founder), Tan Cheng Lock (rubber capitalist) and C Thuraisingham (lawyer).

³⁰ Discussion on citizenship took place in various stages. The Malayan Union (MU) proposal for a *jus soli* citizenship was rejected with stricter rules which required the applicant to have adequate knowledge of Malay or English, Malaya-born parents and to have lived in Malaya for at least 15 years. In 1952, as result of the CLC compromise, any Chinese with a Malayan-born parent would automatically be granted citizenship. As a result, 300,000 Chinese were naturalised. The population figure shows there were about 2.65 million Malays, 1.1 million Chinese and 180,000 Indians. (Cheah 2002, 29)

³¹ The Alliance concept was initially a coalition between UMNO and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) engineered by the colonial regime. MCA was formed in 1949 by Tan Cheng Lock, H.S Lee and Leung Yew Koh. In 1952 MCA and UMNO became partners to contest the municipal election. In 1954, the Alliance was formalised into a political coalition between UMNO, MCA and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). MIC was formed in 1946 by John Thivy (a lawyer) and was initially a social organisation to assist Indians in the estates. The Alliance coalition won 51 out of 52 contested seats during the federal election in 1955. The election took place in spite of the period of Emergency which began in 1948 and was declared ended in 1960.

party to settle inter-communal demands was later known as the “politics of compromise”.³²

1.4.2 Post-Independence Politics

The “politics of compromise” was predicated on the perceived Malay political dominance (on the basis of its indigenous status) and the non-Malays (especially Chinese) economic dominance in the merchant and capitalist sectors. However up until 1970, the alleged Malay political supremacy seemed like an illusion (Cheah 2002, 49). The state was constrained in what it could do to assist the Malays for fear of upsetting the economic dominance of other communities. As such, the state measures to help the Malays, many of whom remained marginalised from the mainstream economy, were dictated by what was available within its disposal (Bowie 1991, 75). This would mean to remain within the activity of agriculture, an area which for some time did not yield substantial improvement.³³

The relatively liberal political system backfired in the period of 1963-1965. The ruling party of Singapore, the People Action Party (PAP) called for what was known as “Malaysian Malaysia”. It demanded an equal political status between the Malays and the non-Malays in order to reflect the weight of Chinese capitalist dominance. UMNO found such public rebuke contemptuous. PAP’s attempt to rally support to its cause through a Malaysian Solidarity Campaign occurred at the same time as the spates of racial riots in Singapore in July and September 1964. Despite the chaotic situations, Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman did not attempt to deal with problems swiftly. Finally, as political and social tension escalated, the Malaysian Parliament decided to expel Singapore from Malaysia on 9 August 1965.

³² Pluvier (1967/68) described the Alliance politics as “an act of opportunism”. It was instead a coalition between conservative elites which discussed and decided on issues based on their outlook and interest, without real participation by the masses.

³³ There were several state initiatives to uplift the Malays in agriculture and rural sectors through the Rural Development Authority or RIDA and the People’s Trust Council or MARA. The achievement was modest due to limited funds and lack of political will (in honour of the “historic bargain”).

The Singapore break-up did not prevent another communal clash. In 13 May 1969, a communal riot erupted that led to the declaration of Emergency.³⁴ Parliament was suspended and the state was administered by the National Operation Council (NOC).³⁵ The NOC was run on a consultative basis and their objective was to unravel the root cause of the problem and to suggest measures to prevent any occurrence of racially inflamed conflict. Like previous consultative mechanisms, the NOC strategy was to mediate differences of interest behind closed doors and to reach a collective consensus. In a nutshell, the council interpreted the event as follows. The clash was inflamed by angry mobs that had questioned whether Malays deserved any privilege. The Malays were outraged by this challenge. This had fuelled the sense of injustice that despite being the rightful owner of the country, they were economically deprived. The latter was interpreted to be the root cause that must be resolved in order to prevent the likelihood of violence (Bowie 1991, 88). Thus, political and economic solutions were aimed at addressing Malay grievances to prevent recurring conflict.

Politically, the NOC decided the previous unchecked *laissez-faire* should be overturned. The constitutional provisions related to the special position of the Malays and the legitimate rights of citizenship of the non-Malays were considered as sensitive and beyond public debate. The Sensitive Issues Bill was passed when the Parliament reconvened on 17 February 1971. When debating the bill, the Home Minister Tun Ismail stated those who attempted to break the spirit of the law would be dealt with “effectively and mercilessly” (Cheah 2002, 139). Further laws were legislated to ensure any channels that could challenge government control were checked. In the University and University Colleges Act (1970) students were barred from participating in political parties and trade unions. In 1981, an amendment to the Societies Act was approved. The amended act now included the term “political

³⁴The local source of this event was classified under the government act. The official version of this event was that the riot was prompted by the celebration of electoral victory by Chinese supporters of opposition party Gerakan. There were reportedly 196 persons dead, while more than 9000 were arrested. However, Kua (2007) a Malaysian sociologist, revealed in his latest book that the event was an UMNO plot to oust the then Prime Minister and UMNO President Tunku Abdul Rahman. Tunku was seen to be too liberal and ‘pro-Chinese’. More importantly, the author wished to show the fallacious logic that “race riot will occur when the Malays are not happy”. Instead, the riot was politically motivated by the intra-party power struggle which capitalised on the uncertainty at the time. For studies of the May 13 riot, see Goh (1971), *The May 13 Incidents*; Kua (2007) *May 13 Declassified Documents*.

³⁵ Although NOC was largely an UMNO caucus, the members of the council reflected a wider diversity from varying segments of society, namely from trade unions, opposition parties, top civil servants, armed forces, leaders of Chinese and Indian communities and religious groups.

societies” that must be subjected to registration and regulation. In doing so the registrar was empowered to interpret any action and activities of the society and direct change whenever necessary (Barraclough 1984, 452). Another legislative mechanism available to the government for matters considered as threatening to national security was the Internal Security Act (ISA). The law originally targeted subversive elements such as communism and militancy. After the eruption of May 13, the scope was to include the preservation of inter-communal harmony. However, in reality these laws were being used to intimidate government critics whether or not what they said was racially instigated³⁶ (Crouch 1992, 23).

Meanwhile, on the economic front, the NOC formulated a new socio-economic package to address the economic predicament of the Malays. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was approved in July 1971, with two objectives. The first objective was to eliminate poverty irrespective of race. The second objective was to restructure Malaysian society so as to reduce identification of race with economic occupation (Jomo & Gomez 2000; Jomo 1991). This policy was different from the previous economic programmes aimed at the Malays in two ways:

1. The NEP was empowered with political will and legitimacy in the sense that the Malay socio-economic predicament became a national agenda. This meant the Malay economic agenda was interpreted as the pre-requisite to national integration.
2. To ensure the smooth implementation of the policy, the state assumed a proactive role that would intervene in economic activities that could contribute to the socio-economic advancement of the Malays. With the range of legislations at its disposal, the state was able to mute opposition should any conflict arise from the implementation.

³⁶ The ISA laws were used to detain social activists such as Kassim Ahmad (lecturer in Malay Studies) and Syed Husin Ali (lecturer in sociology) in 1970s. In 1987, 106 people, mostly opposition politicians, were arrested for allegedly inflaming racial sentiment. In late 1999 and early 2000, the laws were again used to arrest political activists allied to the former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim who was charged with corruptions and sexual misconduct.

Apart from the legislative measures, control over the media was another avenue to strengthen state dominance. Under the caveat of Malay economic agenda, a *bumiputera*³⁷ trust agency PERNAS bought 80% of stakes in the New Straits Times Press which owned two major English and Malay dailies. The state also controlled the broadcasting of the government subsidised television channel. In 1984 the first privatised television channel was 40% owned by the UMNO's investment group, Fleet Trading (Wang 2001, 72 &76). Government control over the media was explained as a way to facilitate state development policy crucial in the volatile multi-communalism in the wake of the May 13th race riot (Lent 1979, 51-52).

Therefore, from the year 1970 onward, the political system in Malaysia shifted from a *laissez-faire* policy into increasing authoritarianism (Crouch 1992 & 1993). This had significant impact in the curtailing of freedom of expression and achievement of fuller democracy. Over time, the state monopoly in politics, economy and media has reduced the competitive political participation that was necessary for democracy to gain ground. Barraclough (1984) argues that each step of control taken to ensure stability means another step taken towards authoritarianism. Such controls have severely limited the expansion of public participation on two grounds. Firstly, it limited the range of issues for which inter-communal political cooperation would be possible. Secondly, it limited the growth of inter-communal cooperation outside state-defined boundaries. This can be seen in the case of non-communal non-governmental organisations (NGOs) applying pressure on the regime on issues of civil rights.³⁸ Although the means of dealing with the pressure varies, it shows the state's intent on limiting the progress of civil society.

³⁷ *Bumiputera* literally means 'sons of soil' which refers to the Malays and other indigenous ethnics in Sabah and Sarawak. The term carries with it legal and economic entitlement.

³⁸ One of the examples is in the area of religion which falls under the sensitive provision in the constitution. In 2005, the Bar Council organised a conference to discuss the formation of an Interfaith Commission of Malaysia (ICM). The rationale for the ICM was to conduct an inquiry, hold negotiations and make recommendations related to inter-faith issues such as religious propagation (other than Islam), conversion and places of worship. The conference was attended by representatives from over 50 Muslim and non-Muslim NGOs. The Prime Minister refused to discuss the proposal with the ICM, while the Deputy Prime Minister urged the organiser to respect the sensitivity of Muslims before 'interfering' in the matter of Islam. For the Bar Council statement on the issue see Sarwar (2005) "We are committed to dialogue".

1.5 Plural Society

The aim of this section is to offer an outline of multi-communalism in contemporary Malaysia. This aspect is examined within its specific historical and political configuration that has continually informed and shaped the current fabric of society. More importantly, I will highlight the continuing tension that exists between communities and the state intervention to deal with this conflict. Through an examination of the historical background, political structure and economic distribution, I suggest that, the 'peaceful' representation of plural society is maintained through the state coercive mechanism. Therefore, it means the state authoritarian policies do not succeed in containing inter-communal conflict. Rather it exacerbates its fragility and deepens its impacts.

This discussion is divided into three historical contexts, namely during the colonial period which is divided into the pre-war and the post-war stage and finally, the post-communal riot of 1969. In each division, the main interest is to establish my claim that the communal issues in Malaya/Malaysia were and are politically structured. The race factor becomes a divisive element that has structured the social and political landscape in colonial and post-colonial Malaysia. By emphasising the politics that were responsible for racial polarisation, I try to bring into attention the underlying political interest that relies on exclusivist nationalism for power and support.

1.5.1 Plural Society in the Pre-War Period (1880s -1941)

The pre-war colonial society was described as peaceful. There were various reasons attributed to this. Gullick (1987) argues that capitalist development during the colonial period tended to "bypass" rather than penetrate Malay economy (1987, 364). As such Malay society was secluded from the pressure that accompanied the modernisation process. Meanwhile, Cheah (2003) argues the colonial policy of divide and rule has contributed to the fragmentation of society. The divide and rule feature in the economy, which confined certain communities within specific realms of the economy and hence geographical reach, allowed communities to develop separately. Other observations also supported the representation of stable colonial society (Emerson 1937, 15; Winstedt 1948, 149; Gullick 1981, 34-35).

Overall, these views conveyed the impression that colonial policy has successfully prevented the outbreak of potential clashes, which would be likely in the scenario of multi-communalism. The current discussion will not try to dislodge this predominant view. Instead, I will expand discussion on colonial policy and the implications for communal relations. I suggest the stability was maintained by a precarious combination of colonial politics and economic policies. Notwithstanding the pre-eminence of economic interest embedded within these policies, it can also be argued that these policies were formulated within the idea of culture, specifically race. Consequently, this has a direct implication in structuring inter-communal relations during the colonial period.

1.5.1a Political policy of protectorate

The centrality of a raja in Malay political culture and the unquestioning loyalty commanded from his subjects, have been noted to be the most important stabilising factors in Malay polity and society (Khoo 1991, 20; Walker 2004, 213; Swettenham 1993, 18; Clifford 1983, 232). The arrival of colonial rule in the beginning disrupted this power balance. Violent clashes erupted between pro-raja forces and colonial forces.³⁹ This experience served as a reminder for the early colonialist administrators that the political culture of the Malays would not be easily assailed with the new regime in place. Despite the initial upset, colonial rule went ahead uninterrupted for almost 70 years before it came to an abrupt halt in 1941.

The longevity of colonial rule can be attributed to its successful accommodation pact with the rajas. Chandra Muzaffar (1979) argues that despite strong aversion towards the colonial presence, the regime realised it could actually benefit from the native's political culture. By providing material benefits, important titles and high positions, it was believed that the ruler could be bought to terms with the new rule. Through this

³⁹ Two notable resistances in the early period of British rule had taken place in Naning and the assassination of the first British Resident JWW Birch in Pasir Salak. For historiography of the former see Chew (1998) "The Naning War 1831-1832". For personal account of the Pasir Salak clash by the Queen's Commissioner Captain Speedy, see Swettenham (1993) section of his *Sketches*, "A Personal Incident".

way, the support of the raja was secured and subsequently, “the unquestioning loyalty of their subjects would be at the disposal of British colonialism” (1979, 52).

The degree to which cultural logic can become a convincing explanation for a stable colonial rule, as suggested by Muzaffar, is open for debate. However, the crucial aspect that deserved attention is the extent to which colonial policy tried to adhere to the cultural ideas. Early administrators believed the stability of the state depended on keeping the Malays within their traditional lifestyle. From the administrative point-of-view, this meant that administrative and economic change must not lead to corresponding pressure for change in the socio-cultural sphere. This matter can be illustrated in a speech made before the Federal Council in 1927, where Hugh Clifford⁴⁰ said:

These States were when the British Government was invited by their Rulers and Chiefs to set their troubled houses in order, Mohammadan monarchies. Such they are today and such they may continue to be. ... in these days, when democratic and socialist theories and doctrines are spreading like an infection, bringing with them not peace but sword.... and this would produce a situation which amount to betrayal of trust which the Malays of these states, from the highest to the lowest, have been taught to repose in his Majesty's Government
(Quoted in Emerson 1964, 174)

This statement demonstrated two things. Firstly, Clifford acknowledged that the force of changes brought about by modern ideologies could prompt undesirable effects. Secondly, such innovation of political ideas was thought to be incompatible with the Malays. For that reason, it was the colonial duty to ensure the Malays were protected within their traditional ways, “such they are and such they may continue to be”. By assuming the duty as protector of Malays from the pressure of modernity, the regime combined a political task with its economic accumulation. Their intention was to keep Malays within the confines of the feudal system, while at the same time promoting a

⁴⁰ Hugh Clifford (1866-1941) was British Resident in the state of Pahang and a High Commissioner in Malaya from 1927-1930. He authored books on his experience in Malaya and on Malay cultures, namely *In Court and Kampong* (1993) and *Studies in Brown Humanity* (1898).

capitalist economy based on primary production, produced an incompatible dualism⁴¹ that characterised colonial rule in Malaya.

The regime's duty as protector of Malay interest was encapsulated in the caveat of "special right".⁴² In the middle of the 20th century, as the colonial economy consolidated,⁴³ the issue of Malay rights became the subject of the discussion between the colonial regime and the rajas. Malay rights are read in conjunction with the socio-economic reality at the time. There was a widespread feeling in the Malay press that their homeland was being overwhelmed by the prosperous immigrant labourers, while the natives were poor and destitute.⁴⁴ To satisfy the Malays' perception of their legitimate interests, the regime tried to allocate special provisions for the Malays in areas such as land,⁴⁵ education,⁴⁶ and public service.⁴⁷

The extent to which the "special right" actually redressed the economic predicament of the Malays was doubtful. This was because the "special right" was formulated within the precept of "arch-conservatism" which restricted Malays within their

⁴¹ Roff (1967) argues that British colonial policy is "fundamentally dichotomous". The dichotomy between its economic agenda and its moral ideology helped to explain the limited success of colonial capitalism in promoting the well being of domestic economy and society. It must be pointed that the underlying purpose of British policy is to ensure the Malays remained excluded from industry and urbanisation, hence guaranteeing political and social stability for economic accumulation.

⁴² The origin of Malay rights can be traced to the concept of trusteeship, in which the British Resident ruled the state on behalf of the raja. For that, every action and policy was justified for the interest of the Malays. For analysis of Malay special right see Means (1972) "Special Right as a Strategy for Development".

⁴³ Milner (1991) argues that it was during this period that Malay nationalism began to take form. It was nationalism imbued with racial consciousness which emphasised the distinctive quality of Malay race from the other immigrant communities. Stockwell (1982) went further to suggest that this racial nationalism was in many ways informed by British contributions to the purification of Malay customs (1982, 63). Nevertheless, it was the consciousness of threat from the affluent immigrant communities that predominated the thinking of the early Malay nationalism. The solution to this problem was to seek protection from the colonial regime.

⁴⁴ The discourse about Malay economic malaise was described in Malay press through the expression "*dirampas segalanya di rumah sendiri*" (being dispossessed at one's own home). For discussion on the link between nationalism and economy see Milner (1994) *The Invention of Politics*, and Shamsul (1997a) "The Economic Dimension of Malay Nationalism".

⁴⁵ The examples are Malay Reservation Enactment (1913) and Rice Land Enactment (1917) that restricted the land use from cash crops and prevented the sale of the land under the jurisdiction.

⁴⁶ Education in colonial Malaya was divided into English schools and Malay schools. The former were usually allocated for the aristocratic families to prepare them for the civil service. The Malay education was aimed at *rakyat* at rural areas, and was free of charge. The colonial education policy was carefully arranged to pre-empt the tendency of 'over-education' among the *rakyat*. There was no state provision for Chinese and Indian education. For studies on colonial education policy and its implication for nationalism see Roff (1964) and Khoo (1991).

⁴⁷ The example is Malayan Administrative Service (MAS) which was a second-ranked Malay bureaucracy to the Malayan Civil Service (MCS). See Allen (1970) "Malayan Civil Service".

traditional lifestyle (Gullick 1981, 33; Nonini 1991, 119; Means 1972, 50). As a result, the “special right” only built up the perception of Malay sense of distinction as the legitimate ‘owner’ of the land without real material change commensurate with the racial rhetoric.

1.5.1b Economic policy

Colonial rule ultimately rested on the exploitation of raw materials. To ensure a substantial profit, a policy of mass immigration was systematically encouraged for mining and rubber sectors. As a result of the expansion of tin mining in the Peninsular and trade activities in Singapore, a massive and steady supply of labour was recruited from southern China.⁴⁸ These incoming labourers were considered as a commodity that was crucial for the development of a capitalist economy. Meanwhile for the plantation sector, Indian labourers from southern India were recruited. In early 1901, 120,000 were recruited for the plantation sector, and the number swelled to 625,000 in 1930⁴⁹ (Gullick 1981, 65). The massive arrival of immigrant labourers was an indication of a prosperous colonial economy during the period.

Meanwhile, the Malays were to a large extent excluded from the activities of the colonial economy. Several cultural reasons accounted for their non-participation. The Malays were considered as resistant to change (Clifford 1889, 227), averse to working-life as coolies (Emerson 1937, 19), and preferring idle existence (Winstedt 1948, 17). Whatever reasons were attributed to the Malay disinterest, it was the

⁴⁸ From their very first day of arrival the incoming Chinese labourers were been sent away into the interior mining areas and had no contact with anyone apart from their fellow-workers who all shared similar nationality. They lived in close quarters, and their problems such as debt, sickness or disputes, were dealt within the close-knit mining community. This had encouraged the formation of secret societies in the community which acted as a leader and protector for these isolated and often divided communities. For a study on Chinese secret societies, see Blythe (1969) *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya*. The author was a former secretary for Chinese Affairs in Malaya. See also Mak (1981) *The Sociology of Secret Societies*, and Wynne (2000) *Triad and Tabut*.

⁴⁹ However, the number did not reflect the trend of Indian labour at the time. This can be explained by the pattern of incoming and outgoing flow of the immigrant-workers. During the height of the economic boom, as many as 90,000 labourers arrived, while 40,000 moved to the opposite direction. This was in contrast with the trend of Chinese labourers who, given their participation in the commercial sector of the economy and the opportunity for material improvement, found an incentive to remain in the colony. This explains the relatively advanced position of the Chinese immigrants compared to their Indian counterparts who had little opportunity for economic progression in the rubber sector. For studies on Indian labour in Malaya see Huff (2002) “Boom or Bust Commodities and Industrialisation” and Madhavan (1985) “Indian Emigrants”.

impression of cultural factors that were considered as disincentive to capitalist enterprise.

In reality, the cultural explanation was used to discourage the Malays from pursuing capitalist activity. One notable example for this is the Malay Reservation Enactment (1913). The law restricted the type of agricultural produce allowed on the reserved lands to rice and coconut. This was justified as a way of preserving Malay land rights from being transferred to non-Malays. Hence, the argument goes, the Malay birthright can be assured (Gullick 1981, 37). However, the underlying effect of this pro-Malay bias was to discourage the Malays from participating in the capitalist sector (Nonini 1992, 75). The commercial profits associated with rubber plantations encouraged the Malays to grow rubber at a lower cost. These smallholders were more competitive than the British plantation operators, who had to bear the cost of labour, accommodation and basic amenities. The new enactment discouraged the Malays from venturing into the capitalist economy. Consequently, this confined the Malays within their traditional activity, which, apparently, was consistent with the British vow to preserve the traditional culture.

The previous discussion shows how the structure of colonial economy contributed to the polarisation of the communities. Economic policy was informed by practical economic decisions coated with cultural explanation. The Chinese community participation in the mining sector had largely resulted to their eventual dominance in entrepreneurial activities in the urban centres. The Indians meanwhile were isolated in the plantation sector in the interior without enjoying the opportunity afforded to the urban-concentrated Chinese. While these communities were at the centre of the capitalist economy, the Malays' conspicuous absence was rationalised as 'cultural'. Although there was a strategy to redress the imbalance, it only accentuated the communal dimension of the inequality.

The pre-war colonial society was from the outset inherently unstable. From the discussion so far it is obvious that the plural society was held together by a precarious balance of colonial political and economic policy. The colonial promotion of economic development has only benefited sections of the community while depriving the native. Although there was a policy to attend to Malay interests, such policy was

ineffectual and merely increased racial distinction. As a result, the racial polarisation that characterised the pre-war period continued to gather force.

1.5.2 Plural Society in the Post- War Period (1945-1957)

Prior to the Japanese occupation, colonial rule was 'tolerated' insofar as it had limited the occurrence of inter-communal conflict. Colonial rule was considered necessary in plural society. Richard Winstedt, a scholar-administrator, described the reason why British rule was relevant:

The Malay peasant has no strong ill will towards the Chinese, whose village shopkeeper -cum- money- lender is genial and friendly, and hides long-term usurious profits under ready cash advances. The educated Malays are alive to his growing economic power and hostile As long as the British could protect him (Malay) from being attacked or swamped by other races, the Malay ... was disposed to enjoy the company of any affable European and often felt real affection for individuals. (Winstedt 1943, 101-102)

In the post-war period, the continuation of colonial rule was complicated by several factors. Firstly, the interregnum period following the withdrawal of Japanese troops was fraught with instances of violent clashes⁵⁰ and retribution.⁵¹ Secondly, the controversy surrounding the much maligned Malayan Union (MU) proposal further aggravated the strain.⁵² Given the intensity of the social and political situation, communal differences were accentuated to the extent that the prospect of the

⁵⁰ A guerrilla movement known as the Malayan Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) was the military wing of the Communist Party of Malaya. With the Japanese withdrawal, the MPAJA took control in the city throughout the 14-days interregnum period. During this "reign of terror", the MPAJA persecuted suspected Japanese collaborators which included (not exclusively) Malays. The Malays responded by seeking protection from their village and cult leaders. The result was retaliation and counter-retaliation that became endemic prior to and upon British return

⁵¹ The Colonial Office record reveals that the returning British administration acknowledged the complexity of the post-war situation. The root of the problem was not racial, but a mixture of socio-economic factors and general misunderstanding. The petty acts of jungle trespassing, illegal rubber tapping and stealing agricultural produce had easily flared into violence that spawned into further reactions until it had culminated in a violent stand-off between one community and another (CO 537/1581, nos. 14, 15, and 16, 31 May- 22 June 1946).

⁵² The proposal suggested the right of citizenship be accorded to the non-Malays on the basis of *jus soli*. This aroused further animosity among the Malays, already made aware of their political and social vulnerability in their own land. The Malay elites and the *rakyat*, as result of British policy, considered the states as essentially Malay (Means 1976).

resumption of colonial rule seemed in the beginning remote. It faced opposition from every section of Malayan societies.⁵³ The stability that characterised the plural society in the pre-war was replaced with the uncertainty of a fractured state.

To make its presence in the post-war Malaya acceptable, especially by the Malays, the British agreed to repel the MU proposal. As a result, the colonial regime was building up its rapport with UMNO as a representation of both the Malays and the rajas' interest. The Anglo-Malay accord was to become the basis for cooperation towards the agenda of self-government. At this stage the issue of multi-communalism became salient. If the previous colonial regime was to exclude other races from mainstream politics, the post-war situation required the participation of other communities to ensure a sustainable self-governing Malaysia was a reality. At the same time, the sensibility of the Malays also had to be respected in order to prevent a similar backlash to the MU protest.

The regime realised the delicate situation required a gradual and cautious approach. The solution adopted by the British was consultation among leading elites of each major community in the form of the Communities Liaison Committee (1949). This set the foundation for a gradual experiment in multi-communal politics. The practice of negotiation between political elites over time became a mechanism over which communal issues were deliberated and mediated. There were two significant policy-building exercises that exemplified the consultative strategy.

The first was the report on educational policy known as the Razak Report (1956). The report recommended the use of the Malay Language as the official language of the country and in schools. The report also recommended a national school system to address national integration. However, the report raised objections from members within the Alliance and from other cultural bodies that demanded Mandarin to be placed as a national language alongside Malay. In the spirit of compromise, the Alliance agreed to postpone the pronouncement of Malay as official language, while

⁵³ The British faced anti-colonial sentiment from the multi-communal section of radical nationalism, which sought to thwart colonial rule in favour of immediate independence. These nationalists were the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP), the Communist Party of Malaya (MCP) and from the conservative UMNO itself. The latter's opposition was limited to the Malayan Union proposal.

the status of Chinese education and language would be dealt with in the future (Gullick 1981, 226; Cheah 2002, 87).

The second challenge faced by the Alliance was the constitutional proposal. The Reid Commission (1956) was tasked with drafting a constitution of an independent Malaysia. The Reid Commission concurred with UMNO's demand for a constitution that reflected the Malay character of the state. This is reflected in the provisions below:

- Article 71 guarantees the constitution of each state in the Malaya Federation and the rights and prerogative of Malay Rajas.
- Article 152 provides Malay language as the official language.
- Article 153 provides the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong* (Paramount Ruler, i.e. first among equals) to safeguard the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of other communities.
- Article 159 requires any amendment to the provision related to the prerogative of the Rulers and special rights of Malays be passed with the consent of the Conference of Rulers. (Milne 1970, 569)

Although certain provisions, notably related to the issue of Malay language drew criticism from the Chinese quarters⁵⁴ and from within the Malay community, the solution adopted by the Alliance was to deal with the issues when the timing was right. The nation-building process initiated in 1949 was therefore circumscribed within the implicit understanding that the need for a stable administration set up during the colonial rule would continue in the post-independence. The lack of political will to reinforce the character of Malay dominance, despite already being spelled out in the constitution, was calculated against the risk of counter claims which could de-stabilise the nascent Malayan nation.

⁵⁴ The Chinese organisations like the Federation of Chinese Guilds and Associations (FCGA), United Chinese School Teachers Association (UCSTA), and All Malaya Chinese School Management Association (AMCSMA) launched a protest against MCA's reluctance to fight for equal rights for Chinese education and culture. However, since the protest was made during the independence talks, the MCA decided to ignore the call for the time being. See Tan (1992) "Dongjiaozong and the Challenge to Cultural Hegemony".

In the nation-building process, the complexity in meeting the demands of a plural society created a daunting task. The previous discussion shows how sensitive issues like language and culture were deflected in order to give way to more immediate concerns, namely attaining an independent nation-state. Moreover, the mechanism for conflict resolution was concentrated in the state's inner-circle. Decisions reached within such negotiation were determined by elite interests, with minimal allowance for people's aspirations. Therefore, there existed a discrepancy between elite interests and public expectations in regards to the direction and the ideology of nation-building. This difference proved to be very costly in the period after independence.

The post-war society was primarily characterised by the race relations debate led and centred at the political elite level. At the general society level, those concerned about race relations faced a different reality. The communist insurgency⁵⁵ launched by predominantly ethnic Chinese was easily misconstrued in its racial dimension alone. Furthermore, the occupational, geographical and cultural difference that divided or rather defined societies from each other continued to be the reality throughout the nation-building phase.

1.5.3 Plural Society in the Post-Independence Period

From 1957 to the late 1960s, some of the socio-political elements inherited from the colonial era remained persistent. These were the identification of race with the economic sector, the separate practice of communal language and education and the "politics of compromise" among conservative elites. Together these elements represented a further segregation of communities rationalised on the principle of status quo.

The extent to which these policies of separation could be sustained in the context of independent Malaya (later 'Malaysia' in 1963) was not fully acknowledged in the early period. Instead, the political elites were content not to let the communal claim

⁵⁵ For first-hand literatures on communist resurgence in Malaya see O'Ballance (1966) *The Communist Insurgent War*; Central Office of Information (1953) *The Fight against Communist Terrorism in Malaya*; Thomson (1966) *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. See also personal memoirs by former communist members such as Chin Peng (2003) *My Side of History*; Rashid Maidin (2005) *Daripada Perjuangan Bersenjata kepada Perdamaian*; Suriani Abdullah (2006) *Setengah Abad dalam Perjuangan*.

make inroads into mainstream politics. This led to intra-party conflict when it came to cultural claims.⁵⁶ This shows the political compromise reached in the Alliance did not reflect the aspiration of its grassroots. As a result, the “politics of compromise” took priority while other cultural demands were left open and unresolved. Therefore, the post-independence nation building was characterised by a plural policy in culture, for example, in the education and language policy (Cheah 2002, 80).

However, post 13 May 1969 witnessed two major shifts from the previous trend.

These shifts are:

- Firstly, the Malay character of the state, as embodied in the constitution, was reinforced in greater strength. This was a reversal from the position of reluctant pluralism in the era before.
- Secondly, UMNO’s role as protector of Malays was taken to a new height. By combining both political and economic functions of the state, UMNO was now in an authorised position to ensure the interest of the Malays was protected from the ‘threat’ of other communities.

The National Ordinance Council (NOC) realised national integration would only be made possible once a ‘Malay’ state was institutionalised into a model of nationhood. This meant asserting the primacy of Malay politics, culture and economy in the context of the multi-communal politics and society. By assuming a position of strength, both politically and economically, it was believed that social integration would logically follow. The assertion of a Malay state was enforced in the socio-economic program of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

The NOC believed that national integration would only be possible once the economic malaise of the Malays was addressed and reached a level commensurate with its

⁵⁶ In the case of UMNO, the issue of Malay language and culture had undermined the credibility of the alliance political compromise. Despite being a national language, Malay language did not assume an official and strong position in administration and education, while English remained as important as before. Even within UMNO, there was a huge dissatisfaction regarding UMNO policy to delay the implementation of Malay language. A Malay Congress held in May 1957 demanded (among others) Malay language to be made official immediately, and not to wait 10 years. In 1959, prior to the General Election, UMNO President Tunku Abdul Rahman took a temporary leave in order to re-organise UMNO. The party was in disarray after members from teaching profession decided to quit UMNO *en masse* to demonstrate their dissatisfaction over the Malay language position. (c.f. Ramlah 1998)

political birthright. The NEP two-pronged strategy, the eradication of poverty and the re-structuring of society, although in policy terms addressed “irrespective of race”, certainly was dominated by, and directed at, Malay economic concerns. Shamsul (1997a) argues that the NEP was essentially part of Malay economic nationalism. The economic agenda had caused concern among nationalists within UMNO particularly after independence.⁵⁷ Following the May 13 tragedy, the Malay economic agenda, in many ways, materialised. One of the immediate consequences was the promotion of Malay entrepreneurs into urban sectors.⁵⁸

The second shift that came following the incident of May 13 was the reassertion of UMNO as the main Malay body politic. The general election on 10 May 1969 had seen the weakening of the UMNO-led coalition in both the rural and urban areas.⁵⁹ The election result showed the Malays frustration towards UMNO’s failure to uplift the Malays socio-economically. Post May 13th provided the occasion to rectify the imbalance between UMNO political might and its economic weakness. The formulation of the NEP raised the Malay economic agenda into a national policy. This signalled the early success of UMNO’s reinvention in Malay society and national politics.⁶⁰ Khoo (1992) argues that the NEP was the beginning of a successful UMNO political ideology as the protector of Malay rights. If the previous British policy interpreted ‘protection’ with traditionalism, in post-1969, this would be taken

⁵⁷ In 1965 a Bumiputera Economic Congress was organised to push for state intervention to alleviate Malay socio-economic problems. However, the compromise which underlined the multi-communal alliance at the time had hindered the capacity for the state to help the Malays.

⁵⁸ Shamsul (1997a) delineated two forms of new entrepreneurs. The first is “accidental entrepreneurs” whose position in the economy was dependent upon political connection and money politics. They were mostly based in the rural areas. The second group is the “new” middle class based in urban areas. Their social mobility, from rural to urban middle class was accelerated by the state affirmative action in education and employment. Most of them worked in upper-level bureaucracy and state corporations.

⁵⁹ The Alliance popular vote was drastically reduced. It won 66 out of 144 parliamentary seats, while opposition parties DAP won 13 and PAS 12 seats. The opposition parties such as DAP and Gerakan made considerable gains from their election campaigns for the abolition of Malay special rights. After the election a victory parade was organised and in some incidents the opposition supporters taunted the Malays with statements like “Malays, return to your village, we are now in power”. This has spawned further rumours among the Malays and non-Malays which resulted in the violent clash of May 13. For analysis of the May 10th elections see Drummond & Hawkins (1970).

⁶⁰ Within UMNO itself, substantial changes occurred. Tunku Abdul Rahman was forced to resign from the post of party President and Prime Minister and replaced with Abdul Razak. Tun Abdul Razak was an ardent nationalist, having led state agencies to address Malays socio-economy. He was also the head of the National Operation Council (NOC) an administrative body during the post-May 13th emergency period which was responsible for the NEP planning. Another change engineered by Razak was to include UMNO rival the Islamic party PAS into the ruling coalition. However, internal conflicts led to PAS separation from the UMNO-led coalition in 1977. For his political biography see Paridah Samad (1998) *A Phenomenon in Malaysian Politics* and Zurina Ismail (1985) *Tun Abdul Razak*.

as producing a stratum of Malay capitalists “who would be capable of standing on their feet” (Khoo 1992, 59). Consequently, the NEP has strengthened UMNO’s grip in Malay society and on the national economy.

From the discussion above, it is clear that post-1969 witnessed strident efforts to address Malays’ socio-economic plight. Evidently, there were more Malays occupying respectable positions in both state and private sectors. To some extent, the NEP can be seen as successfully integrating Malays into the modern economy. On the other hand, there was doubt about its alleged promotion of national integration. The overwhelming response from the non-Malays indicated their resentment of the preferential treatment towards the Malays, while their plight was unattended (Milne 1986, 1382; Jomo 1989, 50; Cheah 2002, 143-145). It is possible that the overtly Malay emphasis in the NEP actually limited the opportunity for the issue of national integration on the basis of racial equality to be realised.

However, the economic deregulation policy in the late 1980s provided a different context for the issue of national integration. Deregulation led the state to employ an integrationist approach in nation-building in order to appeal to foreign capital, especially overseas Chinese, who were wary with the state’s *bumiputera* preferential policy. The concept of *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian Nation) was introduced in 1991 to emphasise the aspect of accommodation between the Malays and the non-Malays. This new version of partnership was essential in transforming Malaysia into “a modern, highly developed, just and equal nation” (Cheah 2002, 240). For the non-Malays, the term ‘equality’ provided them with the opportunity to demand more leverage in resource access and distribution. As a result, there was mounting pressure from the non-Malay political and cultural bodies for equality and representation in state policy.

The state response was ambiguous. While cautious not to concede too much, it was also careful not to alienate its Malay constituents who had already grown disillusioned with UMNO. An incident occurred during the general election campaign of 2008 that can be used to illustrate this point. UMNO’s divisional chief, Ahmad Said, reportedly uttered a remark that the Chinese are “immigrants who do not deserve equal rights”

(*The Star*, 4 September 2008). Apparently, this was taken as undermining the legitimacy of Chinese demands due to their historically ‘immigrant’ status.

The state and UMNO’s response to this matter reflected its limitation to go beyond the racial boundary. Ahmad Said was handed a three-year suspension from his post as divisional chief, while not insisting on his apology.⁶¹ At the same time, the state resorted to authoritarian measures to deal with the incident. The reporter from Mandarin-language press *Sin Chew Daily* who reported the incident was arrested under the ISA law, while three other non-mainstream newspapers were issued show-cause letters for reporting Ahmad’s remark (*The Star*, 12 September 2008; 13 September 2008). The state’s tough action over the reporters, but not the perpetrator, drew criticism from its coalition member the MCA,⁶² the human rights commission Suhakam,⁶³ a Muslim NGO,⁶⁴ and from opposition parties.⁶⁵ This opposition transcended the racial boundary and clearly reflected non-communal interest. However, in the context where politics and society are deeply structured by state-party communalism, the effort towards national integration was bound to be frustrated by exclusive nationalism. Thus, the NEP logic that formal economic parity alone would lead to national integration is not sustainable.

1.6 Religion and State-Control

Can religious revivalism be regarded as a modern phenomenon?⁶⁶ The oft-cited revivalists such as the participants of the Iranian Revolution, the members of the

⁶¹ Despite being suspended by the party post, Ahmad Said was regarded as “warrior” by UMNO grassroots, especially from his division in Bukit Bendera. (*The Star*, 10 November 2008)

⁶² In departure from its previous ‘silent’ disagreement, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) openly rebuked the state arrest of the Chinese journalist who reported the event. Its newspaper arm, *The Star*, provided extensive coverage on the issue. The MCA secretary-general asked for proper consultation with other members of the coalition before the use of ISA or Sedition Act. (*The Star*, 15 September 2008)

⁶³ The Suhakam, the state-sponsored human rights body, has criticised the use of the ISA on the reporter stating she was not a threat to security. Despite her eventual release a day later, her arrest shows the arbitrary use of the ISA law. (*The Star*, 15 September 2008)

⁶⁴ *Jemaah Islah Malaysia* (Islamist Reform Front) or JIM has called the use of the ISA on the journalist and other individuals “un-Islamic”, “unreasonable” and “illegitimate”. (*The Star*, 15 September 2008)

⁶⁵ Lim Kit Siang, a parliamentary member from the Democratic Action Party (DAP), claimed that Ahmad Said’s refusal to apologise was a possible sign that he received support from the mainstream UMNO leadership and its grassroots. (*The Star*, 4 September 2008)

⁶⁶ For view on religious fundamentalism as a response to cosmopolitanism see Nagata (2001) “Towards an Anthropology of Fundamentalism”. View on the ‘clash’ between modernist and fundamentalist Islam, see Moaddel (1998) “Islamic Modernism versus Fundamentalism”. View on global convergence

Muslim Brotherhood and the Wahhabis' puritanism may convey the impression that revivalism and modernity are not compatible (Griffith 1979; Najjar 2000; Sirriyeh 1989). Such views can be attributed to a modernisation thesis that argues that certain religious beliefs or systems, Islam for instance, are inadequate at supporting the political and cultural changes due to economic modernisation (Huntington 1982; Almond 1983). Furthermore, the fundamentalist vision, which sought to return to the uniformity of the prophetic or caliphate model, is in itself defying the modern reality characterised by pluralism and democratisation (Nasr 1995, 263). For these reasons, religious revivalism with its brand of puritanism is seen to be counter-modernist.

Such a view do not take into account the fact that globalisation has significantly altered the socio-political geography of every society. The early modes of globalisation, such as colonialism and capitalism globalised the process of modernity marked by western experience (Euben 1997, 431). Religious revivalism was certainly facilitated by the globalising trend and the Cold War, as in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, which inspired many revivalist movements in the colonies (Munson 2001, 487). This meant western modernity was not inherently antagonistic to religious revivalism. In fact, the latter was enabled by the modernising process that universalised western capitals and western power.

In the studies of the Islamic movement in Malaysia, the cultural context of indigenous Malays provides an insight into the social constituent of religion. One of the proponents for a sociological approach is Clive Kessler. Kessler (1971) argues that unlike other universal religions, typical studies on Islam often focused on the difference between scripture and the existential. He stated that this does not need to be so. It is because there is always a continuing tension between social reality and a religiously inspired worldview. It is a characteristic of every universal religion that wishes to remain relevant at *all* times. For that reason, a socially or politically authorised body or individual is required to interpret, adjudicate and utilise the scripture. Kessler argues that this entails both social and political processes. It is

of religious fundamentalism, see Lehmann (1998) "Fundamentalism and Globalism". For an historical perspective on fundamentalism see Munson (2003) "Fundamentalism Ancient and Modern". Resurgence of religious awareness among professional women in Egypt see El-Guindi (1981) "Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic". These works collectively advance a view that religious fundamentalism is a local response to changes brought by modernity.

ultimately a socially interpreted worldview sustained via political process and authority. Therefore, the issue of dissension between theory and practice as pathological does not arise, as it has always been a site of contest from the beginning.

Taking a similar approach, I argue that the phenomenon of religious revivalism in Malaysia is historically contingent and socially constructed. In this context neither the model of Iranian revolution nor Muslim Brotherhood has relevance. Although I agree these events are inspirational, they do not explain the specific dynamic that is exclusive to the Malaysian experience. Religious revivalism has always needed to contend with the immediate and practical need of a specific milieu. In Malaysia, factors like state authoritarianism and multi-communalism interact to shape the orientation and direction adopted by the revivalists. This socio-political conditioning weakened the exclusivism that characterised its early formation. Nevertheless, the movement strengthened precisely because it was responsive to the adjustments required in specific contexts. In its need to remain relevant, it has borrowed the language of human rights, accountability and democracy.

This section is organised around two periods of colonial and post-independence Malaysia. Within these periods, the contest between the revivalists and the establishment that continues today will be emphasised. The shift of attitude towards religion both from the state and revivalist perspective will also be demonstrated. This has had the simultaneous effect of changing the orientation from exclusivist to integrationist. Above all, this spells a progressive trend in experimenting with democratic values and thinking in politics and religion.

1.6.1 Religion in Colonial Period

Orientation of Islam in Southeast Asia in general and Malaysia in particular, is mediated within a syncretistic framework of indigenous culture (Houben 2003, 152; Anies 2004, 670; Marsot 1992, 160). Prior to Islam, the region had reached a sophisticated politico-cultural system identified by its Hindu influence. The system was centralised around the notion of raja as a divine king (*raja berdaulat*) whose existence legitimated the *rakyat* identity and culture. The raja's legitimacy meanwhile was invented through a series of myths, influenced by Hindu's Ramayana epic, which

glorifies his genealogical origin and possession of magic.⁶⁷ The cultural system is therefore maintained by the presence of a raja, as a source of power and identity, supported with a set of customary practices. The customary practices, known as *adat*, combined the domain of the practical with the spiritual. Aspects like family and marriage, medicine and relations between *rakyat* and raja were expressed within a naturalistic cosmology. Often conveniently wrapped under terms like superstition and shamanism,⁶⁸ *adat* acquired tremendous social value and compelled strict observation. A proverb “*biar mati anak jangan mati adat*” (let the child die but not the *adat*) was and is still invoked to illustrate strict reprimand against offenders. Overall, the system of pre-Islamic polity was “rigid and ascriptive” and more important, emphasised the absolute power of raja and traditional chiefs. Given the resilient nature of *adat* in Malay society, the arrival of Islam⁶⁹ did not significantly alter the life-custom of the people (Husin 1990a, 14; Gullick 1981, 14; Swettenham 1967, 103). This was due to two factors.

Firstly, the spread of Islam can only be facilitated through the support of a raja. In order to convince the raja that religion would not pose a rivalry to his authority, his role as an absolute authority and the centre of polity must be maintained. Therefore, the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia did not lead to the change of political culture in the region. In fact, the raja assumed a new function. He was the patron of Islam and was presented as divinely appointed persona to ensure Islam was embraced by the *rakyat* and implemented as the state religion. Nevertheless, this did not turn the state into an Islamic state in a manner that would imply religion was above the state. Instead, the raja, as an absolute monarch, was elevated higher than the state-religion. This can be illustrated in the case of *shariah* (legal codes). According to Milner (1983), the raja possessed a “discretionary power” where, should any conflict between

⁶⁷ C.f. *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals); *Misa Melayu*, translated as “The History of Perak Native” by George Maxwell (1884); and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*, often translated as “History of Kedah”. These are classical Malay texts characterised as belonging to the genre of high court/palace literature. For studies of classical Malay texts see Milner (1977) *The Malay Raja*; Winstedt (1969) *A History of Classical Malay Literature*; Brown (1970) *Malay Annals Annotated Translation*; Walker, J. (2004) “Autonomy, Diversity and Dissent”.

⁶⁸ The studies or description of Malay *adat* has primarily emphasised the aspect of superstition. See Winstedt (1951) *The Malay Magician*; Mohtar (1979) *Malay Superstitions and Belief*; and Wilkinson (1957) *Malay Customs and Beliefs*.

⁶⁹ The timing of Islam arrival varies from 7th to 12 or 13th century. However, the prominence started to be felt when the raja of Malacca converted the state to Islam in 15th century. For theories of the arrival of Islam to the region see Al-Attas (1969) *General Theory of the Islamisation* and Wertheim (1959) *Indonesian Society in Transition*.

the custom and religious code arise, he has the final word. The institution of *shariah*, in ideal manner, would require the adjudication process to be in the hands of Islamic jurists or scholars. However, in practice, the raja and his appointed chiefs had the task of issuing and implementing the *shariah*. The insistence on raja's absolutism meant that Islam was used as another court instrument for power display.

The second factor that can be attributed to the persistency of *adat* in the Islamisation of the region was the style of conversion. Ellen (1983) argues that a dichotomy existed between *adat* (in its extreme form of naturalism) and Islam (in legal-theological sense) was resolved via integration of shared mystical concepts. The role of *sufis* (mystics) in the conversion process facilitated the integration. The mystical dimension of Islam (as opposed to juristic or *shariah*-minded) expressed in a concept of *ruh* (lit. divine spirit) as a holy term, complemented the indigenous version of *semangat* (lit. spirit) as in naturalistic term. According to Ellen, despite these two concepts differing in origin, they can be understood in a similar cosmological framework. Nonetheless, the difference between them was not resolved, but remained open, or at best, deflected (1983, 64-68).

This instance illustrated the socio-cultural character of proselytisation of Islam in the Malay world. As Islam was forced to make concessions in order to ensure its steady progression, the position of indigenous authority and customary belief remained assured and strengthened. For this reason, the process of Islamisation retained the most crucial stabilising factor in the Malay political and social system: the ritual relationship between the raja and his *rakyat*, as elaborated in customs and in the later addition of Islam.

In the colonial era, the role of Islam as an instrument of raja power was retained and enhanced. The Pangkor Agreement (1874), signed between Sultan Abdullah of Perak and a British representative Andrew Clarke, set the principle for British colonial policy in Malaya. The agreement required the appointment of a British Resident "whose advice must be asked and acted upon on all matters except in the issues related to Malay culture and religion" (Gullick 1981, 25). The clause introduced a new understanding in the relationship between the state and religion. Previously, the functional and symbolic authority was combined under a single authority. Since the

raja had been stripped of his executive power and his role confined to affairs of religion and culture, this had the implication of severing religion from state politics more profoundly than before. The centrality of the raja in religious affairs did not come with the authority to enforce and hence limited the impact of religion.⁷⁰ In effect, the functional role of Islam was further weakened and marginalised. This set the pattern for a dichotomy between religion and politics that continues today.

The implementation of Islam at the state level had always been limited and was now further eroded throughout colonial rule. At the village level, the exercise of Islam was circumscribed within a feudalistic society held together by a mystical worldview and unquestioned obedience to rural authority. The real value of Islam for the village community was social. Ellen (1983) and Swettenham (1993) have noted that an in-depth knowledge of religion on behalf of the *imam* and the *rakyat* was never considered essential. Swettenham observed that for ordinary Malays, their knowledge of Islam was “faith in God, immortality of the soul, a heaven of ecstatic delights and a hell of punishments” (1993, 18). This shows that Islam, as a theology, was not rigorously adhered to by the *rakyat*, nor did it pose a problem for the *imam*. Islam as a social institution however, was more prominent judging by the role of *imam* and *penghulu* (district chief). They were the centre of village social activity. In a society where *adat* was expressed through socially bound rituals, inevitably the *imam* would become the centre of social life. Stockwell (1979) described the joint-role of *imam* and *penghulu* within a village:

... the day to day ordering (of) life rested with the *penghulu* and the *ulama*. While he was the link between peasant and local chiefs, his own interest was enmeshed with those of the villagers; and the local government depended in the last resort on his being accepted by the village community.

(1979, 147)

⁷⁰ Under the new power arrangement, Islam was bureaucratised in order to reflect the symbolic importance accorded to the raja's new role. New state posts were created such as *Qadi* (judge), *Majlis Ulama* (council of theologians) and Department of Religious Affairs which came under immediate raja's authority. The introduction of Islamic institutions however did not contribute to any substantive Islamisation. This was because of the raja's very limited resources and the monopoly of power of the Resident. See Mutalib 1990a, 16-17; Means 1969, 274; Ellen 1983, 80-81.

The centrality of religion in a closely-knit village community has meant the *imam* provided the social cohesion necessary for stability (Roff 1967, 19-20; Ellen 1983, 79). His authority was later to provide the buffer against the rise of religious reformists and later, a source of political support among Malay nationalists.

So far, it has been shown that the value of Islam in colonial and pre-colonial Malaya was informed on its practicality both from the perspective of raja (later the coloniser) and the *rakyat*. The socio-political system, encapsulated under the *adat* norms and beliefs, made such adaptation necessary. On the other hand, the lack of insistence or assertion to adhere to a strict reading of Islam has contributed to the perpetuation of feudalism in beliefs and social practice. The latter was to be cited as the reason that contributed to the backwardness of the Malays. This was to be the position of the Islamist revivalism in the beginning of the 20th century.

In the early 20th century, a new generation of young Islamic graduates of Al-Azhar university, began to organise themselves into a religious movement known as *Kaum Muda* (Young Turks).⁷¹ They challenged the rural religious establishment known as the *Kaum Tua* (Old Guards). The *Kaum Muda* attacked what they saw as a doctrinal form of Islamism that was synonymous with the *Kaum Tua*. *Kaum Tua* insisted the *ulama* had authority equal to the word of God. This conception was attacked by *Kaum Muda*. They called for reform from religious conservatism and superstition and educational opportunities for women (Roff 1967, 77-78). The debate sparked the beginning of a contest between what was seen as the feudalistic religious establishment and a new brand of reformist Islam.

The second challenge mounted by reformist Islam against traditionalist Islam came after the war. Following the end of the Japanese occupation and the subsequent British re-occupation, the subject of independence was high on the agenda of Malay nationalists. In the formative years of Malay nationalism, both UMNO and the radical Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) realised their survival would depend on their

⁷¹ For studies regarding the debate between the *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Muda* see Khoo (1991), Mutalib (1990a), and Roff (1967). In brief, the pioneers of *Kaum Muda* such as Syed Al-Hadi and Tahir Jalaluddin, both educated in Egypt, were exposed to the teachings of Muslim reformists such as Jamaludin Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh who called for an end of western imperialism and the unity of Muslim *ummah* (nation).

ability to win the support of the rural establishment, namely the *imam* and the *penghulu* (district chief) While UMNO, given its aristocratic background, would find such support as natural, the same cannot be said of a mass-based political party like the MNP. For this reason, it resorted to another channel of religious support in the form of the Supreme Religious Council of Malaya (MATA).

MATA was a splinter Islamic group of its Indonesian counterpart, Masjumi. Masjumi was an Islamic revivalist group in Indonesia that participated in the independence revolution of 1945. Through its close cooperation with the radical section of Malay nationalists of the MNP, Masjumi helped to set up MATA based in Gunung Semanggol in March 1947. MATA combined religious, political and economic reformism as a solution to Malay backwardness.⁷² Like other radical nationalists, the Islamists of MATA demanded an immediate independence from colonial rule. In addition, it carried a reformist's agenda as an ideology. The MATA ulama had criticised the religious establishment which they believed had not done much to eradicate non-Islamic rituals and superstitious belief. Moreover, it had called for the uplifting of the Malay economy through agricultural assistance and non-interest loans. Despite the reformist agenda, MATA failed to gather political support from the rural Malays. Its leadership, including its founder Abu Bakar Baqir, was arrested under the Emergency Regulation in 1948. As a result, the program for religious and socio-economic reform came to an abrupt end.

This showed once again that the force of religious reform in Malaya was hindered by the social structure of Malay *rakyat* which only reinforced the elite establishment and the values associated with it. Throughout the period of Emergency (1948-1960) reformist politics, in secular and religious forms, were effectively clamped down in order to eliminate threats to the Anglo-Malayan regime.

⁷² MATA comprised of three bodies: a political party known as *Hisbul Muslimin* (House of Islam); an education body *Lembaga Pendidikan Rakyat* (People's Education); and economic body *Pusat Perekonomian Melayu* (Centre for Malays Economy). For works on MATA see Firdaus (1984) and Stockwell (1979). A communist representative to the MATA conference, Rashid Maidin, had described his participation and observation of the congress in his *Memoir*.

1.6.2 Religion in the Post-Independence Period (1957-1990)

Thus far, I have shown the colonial context of Islamic revivalism in Malaysia. The force of Islamism, as an agent of socio-political change, was constrained by both structural and cultural factors. This had the impact of under-cutting its supposedly universal application, and in the process, consigning it to a personal-social trajectory. In this section, I will discuss the revivalist movement that started to regain ground in the era of state-led modernisation. The state response to the revivalist movement will also be discussed. The interaction between religious forces and state authoritarianism has forced religion to adapt to the contemporary political and social constraint.

In the post-independence period, in particular during the 1960s and 1970s, political changes occurred in the Middle East.⁷³ Central within this transformation is the articulation of Islamic political activism. Islamic revivalism in the Middle East combined the sources of medieval moralism and literalism with Muslim Brotherhood's emphasis on organisation and discipline (Al-Azmeh 1991, 45). These sources combined into a form of movement known collectively as a modern form of Islamic resurgence or revivalism. Husin (1990b) has identified several traits that characterised the modern Islamic resurgence. These are:

1. The confidence that Islam and the modern world are mutually harmonious. This is expressed in an ideology of "holistic" Islam that integrates faith (*aqidah*), law (*shariah*), state (*daulah*) and spiritual (*din*).
2. A desire to identify with a broader Muslim community (*umma*). Consequently, transnational movements such as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and the International Islamic Federation of Student Organisation (IIFSO) express this concept of *umma*.
3. The formation of movement-type bodies that aimed to organise Muslims into a collective body that is oriented towards practicality and problem solving.
(1990b, 878-879)

⁷³ This refers to events such as the Six Days War (1967), the Iranian Revolution (1979), the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979), and the anti-Saudi attack on the *Kaabah* (Muslim holiest site) in 1979.

These elements show that Islamic resurgence is an attempt at reconciliation between the force of tradition and modernity. It is an attempt to engage modernity within a culturally/religiously nuance perspective without entailing a rejection or antagonism of the social reality. From this, it is clear that the revitalisation of Islamic spirit is in tandem with the progression of modernity.

On the other hand, the concept of integrating historical-religious idealism with political activism was not new.⁷⁴ The difference this time was the condition that allowed the translation of what was previously construed as idealism into a concrete political struggle. This was mediated within a condition of modern capitalism. The globalisation of capital, technology and information made the idea of united and transnational *ummah* (lit. community) and social movement a possibility. As a result of capitalist globalisation barriers between nations and between people were dissolved. This facilitated the inflows of goods and ideas, and in the process, accelerated internal changes. By the same token, religious revivalism was part of this commodity-export that made its presence felt in other nations' socio-political contexts. Therefore, the phenomena of religious revivalism in post-colonial Malaysia assumed its form within this transnational context.

In the previous discussion, I have shown two things. Firstly, the ideological root of Islamic revivalism and, secondly, the condition that enabled Islamic revivalism to gain prominence across the Muslim nations. These two have facilitated the appeal of the universal Islam as an alternative to local politics, even local Islam. There is however, a problem with the ideology of the universal model. In its idealism to pursue its universal claim informed by a historical model, the Islamists' ideologue saw the vision of comprehensive Islam as a functionally integrated whole. This view has been contested. There has been a sizeable degree of separation between the state and

⁷⁴ This is encapsulated in the Islamic term *jihad* (lit. struggle) which combined the element of spiritualism (faith) with physical action. For a brief introduction, see Mohammad, N. (1985) "The Doctrine of Jihad". Historically also, this has been propounded by the works of Rashid Rida, Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin Al Afghani who were influential to the ideology of Muslim Brotherhood.

religion.⁷⁵ In fact, the boundary between state and religion is often marked with contention and readjustment.

Having established the conceptual limitation inherent in a universal model of reformist ideology, the focus next is on the politicisation of religious revivalism in Malaysia. There are two things will be discussed. Firstly, the phenomenon of revivalism in Malaysia was strengthened within a process of economic modernisation among the Malays. Although inspired by the international stirrings of Islamism, the universal model of revivalism reached its point of limit in local application. Secondly, I will show the role of the authoritarian state in adapting to the pressure of revivalism, while at the same time maintaining its nationalistic ideology founded on race. The outcome of the contest between the state nationalism and Islamic universalism has rendered both the state and the reformist vulnerable to populist pressure.

There are various reasons that may account for Islamic resurgence in post-independence Malaysia. Chandra Muzaffar (1987) argues that religion provided the spiritual solace among the newly urbanised Malays. Shamsul (1997) supports the claim. He argues that Islam has provided the spiritual antidote in the environment of intense material competition. For the Malays, having been uprooted from their familiar collective life in the village, Islam gave them the sense of moral purpose that was somehow absent in a modern environment. This means Islam has occupied a moral and spiritual vacuum in the urban sector. Lee (1994) meanwhile argues the rise of Islamic awareness was engendered by the spirit of the NEP that promoted Malay culturalism. It was the sense that Islam was regarded as secondary to race that encouraged awareness that it was time for Islam to gain its importance.

The Islamic resurgence in post-independence Malaysia was characterised by the phenomena of *dakwah* (lit. missionary) (Muhammad 1981; Nagata 1980&1982). One of the early proponents of *dakwah* was the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia

⁷⁵ For analysis on the separation between state and politics in an historical model, see Goldberg (1993) "Private goods, public wrongs, and civil society in some medieval Arab theory and practice". See also Eickelman & Piscatori (1996), *Muslim Politics*.

(ABIM).⁷⁶ Founded in 1971, the group appealed to the Malay youths in local universities. It combined the ideology of puritanism with social activism. ABIM has utilised the Islamic principle of justice with the empirical reality of poor Malays in the countryside. It demonstrated its commitment to the poor by organising street protests that were coordinated between various universities in 1974. The protest was directed at the state failure to alleviate the poverty of the rice-growers in Baling which they claimed has resulted in starvation.

ABIM's confrontational strategy has not only upset the state, but also the rural religious establishment. For the village elites, ABIM was seen as politically motivated, too young and pro-Middle Eastern (Nagata 1982, 53). ABIM has also offended the communities by calling for an Islamic solution to the multi-communal problem (Muhamad 1981, 1051). ABIM's "middle-eastern" approach in religion, which did not take into account the reality of plural society in Malaysia, has limited its constituency within the confines of race, namely the urban Malays.

From the state perspective, the Islamic resurgence, especially the *dakwah* movement, was viewed with suspicion (Muhamad 1981; Camroux 1996). There were two reasons for this. In the 1970s the administrative stratum of the state was still under the monopoly of the aristocratic western-outlook mentality. Moreover, Islamism was seen as a destabilising force in the multi-communal Malaysia. Hence, the state tried to keep Islam out of mainstream politics.⁷⁷ This can be seen by the way it handled the ABIM's street protest in 1974. The state responded by placing security forces in the universities, and arrested some 1000 university lecturers and students under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Moreover, the University and University College Act (AUKU) were amended to include tougher laws to prevent student incursion into politics and mass protest.

⁷⁶ There are other *dakwah* groups namely *Jamaah Tabligh* and *Al -Arqam*, but due to limited space, I will confine the discussion to ABIM. For studies of *dakwah* movements See Muhamad (1981) and Nagata (1982)

⁷⁷ There were several state sponsored Islamic programmes, but with limited impact such as the *Dakwah* Month in 1978.

It was only during the early reign of Mahathir Mohammad that the state pursued committed programs of Islamic reform.⁷⁸ When he rose to power in 1981, the image of civic Islam began to gain ground as the *dakwah* movement flourished both in Malaysia and abroad (Regan 1976, 96). This suggests that state and religion need not be antagonistic. Instead the state can take a leading role in modernising Islam. The Mahathir's Islamisation programme was designed to show the modern side of Islam. One of the earliest steps taken en-route to his Islamisation programme was courting ABIM's president, Anwar Ibrahim.⁷⁹ Anwar's foray into UMNO was considered as a coup (Cheah 2002, 214; Jomo & Shabery1988, 856). This was because Anwar was considered close to UMNO's rival party the Pan-Islamic Party (PAS) and also because of his anti-establishment background. Anwar's entry into UMNO in 1982, and a year later into cabinet, rapidly increased Mahathir's Islamic credentials. Added to his credits were the foundation of the Islamic university (1983), Islamic bank (1982) and the introduction of an Islamic civilisation course in universities (1983). In the meantime, the ABIM profile as an erstwhile government critic began to wane, and some of the elite members left for the Islamist party PAS.

The state was also cautious in its dealing with the *dakwah* movement in order not to upset the balance of plural society. This was done with some success by justifying some of its heavy-handed measures as being necessary for national stability. There were two events that saw the state curbing religious 'militancy' in the interest of national security. The first event was the military confrontation between a 'militant' group and the security forces in 1984. The state accused the group leader Muhammad Ibrahim Libya (also a PAS member) of trying to overthrow the state by armed

⁷⁸ This was parallel to his disillusionment with the pro-western approach characterised by his predecessor. His Look East Policy, his championing of Third World Nationalism and support over the Palestine issue have raised his profile (and Malaysia) as a moderate Muslim nation. A useful source for Mahathir's ideology is Khoo Boo Teik (1995) *The Paradox of Mahathirism*.

⁷⁹ Before joining mainstream politics, Anwar Ibrahim (b. 1947) was active in youth movements such as the Association of National Muslim Students (PKPIM), ABIM, and the Malaysian Youth Council (MBM). He was imprisoned under the ISA for 20 months for his involvement in the Baling protest. He was invited into UMNO in 1981 by Mahathir Mohammad, and rose rapidly in the party hierarchy and cabinet. In 1993 he became the Deputy Prime Minister and UMNO vice-president. His close alliance with Mahathir coupled with his political craft, almost earned him the most-coveted position of Prime Minister when in 1997, he was appointed as acting Prime Minister. He has earned an international reputation for his effort at inter-civilisation dialogue which was evident through an Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC) which he was a patron. He also authored *Asian Renaissance* (1996) which espoused a vision of civil society based on indigenous culture and religion. His harmonious approach was in contrast to Mahathir's clash of civilisation version of "Asian values".

rebellion. The conflict resulted in 18 deaths and some 1000 members, including women and children, being detained (Cheah 2002, 212; Chin 2004, 366).

Another event that received region-wide attention was the banning of Al-Arqam in 1994, the largest *dakwah* group in Malaysia.⁸⁰ Founded in 1968, the movement was accused of attempting to launch armed rebellion in order to install an Islamic republic in Malaysia. Moreover, the teachings of the group, known as *Aurad Muhammadiyah*, were allegedly deviant and detrimental to the faith of the majority of Muslims.⁸¹ The state resorted to a regionally-coordinated clamp-down on the group that resulted in its disbandment in Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia⁸² (Camroux 1996, 864). ISA laws were used to detain its leader Ashari Muhammad and a live telecast was arranged to broadcast the leadership's confession of deviating from Islamic teaching.⁸³

The state actions in both of these events served to show that state co-option of religious aspirations was checked by its authoritarian measures. This was rationalised as a safety valve for a multi-communal Malaysia. During the 1980s, as the state Islamisation drive was gaining momentum, forms of religious *dakwah* outside the mainstream were portrayed as militant and deviational. By putting down what was seen as powerful and potentially threatening to the national security, the state approach was tolerated by the majority of Malaysians in favour of a moderate and stable state-sponsored Islamist movement.

⁸⁰ Following its disbandment, the state has seized its assets worth USD 120 million which were accumulated from its extensive regional-wide business activity, private schools and donations from its members. 7000 government servants became active members of the group which was ordered to leave the party. (*The New Straits Times*, 7 July 1994)

⁸¹ For reading of Al-Arqam role in socio-religious scene of Malaysia, see Ann (2005), *Al Arqam di Sebalik Tabir* and Farawahida M Yusuf (2007), *Al Arqam dan Ajaran Aurad Muhammadiyah*

⁸² See also Parliamentary Debate on the Senate proceeding to discuss the state strategy to diffuse the security threat posed by Al-Arqam. *Parliamentary Debates*, 8th Parliament, 3rd Session, Tuesday 28th December 1993.

⁸³ The teaching was declared as a deviation (*ajaran sesat*) by the Islamic Council of every state (except Kelantan) in August 1994. One of the deviational practices of Al-Arqam, known as *yaqazah*, was cited to be the cause. It was a spiritual ceremony in which the Arqam leader claimed he had spoken with Prophet Muhammad and his companions. See the state religious department website for a list of disbanded Islamist groups, <http://www.islam.gov.my/ajaransesat/pdf/>

1.7 Theme of 'Peaceful' Independence

Discussion so far has highlighted the prevalence of state power in every segment of Malaysian politics and society. However, it has also shown that state authoritarianism should be seen as adaptive mechanism for dealing with the pressure of competing demands in a multi-communal society. What emerged from such practices was the deepening of inter-communal insecurity and distrust fed by state intervention. Ultimately, state authority remained assured and undeterred.

Of late, state predominance has come under challenge from pro-democratic forces. They represent a broader segment of society such as from the human rights' groups, Islamist interest groups and political bodies that assumed an agenda for democracy and institutional transparency. Such pressure has positive impacts on burgeoning democratic awareness among the people and at the same time, exerts pressure for institutional reform. And I argue that the process of democracy has made inroads into the field of culture. This can be seen in the field of national history that has for long been dominated by the state-agenda. The state investment in national history can be illustrated by the theme of 'peaceful' independence.

Malaya will soon become an independent state. That independence is the result of the just demands of the people of Malaya to which the British Government has sympathetically conceded. The *Merdeka* we seek is genuine independence. We want our independent Malaya to enjoy the same prestige and sovereignty as all the other free and independent nations of the world.

(Tunku Abdul Rahman, speech over the BBC Radio, Dec. 26, 1956)

There are two striking features in the speech from the then UMNO president, later the first Prime Minister of independent Malaya.⁸⁴ These are the view that Malayan independence was "sympathetically conceded" by the British, and that the independence achieved was the "result of the just demands". On cursory viewing, there was nothing wrong with this portrayal. It represented some aspect of historical

⁸⁴ Tunku Abdul Rahman (1903- 1990) was the 14th son from the 20th of the Raja of Kedah. He read Law in Cambridge, where he picked up the habit of driving fast cars and a passion for horse-racing. He became UMNO President in 1951 when the founder, Onn Jaafar, left the party. See his biography, Miller, H. (1959) *Prince and Premier*.

truth in the route towards independence that mainly involved negotiation and diplomacy. The impression that Malayan independence lacked struggle was also noted in *The Times*. The progression from a colonial status to full independence occurred with relative ease compared to other liberation struggles, as described in the following:

Unlike India or Pakistan, where the claim for independence was pressed through many years of struggle and dispute, Malaya has made the passage to free nationhood relatively easy. ... The mere ease of the change, compared with the other anti-colonial struggles of other countries, has meant a leadership in Malaya untested by setbacks and disappointment. Malayan nationalism has not been born out of conflict. There is not a Minister in the new Government who has ever spent a day in prison for sedition. (*The Times*, 31 August 1957)

These two examples highlight the common assumption about Malayan independence. They convey the picture of a 'peaceful' independence process in the absence of confrontational struggle. This research is concerned with the consequences of the representation of 'peaceful' independence in present time. The consequences are socio-cultural and political. From a socio-cultural point of view, there was a belief that British colonialism in Malaya was a relatively benign experience. The residual colonial structure and mentality in the contemporary politics and society was not perceived as problematic. Zainal Kling (2005) argues that the problems facing contemporary Malaysia such as the issue of national integration and excessive focus on growth⁸⁵ had its root in the colonial past. Despite that, the issue of colonialism did not attract much attention from the administration, academics or the public. He explains that:

Possibly since the experience of colonialism was not so oppressive, this has led the present generation to be less critical of the phenomena of post-coloniality that is happening in our society. Another reason was the presence of other more pressing and urgent issues within our culture and society.

⁸⁵ This is reflected on various long-term visionary plans such as the Vision 2020 program which aimed to shift Malaysia into a developed nation-status by 2020. In 2005, the then Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi launched "corridor development regions" in order to open up Malaysia to foreign investment and to fast-track the country's productive capacity into a higher economic plane.

(Kling 2005, 28)

Kling thus believes the idea of benign colonialism as understood in the present context to mean that the colonial experience was quite remote or separated from other more “pressing” and “urgent” issues in today’s society. However, the severance of the current issues from its formation in colonial history ignores the reality of continuation of colonial structure and mentality constituted during the colonising process.

While the socio-cultural viewpoint is inclined to see the present situation as conceptually severed from the past, the same cannot be said in the political domain. Instead, there was a continual exercise in remembering the past so that the current generation can be reminded about the sacrifice made by the previous nationalists. During the 61st UMNO Assembly in 2007, UMNO President and Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi in his speech stated that:

UMNO has done more than merely lead the government for 52 years. It has succeeded in building Malaysia into one of the most successful nations in the world, with an average growth rate of 6.3 percent per annum over fifty years. When we gained our independence, we ranked among the poorest countries in the world. Now, we are classified as a high human development index nation. Our nominal per capita income is RM20, 900 – a 26 fold increase from the time of *Merdeka*. (Utusan Malaysia, 8 November 2007)

This statement conveyed the impression of UMNO’s contribution to the country since the time of *merdeka* (lit. freedom). Not only has UMNO attained the nation’s freedom, it has also led the country into a period of growth and progress. This claim is significant. It demonstrated the ease with which a political party can actually claim its significance not only to a particular race, but also to the country as a whole. More importantly, it expressed a sense of ‘continuation’ of UMNO importance to the country since the time of *Merdeka*. For this reason, there was a belief that the current generation must be obliged to appreciate the role of UMNO leaders, past and present, to the country’s prosperity. In this regard, Badawi further stated that:

Malaysians should be thankful for the dignity and sovereignty that our nation possesses. We can be proud of how we have progressed since we attained our freedom. Much of this stems from the wisdom of our leadership, beginning with Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, followed by Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Tun Hussein Onn and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The illustration above highlights the state-party use of history in order to rationalise its power in the present time. History in this sense is not only used to express the party's contribution, but more importantly, it is used to compel obedience from the subjects. This mode of domination is known as 'hegemony'; where the exercise of power in civil society is exercised through consent (c.f. Gramsci 1973).

The discussion so far shows various attitudes, socially and politically, in regards to 'peaceful' independence. But what becomes a matter of interest here is the state-party ability to draw its legitimacy from certain aspects of the past. The aspect of 'peaceful' independence was defined as the locus of the party's achievement. This image was then extended to explain the country's economic progress. Above all, the outcome has reinforced UMNO's sense of importance in politics and society. This exemplifies the connection between state authority and the narrative of 'peaceful' independence.

However, the state dominance in history interpretation has been put under pressure. The interrogation of the state-version of 'peaceful' independence by opposition politics will be discussed next.

1.7.1 Debate on 'Peaceful' Independence

In 2005, a short article was published in an opposition party website. Ronnie Liu, DAP⁸⁶ secretary for international bureau, claims that "UMNO leaders were not the real fighters for Independence". UMNO nationalists were basically lackeys for colonial authority, the "friends of the British". Liu instead argues that the "real

⁸⁶ Democratic Action Party (DAP) was formed in 18 March 1966. It promotes the vision of democratic socialism which "desires a social order whereby there can be free development of human personality within the community". Its vision of nation building calls for the implementation of ethnic equality, and for the replacement of economic distribution based on ethnic grounds with a policy of merit and needs. Despite its egalitarian pledge, the party mobilisation and support is drawn primarily from the Chinese community, hence its politics is typified by a pro-Chinese attitude.

freedom fighters” were those who had staked their life at the frontline in the quest for attaining the nation’s freedom. As a result of their commitment not to tolerate colonial rule, they were forced to endure long-term imprisonment or to commit their lives to guerrilla warfare. The article concluded that:

... Without the struggle and sacrifice put up by these freedom fighters and the pressure mounted by the MCP (the communist party), the British would certainly not (be) willing to cooperate and negotiate with the Alliance leaders for an ‘Independence without bloodshed’. (Liu 2005)

Liu’s allegation that UMNO nationalists were not the “real independence fighters” was met with derision and revulsion. *Utusan Malaysia*, a national press owned by UMNO, had run strings of responses from politicians, academics and the public that condemned Liu’s article. The criticism was focused on what was perceived as Liu’s attempt to inaugurate communist militancy as a form of independence struggle. An UMNO veteran Borhan Md. Yaman⁸⁷ stated that DAP was simply twisting historical facts. The communists were not freedom fighters but instead their aim was to “colonise *Tanah Melayu* and to subject her under their thumb”. He continues, “20 February 1956 was the evidence of UMNO’s success in gaining independence from the British when people from across the country gathered to receive the return of Tunku Abdul Rahman and his delegation from London”⁸⁸ (*Utusan Malaysia*, 9 November 2005).

The state, through its dominant party UMNO, was quick to dismiss Liu’s allegation. UMNO Youth leader, Hishammuddin Hussein, believed that the article “was very malicious and clearly playing with fire” (*Utusan Malaysia*, 6 September 2005). A similar view was expressed by the former Deputy Prime Minister Musa Hitam. He described the article as tainted with “politics of hate”. He was concerned that this

⁸⁷ Datuk Borhan Md. Yaman (b. 1930) is a former secretary of UMNO division in the state of Malacca. He was a member of the organising committee for the historic event in Bandar Hilir when Tunku Abdul Rahman announced the date for Malaya’s independence. See his recollection of the event in an interview “When two lorries provided the stage”, *The New Straits Times*, 20 May 2007.

⁸⁸ This refers to the *merdeka* mission that took place in London from 18 January to 8 February 1956 between the Malayan delegations (led by Tunku Abdul Rahman), Colonial Secretary, the High Commissioner of Malaya, and British Minister of State. The negotiation involved issues concerning the transition to independence such as defence/security, administration, economics and constitution.

political style could reignite the tragedy of the communal riots of 1969. According to Musa, the riots were sparked by the hate sentiment incited towards the government by the opposition parties. Similarly, by questioning the role of UMNO nationalists such as Tunku Abdul Rahman, the opposition was seen as challenging the administration and that could potentially repeat the May 13 tragedy (*Utusan Malaysia*, 8 September 2005). Given the controversy arising from the article, a historian, Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud, believes that the question of national independence should be closed to public debate. Instead, he suggested that the people “just leave the debating task for historians” in order to prevent the issue turning into political polemic (*Utusan Malaysia*, 11 September 2005).

The controversy generated from DAP’s article triggered debates over what actually constitutes “independence struggle” (*perjuangan kemerdekaan*). From the state perspective, UMNO nationalists were the ‘true’ independence fighters as a result of their successful negotiation with the British. For the opposition DAP, the communists should be recognised as independence fighters because their armed struggle was responsible for the British decision to grant freedom earlier than planned. The dispute does not centre on communist apologists alone. Islamist opposition PAS⁸⁹ has also contributed to the debate. They ask, “Was it true that only Onn Jaafar, Tunku Abdul Rahman and UMNO leaders were the only group that strenuously worked for our country’s independence?” They believed that historical interpretation was dominated by the UMNO perspective. For this reason, PAS called for a “re-writing of the history of national independence”. Re-interrogating the past, it was argued, is essential in order to make visible the history of independence so that “truth and justice can be restored” (*Harakah Online*, 27 August 2006).

This illustration of the debate concerning national independence demonstrates that the issue is ultimately a political question. Every political group tried to stake their claim

⁸⁹ Islamic Party of Malaysia or PAS was formed in 1955. The main agenda of the party since its formation until now is to create an Islamic government that could rule the country according to Islamic values and laws. The upper hierarchy of the party consisted of *ulama* leadership (*kepimpinan ulama*) although its membership is fast gaining ground from the middle class and professional Malay community. For study of PAS see Chin, J. (2004) “Exigency or Expediency?” and Husin (1990a).

in the interpretation of who the 'real' freedom fighter was. From this, it could be argued that each group was merely representing sectarian interest rather than a search for 'truth'. But a more significant point arising from this debate is related to the orientation of national history in Malaysia. The process of reinterpreting and redefining aspects of national independence shows that history is contemporary and politically constructed.

My argument in the following chapters therefore suggests that there has been a substantial control of historical-representation by the state. Such dominance is by no means hegemonic but contestable. I want to address the emergence of alternative perspectives that could raise doubts and questions over the legitimacy of the state authority founded on its claim on history. Argument will be made that the availability of sources from different perspectives points to other processes of resistance in the field of culture.

CHAPTER 2

Theorising Cultural Resistance: Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Post-Colonial Studies

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to build a framework of cultural resistance which will be used to examine the practice of resistance in post-colonial Malaysia. It first examines critically the work of Edward Said's *Orientalism* which is the main theoretical and philosophical source for this research. I argue that the main proposition in *Orientalism* in regards to the relation between power and knowledge can be extended to discussion of resistance in the representation of Malaysian history. The chapter then examines the relationship between *Orientalism* and the field of post-colonialism. This second section focuses on the way that post-colonial studies have expanded issues raised in *Orientalism* such as power, agency and culture. In this section too, I present a critique of the post-colonial approach to resistance that could limit its applicability in the Malaysian context. Nevertheless, this by no means renders the approach obtuse but is a reflection of its expanding engagement into non-western contexts. Next, the reception of post-colonialism from the Malaysian academy will be discussed. The current attitude is that the post-colonial project of interrogating western dominance is nothing new. Instead, it has been a practice in the Malaysian academy since the 1960s. This criticism notwithstanding, I suggest that Malaysian critics of post-colonialism have overlooked the broader significance of the field in developing critical approaches towards various forms of domination. The final section will attempt to construct a framework of cultural resistance grounded on *Orientalism*. It will examine three concepts that are used in the research namely culture, resistance and agency.

2.2 *Orientalism* (1978)

My treatment of Edward Said's *Orientalism* is taking place in the context of an inquiry into the narrative of national history in Malaysia. I come to it preoccupied with the following questions:

- What is the assumption that characterised discourse of national history?
- What is the relation between national history (at present) and colonial past?
- Does the narrative have a power/political dimension to it?
- Is it possible to offer another reading of history from different location(s) and perspective(s)?

Orientalism is a significant source for several reasons. Firstly, the book concerns itself with the issue of power. In particular, Said claims that the Western power configuration was largely shaped and informed from the imperial experience. Secondly, *Orientalism* demonstrates the correspondence between power politics and the discourse of culture. He discusses the ways the exercise of territorial accumulation have simultaneously enabled and increased the pursuit of knowledge about other societies. For Said, power politics and power culture are interdependent. Finally, *Orientalism* is not a mere description or criticism of an established body of scholarship; more importantly, *Orientalism* demonstrates that *every* field of culture is not to be distinguished from its specific political formation. In fact, culture can be and has been used for perpetuating the claim of authority in any given power relation.

For these reasons, the research aims to extend the issues raised in *Orientalism* for understanding the practice of resistance in Malaysia. I argue that the ideas expressed in the work, specifically the inter-dependency of power and culture, are useful analytical instruments for interrogating the complicity of elite power and historical claims in Malaysia. Therefore, *Orientalism* is used in this research as a philosophical and theoretical foundation upon which a critique of elitist history is built.

Three tasks will be carried out in this section. Firstly, I will elucidate the political background, within the academy and externally, that contributed to the success of

Orientalism. The context explains the reason behind the longstanding interest, debate and issues generated by *Orientalism* from its inception until now. Secondly, a brief description of the structure and main argument of the book will be discussed. Said argues that *Orientalism* is above all concerned with the problems or issues that arise from the nexus of power and culture/knowledge. For Said, the illustration of “the formidable structure of cultural domination” in *Orientalism* is a reminder of both the western perpetration, as well as, for the formerly colonised people, “the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others” (Said 1978, 25). Finally, three inter-related categories crucial to the thought and critique of *Orientalism* will be examined. These are power, culture and resistance.

2.2.1 Ground of emergence

There have been various reviews that have discussed the motivation of *Orientalism*. The most striking reason attributed is the influence of the Six Days War (1967) which had intense impact upon the way Said reflected upon his identity in the climate of political hostility (Tariq 2003; Selby 2006; Ashcroft 2004). Said himself admitted the influence the conflict had upon him. Prior to that, his sense of “history as an Arab and as a Palestinian didn’t bear relationship” to his reading and his philosophy as an intellectual. Following the war, Said grew more conscious of his identity. From then onwards, *Orientalism* announced his shift “to act as an interlocutor rather than as a silent and inert Other” (Said & Paul 1988, 32). Two other works were published to continue *Orientalism*’s political engagement, namely *The Question of Palestine* (1980) and *Covering Islam* (1981).

I approach *Orientalism* from another angle. Instead of elaborating on Said’s motivation to write in the first place, I choose to ponder the factors that have contributed to the success of the book. This is to emphasise the relevance of the book in understanding the contemporary situation that is fused with western political and cultural dominance. In this context, *Orientalism* is an attempt to demystify the prejudice that underlines western expansion in the past and present.

The singular aspect that stood out from *Orientalism* is that it is unpretentiously political. According to an academic, for this reason alone *Orientalism* is seen as a

radical work of its time. Kennedy (2000) describes the academic context during the emergence of *Orientalism*. Literary studies were gradually influenced by the external impact of political programmes advanced by the civil rights and feminist movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a result, there were “cautious attempts” to include groups or individuals at the margin of society as subjects of study. Nevertheless, such attempts were still considered peripheral. According to Kennedy, these efforts “offered nothing comparable to Orientalism’s insistence on the inextricable connections between literature, history and politics” (2000, 15). Another reviewer has also noted the significant impact of *Orientalism*. Its publication was, despite not being in a bestsellers’ list, described as a “media event”. The book has generated publicity for conjuring up how “institution counters institution”, or to rephrase, a contest between academy and foreign policy (Beard 1979, 3).

What accounts for the impact generated by *Orientalism*? After all, it certainly was not original in exposing the ethnocentricity and prejudice synonymous in scholarship relating to the Orient.⁹⁰ The answer possibly lies in its challenge towards the widely-held assumption of an East-West ideological contest that was dear to American foreign policy at the time. Since the British withdrawal from the Middle East in the late 1940s, America has assumed a central position in the region. It was also no coincidence that American universities began to assert authority in the studies of the region, with departments specialising in Islam and Middle Eastern affairs flourishing relative to the decline of the subject in British universities.⁹¹ In this regard,

⁹⁰ C.f. Abdel Malek (1963) “Orientalism in Crisis”; and Tibawi (1964) “English Speaking Orientalists”.

⁹¹ There are two indicators that can be used to point out the connection of politics and oriental studies in the American academy. A primary association that gathers every scholar of Middle Eastern studies was formed in 1966. The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) that claimed to be a “non-political learned society”. However, one of its prominent founding members, Bernard Lewis, formed a breakaway association known as the Association for the Study of the Middle East and African in 2007. ASMEA was formed as a reaction to the MESA’s “highly politicised leadership”, “apologetic approach towards the West’s foes” and “inattention to radical Islam”. ASMEA’s alleged vow of non-partisanship is doubtful. Its founding members, Lewis and Fouad Ajami, are two well-known policy advisors for the Bush administration. A second example is *Campus Watch*, an academic watchdog and an influential lobby group headed by Daniel Pipes. The aim of the organisation is to check against the “analytical errors”, “extremism” and “apologetic” attitude among the practitioners of Middle Eastern studies. Nevertheless, the body has a watch list of academics that have voiced critical attitudes towards Zionism. It contained figures like Noam Chomsky (MIT), Gabriel Pieterberg, (UCLA) and Norman Finkelstein (DePaul). Its website has also contained reports of alleged political connection in every Middle Eastern department in major universities. It is clear that *Campus Watch* is more like a surveillance body to check the popular influence of the progressive figures in American universities. The implication of ideological protectionism is obvious. A political scientist has noted that after 50

Orientalism has successfully elaborated this connection. It argues the field becomes a policy-making instrument disguised under the pretence of pure scholarship.

Furthermore, the American connection in tumultuous crises in Iran (1979) and Lebanon (1981-82) had bolstered the book's claim on the unobtrusive relation between politics and knowledge.

Another development that has played a role in the success of *Orientalism* can be attributed to the ambivalence of identity and location inhabited by the author, Edward Said.⁹² This is explained by Said's identity as a Palestinian-born 'oriental' and his location in metropolitan academia. Said openly declared *Orientalism* is a "personal investment" that bears the traces of his personal experience. He elaborates:

The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and, when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. (Said 1978, 27)

Said noted such alienation was present both in the immediate and in the general environment. In his immediate setting in the western academy, Said noticed liberal orientalist would identify themselves with Zionists but not the Arabs, culturally and politically. Moreover, in the popular media, the cultural stereotyping of the Arabs has only reinforced the "imaginative demonology of the mysterious Orient". As a result, the perception of issues relating to Palestine or even Islam would easily slide into standardised moulds of anti-Arab and anti-Semitism. Said hoped his book would disentangle the "web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology" in which "every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely

years of the flourishing of Middle Eastern studies in American universities, many scholars failed to provide original and in-depth insight into the political processes in Middle East (Bill, J. 1996). For *Campus Watch* visit <http://www.campus-watch.org/>

⁹² Edward W. Said (1935-2003) was born in Jerusalem to a prosperous Anglican family who migrated to Cairo in 1947. He was educated in Mount Hermon, Mass. in 1951, and later graduated from Princeton (1960) and Harvard (1964). He was a member of the Palestinian National Council from 1977 until 1991, from which he protested the Oslo Peace process as an unfair settlement for Palestinians. Said's political advocacy in Palestinian matters earned him both admiration and censorship in American academia and public media. Said was accused of "fabricating facts", "plagiarism" and "hypocrisy" by an American orientalist think tank, the Middle East Forum. See Karsh & Miller (2008) "Did Edward Said really speak truth to power?"

punishing destiny” (1978, 27). *Orientalism* is thus an endeavour at personal liberation from institutional and socio-cultural prejudice.

The two elements mentioned previously, the foreign-policy connection and the ambivalent location, are combined to appeal to the wide-ranging interests that went beyond the field of Middle-Eastern studies. In a 1988 interview, Said expressed his surprise at the interest generated from the single book. *Orientalism* has opened up the study of ‘otherness’, in particular the issues of marginalisation and representation in media and scholarship (Said & Paul 1988, 32). More importantly, *Orientalism* has paved the way for development of post-colonial studies that have combined studies of ‘other’ cultures and societies grounded in the experience of colonialism.

2.3 Overview

This section offers a general description of *Orientalism*. The aim is to provide some basic understanding of important issues addressed in respective chapters. This will be followed by a critical reading of the definition and the main argument proposed in the book.

Orientalism begins with an introduction, followed by three chapters. The introduction provides substantial discussion on theoretical issues that occupy the rest of the book. The issues that informed the theorisation of *Orientalism* are the role of culture, discourse and authority in the academic discipline that deals with the orient as a subject of study.

For the role of culture Said refers to a term used by Gramsci, “hegemony”, as an “indispensable concept for understanding the cultural life in industrial West” (Said 1978, 7).⁹³ In *Orientalism*, hegemony is used to explain the durability of certain ideas about the orient that were circulating in western discourse of culture. The arrays of oriental ideas such as despotism, splendour and degeneracy are disseminated in western cultural texts as the standard description about the orient. Whether or not such descriptions adequately reflected the reality of the orient is of secondary importance.

⁹³ Any reference to *Orientalism* from now is summarised in page number only.

For Said, more important is the positioning of orient as the weaker side which has by implication given the impression of the relative strength of western culture. The idea of hegemony therefore, refers to the continuous acceptance and unchallenged 'fact' of oriental weakness that subsequently enables western culture to be constructed as the superior one both within and outside the west.

The notion of discourse refers to the way orientalism is produced by and used as a mechanism of control over other societies. Said employs the notion of discourse from Foucault, but also announces his difference from him.⁹⁴ Foucault did not include the role of an author in his conceptualisation of discourse. Said however, believes in the "determining imprint of individual writers" (23). Said embraced the view advanced by Noam Chomsky's study on the connection between politics and scholarship in the Vietnam War.⁹⁵ Inspired by Chomsky's finding, Said went on to claim that for an orientalist, "he came up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second" (11). He shows the individual author is always, to an extent, ideologically informed and influenced by the power interest that defines him.

The role of authority is crucial for *Orientalism*. For Said, authority refers to the network of interests that produced and maintained orientalism. This network consisted of individual authors, politicians and experts who have direct investment in the orient. For academics, the orient is the source of their prestige as the experts on things oriental. For politicians, the orient is the source of imperial enterprise in the quest for market and political power. Said argues the convergence of knowledge and political interest began in the late 18th to early 19th century, during which the height of imperialism coincided with the proliferation of oriental scholarship. From this historical moment onwards, orientalism, as an academic discourse, has morphed into a "corporate institution" that renders service to the political interest and in turn, was sustained by the continuing political and material investment in the orient. From this standpoint, *Orientalism* describes the "historical authority in and the personal authorities of Orientalism" (20).

⁹⁴ For Said's criticism of Foucault's concept of struggle and resistance, see "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" in *Reflections on Exile* (2002). For Foucault's influence in *Orientalism* see Racevskis, K. (2005) "Edward Said and Michel Foucault: Affinities and Dissonances".

⁹⁵ For Said's appraisal of Chomsky's political philosophy, in particular his critique of left-liberal attitude to Vietnam see "Chomsky and the Question of Palestine". A scholar argues that *Orientalism* is more a reflection of Chomsky's political advocacy than Foucault's theoretical machine (Selby 2000).

In the first chapter, “The Scope of Orientalism”, the main focus is the evolution of modern orientalism which was identified from the moment of Napoleon’s occupation of Egypt in 1798. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt illustrates *Orientalism*’s claim that orientalist texts have prepared and justified imperialism in advance (39). In this regard Napoleon’s invasion was in the first instance, according to Said, furnished with “ideas and myths culled from texts, not empirical reality” (80). Napoleon’s reading of Comte de Volney’s work *Voyage en Egypte et en Syrie* (1787) prepared him for what was to be expected from the natives. The knowledge gained from the text, Said argues, had prepared Napoleon mentally and afterward, was put “directly to functional colonial use” (80). There are two pieces of evidence that Said used to support his argument. Napoleon’s recourse to persuasion instead of sheer military force to persuade the natives into obedience is cited as one. Napoleon had courted support from the local *muftis* by presenting gifts and awards in return for religious support in favour of the French expedition. This shows his familiarity with the importance of religious authority in such culture, knowledge that he would not have possessed had he not read the text.

Secondly, Napoleon’s expedition had exemplified the synchronicity of knowledge and imperialism. Along with Napoleon’s expedition was a team of experts in chemistry, history, medicine and archaeology who were responsible for putting “Egypt into modern French”. For Said, this indicates that knowledge was used not only to deal with the natives, but also to make the orient “totally accessible to European scrutiny” (83). The result of the research about the Egyptian life, society and history was recorded in 23 volumes of *Description de l’Egypte*. As a result, Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt led to the rise of oriental learning in the French academy.

From this description, it was apparent to Said that the west encounters the orient first, by text, and later, through actual experience. After showing how a text can influence a reader, Said went on to show how a reader, in turn, adopts such a “textual attitude”. Ultimately, this description illustrates the point the book was making in regards to orientalism as an academic discipline infused with political interest which historically begins with the occupation of Egypt.

The second chapter, “Orientalist Structures and Restructures”, is concerned with the elements that have structured the discourse of orientalism. For Said, orientalism is “not a sudden access of objective knowledge” (122). Instead, orientalism has a tradition which is inherited from the past. Such tradition is structured by four elements, namely expansion, cultural contact, identification and classification.

The western imperial expansion to the orient broadened the western frame of reference beyond the Biblical lands. As result of expansion, the cultural contact between different civilisations intensified. Said argues such contact has increased the awareness of Judeo-Christian cultures in relation to others, principally Islam. To an extent, the encounter with non-Judeo-Christian cultures was dealt with and understood within a familiar framework. Hence, the orient was imagined in the Romantic language that evoked “sensuality, terror, sublimity, idyllic pleasure and intense energy” (118). Finally, the classification of man and nature in academic discourse was making inroads into orientalism. The classification was used not only to separate one group of people from another, but also to identify moral characters unique to particular groups. These elements combined to internalise the form of knowledge about the orient. Hence, the mode of orientalism “from the beginning, was reconstruction and repetition” (122).

In chapter three, “Orientalism Now”, Said discusses the persistency of oriental structures and attitudes into the present time. The focus is to show that despite the changing context, from imperialism into sovereignty, orientalism continues to perpetuate its longevity. To illustrate this, Said cited a report from the State Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1967. The author of the report, Princeton-based orientalist Morroe Berger, concluded that “the modern Middle East and North Africa is not a centre of great cultural achievement, nor is it likely to become one in the near future” (288). From this instance Said pointed out that there is “almost exact duplication of the canonical Orientalist opinion that the Semites never produced a great culture, as Renan frequently said, the Semitic world was too impoverished ever to attract universal attention” (289).

It is not only the continuation of orientalist prejudice, but more importantly, that the political connection remains persistent. Said demonstrated the continuing cooperation

between orientalists and politicians. Modern orientalists, notably Bernard Lewis, continued to be an important source for policy-makers and shaped the American approach in the orient, particularly in the Middle East. Lewis believed the orient should emulate western social and economic progress in order “to come to terms with the West”. Only through this, the orient would cease to be a threat. American policies in the region were thus drafted from western development experience which was expected to be similar in the orient. Said argues this illustrated the renewal of “old Orientalists’ stereotypes dressed up in policy jargon” (321).

2.3.1 Definitions and Main Argument

By “orientalism”, Said appeals to three inter-dependent meanings. *Collectively*, these three elements designate the modern discourse of orientalism. Modern orientalism is referred to as:

- An academic institution that deals with the Orient. According to Said, “Anyone who teaches, writes about or researches the orient” is an orientalist, and “what he or she does is Orientalism”. (2)
- A style of thought based upon an ontological distinction between the ‘orient’ and the ‘occident’. This dichotomy became the ground for elaborating aspects of oriental cultures, society and mind. (3)
- A corporate institution for dealing with the orient. Orientalism is a discourse of domination that is used to manage, restructure and authorise the orient as object of power and control. (3)

From the definitions above, there are three distinguishing elements that underline *Orientalism*. Clearly, Said wished to use the academic, imaginary and institutional elements simultaneously to refer to the phenomenon of *Orientalism*. However, as discussion developed, it became clear that Said’s intention was to emphasise the evolution of modern orientalism *from* academic discipline to a corporate institution. It is therefore not entirely correct to conceive these definitions as equal and tightly-functional in the analysis of *Orientalism*. Thus said, Said did not abandon the academic and the imaginary meaning completely. Instead, their presence is used

either to explain the regularity of ideas about the orient (42) or to explain the ways academia has collaborated and advanced power ambitions (39). Overall, this means Said actually shifted from the traditional preoccupation of orientalism as an academic discipline into one that is politically constructed. This is the main contribution of Said's book to the discourse about the orient.

Following from this, ultimately, orientalism is a discourse of power politics. Said's main argument is stated as follows: "Orientalism is – and does not simply represent- a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture" (12). For Said, once an academic project like orientalism participated in the imperialist enterprise, the discipline ceased to assume claim of a "pure knowledge". Said's book aims to unravel the "highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced" (10). By establishing the connection of politics to cultural production, *Orientalism* demonstrated two important findings.

Firstly, it shows that individual authors, academic and non-academic alike, are likely to be influenced by the political circumstances of their time. This political aspect can be studied and understood through the cultural texts contemporary to the author's generation (15). Secondly, the political realities that inform scholarship indicate the operation of hegemony in general culture. *Orientalism* demonstrates the positive correlation between political power and cultural hegemony. In terms of cultural discourse, since the west is always in the position of strength, "the freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner's privilege" (44). As a result, what has been said or written about the orient refers "to the fact that the Orientalist makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, and renders its mysteries plain to the West" (21).

Said's approach in *Orientalism* has been criticised for several reasons. Clifford (1980) in his review of *Orientalism* has raised the issue of inconsistency inherent in Said's definition. For Clifford, Said did not define the meaning of "orientalism", rather he "qualifies and designates it from a variety of distinct and not always compatible standpoints" (1980, 208). As an example, Clifford shows the incompatibility between the academic and corporate role of orientalism on the one hand, and a style of thought, on the other. While the former refers to the reality designated to orientalism as a subject of study, the latter refers to the mental or imaginary element. This split,

according to Clifford, has led Said to continue alluding to orientalism as not corresponding to external reality, while insisting, at times, on the possibility of a real orient, which such discourse has excluded.

Others raise similar comment on Said's definitional inconsistency. Mellor (2004) describes Said's use of social constructionism, evident in the third definition, as contradictory to his invocation of positive knowledge. Porter (1994) argues the inconsistent definitions are not purely technical. The inability to make a choice between the reality of constructed orientalism and a 'possibly' positive orientalism has wider repercussions for *Orientalism's* thesis. Not only does *Orientalism* describe a particular system of hegemonic ideas, it also precludes the possibility of alternative discourse in study of the orient. This is attributed to Said's inability to "reflect on the significance of hegemony as a process" which otherwise would include the participants in making and in contesting the hegemony (1994, 152).

These criticisms notwithstanding, it needs to be pointed out that Said did not perceive any conflict in his simultaneous tripartite definitions. At least for *Orientalism* such discourse was political from the beginning. The emphasis on the political construction overrides the other elements of the definitions. Said reiterated this position when he revisited his work in his essay "Orientalism Reconsidered" (1985). Said re-stated his position that orientalism is less about the field itself than about the problems associated with power-knowledge complicity. In the sense that *Orientalism* has successfully elaborated upon this connection, it shows the viability of, albeit incongruous, definitions. Furthermore, in an interview with Imre Salusinszky, Said responded to the criticism of his theoretical inconsistency with, "*Orientalism* is theoretically inconsistent, and I designed it that way: I didn't want Foucault's method, or anybody's method, to override what I was trying to put forward" (Salusinszky 1987, 137). From this statement, it is clear that for Said the methodological issue arise from his selective interpretation of Foucault's works has not undermined the main thrust of *Orientalism*. His primary interest was to show the ways power and knowledge intertwine, and how this has adversely affected understanding of societies and cultures.

In the next discussion, three aspects regarded as crucial to Said's formulation of *Orientalism* will be critically examined. These are the power-knowledge connection, the role of culture and the aspect of resistance.

2.3.2 Power – Knowledge Nexus

Orientalism is particularly concerned with challenging the liberal notion⁹⁶ that “true knowledge is fundamentally non-political” (10). In the field of literary criticism, the approach towards literature is two-fold. Literature is either conceived as a source of truth and morality, or, as an aesthetic that is an expression of one's heart and mind.⁹⁷

Said's rebellion towards this interpretative procedure in literature is evident in his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975). In reviewing Said's work, White (1976) identifies two far-reaching contributions that Said made to the field. Firstly, Said argues that a literary author is directly involved, hence his work is implicated in social and political reality. Secondly, Said criticised the “dynastic thinking” that has dominated literary thinking. This thought claimed that canonical texts constitute a repository of values and wisdom that serve to inspire good behaviour and taste. Said argues that modernist texts, unlike the canonical or pre-modern, are an exercise of “will”. That is to say, an author creates meaning in the general context of politics and culture. This conception is a significant departure from the hierarchical values of dynastic ideology, into something that is “traditionless”, whose meaning is acquired in specific context (1976, 10-11).

Said's formulation of authorial-social connection⁹⁸ was put to the test in *Orientalism*. In the first paragraph of the book, Said quotes a French journalist who reported the

⁹⁶ Said's distrust over liberalism and neo-liberalism is not confined to the field of knowledge. In terms of policy, Said has criticised what he discerned as policies of the right packaged in liberal language. He refers to the ascendancy of alliances between stock-market corporations and state politicians in the era of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. The result of such alliances has been the weakening of people's democracy and social welfare. See his article “The Problems of Neo-Liberalism”.

⁹⁷ Such attitudes towards literature have immediate political significance. Said deplored how certain books, which were perceived by the elites (religious and political alike) as corruptive, have been banned from universities in Muslim countries and in former Soviet nations. See his article “Literature and Literalism”.

⁹⁸ Said's exposition of this relationship can be seen in his *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983). Said has used the term “worldliness” to convey the relationship between an author/text and his political world: when a critic recognised the connection between escaping from the narrow confines of the text

Lebanese civil war of 1975, “it had once seemed to belong to ... the Orient of Chateaubriand and Nerval” (1). This brief sketch spelled out the theme that occupies the book. The French reporter, hailing from the former imperialist nation, reported an event in the Middle East, or the *orient*, as known to the west historically. The reporter, apparently, re-echoed the sentiment that the orient once belonged to the world described in western texts.

From this instance alone, Said argues that the reporter and his attitude of reporting the Middle East had a long history and tradition that preceded him. Thus, by drawing upon his earlier work and upon his background as an orient-born scholar, Said embarks on a quest to construct a genealogy of the learned field that is orientalism. Said’s analysis reveals the political circumstances that grounded the development of orientalism. From this, Said sought to demonstrate the extent to which an author and his work are implicated in the service of power. There are two concepts that require clarification in order to understand Said’s thesis of the orientalist-power connection. These are knowledge and authority.

Said’s methodology in *Orientalism* is predicated upon what he conceived as a distinction between pure and political knowledge. In the field of orientalism, Said acknowledged that to some extent, there was some aspect of “truthful” knowledge in the discipline. Hence, in his definition of orientalism, the “academic” knowledge is considered an integral element in studies of the orient (2). On the other hand, Said argues that knowledge of the orient is also political. As evident in his third definition, orientalism is a corporate institution that is responsible for producing and maintaining the orient in subjugation (3). By political, Said refers to the form of knowledge “that is premised upon exteriority” (20). That is, the production of orientalism mainly involves representation of the orient seen in the eyes of the authors and later transmitted to the western audience.⁹⁹ In short, Said argues this means “all of Orientalism stands forth and away from the Orient” (22).

and adopting a “secular critical” attitude. For reviews of this book see Robbins, B. (1983) “Homelessness and Worldliness”; and Bove, P. (1985) “Closing up the Ranks”.

⁹⁹ The detail of this process is explained by Said as an “Orientalist stage”. It is when “the Orient is corrected, even penalized for lying outside the boundaries of European society; the Orient is thus Orientalised; ... a process that forces the uninitiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications as the *true* Orient” (67).

The juxtaposition of the two seemingly contradictory positions is resolved as a matter of priority. Thus, Said states that “it is wrong to conclude that the Orient is a creation with no corresponding reality”, while in the same paragraph he insists that “it’s about the regular constellation of ideas ... and not to its mere being” (5). For Said, his primary intention is to establish a political connection between a scholar and institution. For this reason, the political content of the field takes priority ahead of its ‘truthful’ account. To this effect, Said stated that “Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European – Atlantic power over the Orient than a veridic discourse about the Orient” (6).

Having clarified his position that it is political orientalism that the book is concerned with, Said identifies the agency responsible for authorising the knowledge. After all, Said believes that “a text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual is not easily dismissed” (94). Hence, it was the intellectuals or, specifically, the orientalists who were responsible for the production of the orient. In fact, Said claims that it is their expertise about things oriental that enabled them to acquire status as authoritative representers of the orient (19).

The question that still remains is how knowledge of the orient is put into political use? In other words, how does an authority in the textual realm become directly involved in the pursuit of power in the real world? This question can be answered by looking into Said’s treatment of orientalism as a discourse.

Orientalism, Said wrote, “is not a mere political subject matter that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, institutions”. In fact, orientalism is a discourse that distributes awareness about the orient into western minds and consciousness. As a discourse, orientalism contained a repertoire of interests (political, economic, and cultural), and the will to explain, to control and to manipulate the unfamiliar orient (12). From this description, it is clear that Said understood the discourse of orientalism as a field that enmeshed the interests of the orientalists (academics) with the interest of political institutions. The moment when these two interests converged is exemplified in the speech made by Alfred Balfour in the British House of Commons in 1910. From his speech, Said identified the convergence of power and knowledge. Balfour declared that England’s occupation of Egypt was possible

because England “knows it further back” and “knows it more intimately” (32). Knowledge in this sense acts as an enabling factor for colonial rule.¹⁰⁰ From this, Said stated “to have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it” and “being able to do that” (32).

Apart from the allegedly unsubstantiated historical evidence to support Said’s claim, his argument that knowledge can only be obtained and known *exteriorly* has been criticised. Ahmad (1991) argues that Said’s reference to orientalism as a mere representation has actually reduced the possibility of the coming together of real orient and real occident. As a result, this simply does not “permit a sustained engagement with the category that especially of class but of gender as well, except superficially” (1991, 150). Furthermore, Said’s analysis lacked differentiation, both historically and materially. Instead, Said posits the orient as a stable subject with predictable reality. Thus Ahmad asks “In what sense, then, Said himself is *not* an Orientalist ... or an Orientalist-in-reverse?”¹⁰¹ (1991, 144)

2.3.3 Resistance

Orientalism is mainly interested in showing the existence of political ideology that governs and uses orientalism to rule and impose hegemony over the orient. “Hegemony” as referred to by Said is pertinent. Said shows how orientalism distributes assumptions and prejudices about the orient to the western audience, without a corresponding challenge from the ‘other’ (209; 324). It also demonstrates that every agency involved in the production of orientalism is guilty, either by association, or by themselves is central in the making and sustaining of imperialism.¹⁰² Judging from this, Said felt it was warranted to claim “Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West” (204).

¹⁰⁰ Thus, Kissinger’s exposition of East-West division (46) resembled that of Balfour, which in turn resembled Greek text *The Persians* (56). Said’s “anthropological method” as he called it, shows that the genealogy of orientalism keeps on falling back to the western repository of imaginations and vocabularies on the orient.

¹⁰¹ This is a concept used by Sadik Al-Azim. Al-Azim (1981) argued that Said was equally guilty of essentialising the west by using category and classification that relied upon a mental construct that was later upgraded into general principle.

¹⁰² For example Said claimed that “It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric” (204).

For this matter critics have raised the point that since orientalism is all-powerful and all embracing, and since Said did not offer any alternative, this precludes the question of resistance (Young 1990, 174; Mellor 2004, 103; Porter 1994, 151; Ahmad 1992, 194). The critics clearly ignored the importance of authorship in *Orientalism*. The question of authorial autonomy, namely, how a writer escapes from the determining structure that one inhabits, possibly leads to the questioning of resistance. This aspect is dealt with in the final three pages of the book. Said describes the underlying message of *Orientalism* as being about the study of human experience. To study human experience, a scholar must at first acknowledge the ethical and political consequence of such study. Following from this, a scholar would then be able to assert an independent or “an oppositional critical consciousness” (326-‘7). The aspect of “oppositional consciousness” was identified by Ashcroft & Ahluwalia (1999) as a strategy of resistance. It is a strategy of “writing back” to the orientalists by exposing their political connection disguised under the academic pretension of pure knowledge. Therefore, Said’s strategy of resistance appears premised upon the role of intellectuals who always remain on guard for the effect of political interest in their respective disciplines.

The importance attributed to intellectual will to resist the hegemony of discourse is not well received by critics. Ahmad (1992) argues that Said’s turn to the intellectual is just as expected coming from Said’s training in the humanities. As a result, *Orientalism* is envisaged as a problem and as a solution. As a problem, *Orientalism* has rejected “humanism-as-history” “unequivocally”. As a solution to the problem of humanist imperialist heritage, Said proposed a humanist solution in the form of individual will or in Ahmad’s phrase “humanism-as-ideality” (1992, 164).

Kennedy (2000) argues that the notion of humanism with emphasis on individuality was historically based on hierarchical views of cultures. *Orientalism*’s attack on this heritage was itself an attack on humanist values that define western culture as

superior. However, this does not end Said's conviction that secular humanism is still a valuable defence against its own shortcomings¹⁰³ (2000, 33-34).

Despite the hegemonic nature of orientalist discourse, there is still a space where resistance is imaginable. In "Orientalism Reconsidered" (1985), Said argues that what constitutes a challenge to political doctrine such as orientalism is "a challenge to the muteness imposed upon the subject". A passage in *Orientalism* describes what constitutes this muteness:

... a relation between Western writing and Oriental silence is the result of and the sign of the West's great cultural strength, its will to power over the Orient. ... (Another side to the strength) is the one that sees them (Orientalists) carrying on in the dimensionless silence of the Orient mainly because the discourse of Orientalism, over and above the Orient's powerlessness to do anything about them, suffused their activity with meaning, intelligibility and reality. (94-95)

Orientalism stipulates that oriental muteness has led to more oppression of the orient in this power relationship. Although the book does not suggest a way out of this impasse, it does not suggest that this is an enduring feature either. For this reason, Said argues that the potential for resistance is present when "the history that resisted its ideological as well as political encroachments" is brought into life. In short, it requires the revival of repressed or resistant history that can mount challenges to hegemonic structures such as orientalism (Said 1985, 93-94). This means the claim that *Orientalism* (the book) is merely re-producing hegemony is not entirely representative, and certainly not consistent with Said's philosophy.

In the current context, the concept of oriental muteness remains relevant. In his article "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals" (2001), Said cited an example of an act of political vandalism towards computer terminals set up in an occupied town near the

¹⁰³ Said was consistent in his belief in "secular humanism" that can energise liberation struggle and serve as a check against narrow provincialism. See his interview in Barsamian, D. (2003) *Culture and Resistance*. A similar position is explained in another interview. Said stated that a secular vision can limit the otherwise inflamed religious tendency which has the implication of denying minority rights, as in the case of Armenians, Egyptian Copts and Kurds in Muslim-dominated territory. See Wicke & Sprinker (1992) "Interview with Edward Said".

West Bank. The computers were used by Palestinian refugees as means of communicating with their relatives and friends dispersed in refugees camps elsewhere along the borders of Lebanon, Egypt or Syria. When the computers were vandalised, the refugees sought to restore the facilities with some success. This example shows that “the existence of individuals or groups seeking social justice and economic equality ... will lead to desire for articulation rather than silence”. From this specific experience, Said went on to elaborate that this is not a singular and fragmented instance, but inter-connected to wider struggles.¹⁰⁴ Hence, as the western strategy to impose muteness continues, so does the resistance against it. As Said states:

There is social and intellectual equivalence between this mass of overbearing collective interests and the discourse used to justify, disguise or mystify its workings while at the same time preventing objections or challenge to it. ... From that nexus emanate such ideological confections as “the West”, the “clash of civilizations”, “traditional values” and identity”.

(*The Nation*, 11 September 2001)

Therefore, resistance for Said is not merely a struggle by intellectuals alone. The role of the oppressed and their everyday struggle is crucial in sustaining struggle against the materiality of domination. In this regard, both intellectuals and the public can be engaged in similar quests to dismantle the silence of being the ‘other’.

2.3.4 Culture

The general approach to ‘culture’ is concern with culture as a way of life, or, as a reference to arts, literatures and great works that become the embodiment of values. Both of these approaches have been criticised by Said in *Beginnings* (see thesis section 2.3.2). *Orientalism* marks a new departure in thinking about culture and its relationship to power and society. There are two issues that occupied *Orientalism* in

¹⁰⁴ A similar position is also expressed in “Orientalism Reconsidered”. Said wrote that the act of fragmenting knowledge has deleterious effects in fragmenting experience. He states: “the problem of the division of labour ... whether in identifying and working through anti-dominant critiques can resolve the dilemma of autonomous fields of experience and knowledge that are created as a consequence. A double kind of possessive exclusivism could set in: the sense of being and excluding insider by virtue of experience ... and second by virtue of method” (Said 1985, 106).

regards to culture. Firstly *Orientalism* interrogates what constitutes culture and secondly, the question of representing other cultures. These will be discussed in turn.

Said's approach to culture is informed by social constructionist method. In the "Afterword" section to *Orientalism* published in 1994, Said spoke at length about cultural constructivism. He wrote:

... Human history is made by human beings. Since the struggle for control over that territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. ... My way of doing this has been to show that the development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another, different and competing *alter ego*. The construction of identity-whether of Orient or Occident- involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'. (Said 1995, 331-332)

Culture in *Orientalism* is thus constructed as a form of authority. This can be seen from the reference to culture in conjunction with authority, for example, Anglo-French "cultural enterprise" (4), "cultural hegemony" (7), and "cultural *and* political fact" (13). To understand why this is the case, two possible explanations are elicited from the book:

- Firstly, to support Said's power-knowledge thesis.
- Secondly, to challenge the orientalist myth of separation or fragmentation of culture into discrete and stable units.

Culture *as* authority is an integral element in Said's theorisation of discourse. In his view, culture operates in the realm of discourse. When Said utilises the concept of "cultural hegemony", he is basically alluding to the existence of the general culture that operates in civil society. He points to the underpinnings of the specific role of orientalism in disseminating ideas (about the orient) to the broader culture. As Said remarks, "the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe" (7). Culture links to power and what

enables the hegemony to operate is the fact that the west had “commanded the vastly greater part of the earth’s surface” (41).

The coexistence of culture and politics is thus established in the realm of discourse. The relationship between them mutually reinforces each other’s strength. Power provides culture with opportunity for its hegemonic expansion and dissemination,¹⁰⁵ while culture provides politics with a discourse of attitudes that can regulate and impose meaning on the way the orient is perceived and controlled.¹⁰⁶ When the interest of culture and politics coincides, orientalism becomes a cultural apparatus with “all aggression, activity, judgement, will to truth and knowledge” that creates and delivers the orient for the west (204).

In response to Said’s theorisation of culture, Clifford (1980) argues that Said’s conflation of culture as discourse has only led to privileging the west. By constructing orientalism as a discourse that reflects the culture that produced it, namely western culture, Said in effect is portraying western culture as “a discrete entity capable of generating knowledge and institutional power *over* the rest of the planet” (1980, 219). Although Said has stated his distrust of any essential concepts such as East or West (and its equivalent), he continues to foreground his analysis against western totality, which may be itself seen as a form of conceptual construct also unable to escape from the power relationships entailed by its constitution.

On the other hand, Clifford believes that *Orientalism* has offered a significant contribution to the conception of culture. By conceptualising culture as a form of political construction Said has forced a rethinking of culture as a process of construction and reproduction. Moreover, this allows a rethinking of other forms of dichotomising categories, such as developed/underdeveloped, modern/premodern, and First World/Third World (1980, 220).

¹⁰⁵C.f. “The period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincides with the period of unparalleled European expansion” (41).

¹⁰⁶ This is explained by what Said discerned as a form of “family of ideas” or “unifying set of values” that became explanatory variables of oriental behaviour. The orientalism archives “allowed the European to deal with and even to see Oriental as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics” (42). This archive contains individuals like Cleopatra, Troy, Mahomet; half-imagined entities like devils, heroes; and seductive panorama of oriental pleasures and splendour (63). Politicians such as Kissinger drew inspiration from such vocabularies when conceiving ideological battles between the west and the orient (46-47).

By constructing culture as a strategy of western authority, Said was able to challenge the myth of constructed distance (and difference) between the west and the orient that lies at the heart of orientalist discourse. A good illustration of this is given by Said in his depiction of Edward Lane's observational and narrative technique. In the *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), Lane described his impartiality and above-board attitude in his observation of the normal Egyptian's culture. Said describes Lane's technique as akin to an orientalist pretension that he "can imitate the Orient without the opposite being true" (160). Lane's proclaimed distance from the oriental subject, hence acting as an objective representor is not unique. It was parallel to his predecessors in the like of d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697) and Dante's *Inferno* (circa 1308-1320). These works, like other orientalist texts, assumed the task of representing the unfamiliar orient and transforming the imaginary into a form that can be recognised in the west. On this evidence, Said argues "Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object" (22). On the other hand, it also shows the orient is much closer to western culture than is readily admitted. The wider implication of dramatising such distance is:

... (It) limits human encounter between different cultures, traditions and societies. ... Because this tendency is right at the centre of Orientalist theory and practice and values found in the West, the sense of Western power over the Orient is taken as having the status of scientific truth. (46)

It is not only cultural distance that is simultaneously bridged and widened. The essentialising of geographical boundaries as thoroughgoing and permanent has even aggravated the sense of hostility between the east and the west. The book challenges such spurious categorisation such as the east and the west, the orient and the occident. Hence, in the first page of the "Introduction", Said clearly states that the orient and the occident are a part of each other. The orient is:

... the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the sources of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. (1)

A similar standpoint is raised in Said's essay, "Representing the Colonized" (1989). Here, Said reiterates the historical connection between the seemingly separate cultures of the east and the west. As a result of the colonisation, the cultures of the west and the east have both informed and to considerable degrees reflected the experience of their encounter. Adjacent cultures are inevitably involved in a process of exchange and continuous reinterpretation. Furthermore,

... there is no vantage *outside* the actuality of relationships between cultures, between unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, between different Others, a vantage that might allow one the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating and interpreting free of the encumbering interests, emotions and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves.

(Said 1989, 216)

This illustrates that there is no place from which cultures can be observed outside the realities of dominations. Still, the tendency of some cultures to impose their will upon the weaker ones must be recognised. Said's work responds to that imperative.

The second cultural dimension raised in *Orientalism* is the question of representing other cultures. Said asks "Is the notion of distinct culture a useful one, or does it always get involved in self-congratulation or aggression?" (325). In *Orientalism*, one could elicit the answer to his question by considering the hegemonic nature of cultural discourse. In this view, the issue of representing other cultures is a political question. For Said, relations between the east and the west are always "between a strong and a weak partner" (40). As a result of this, the orient is always in the position of being unequally represented in the "whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulation". To support his claim, Said demonstrated that it is not only purely political figures such as Balfour or Napoleon who collude in the making and representing of other cultures in degenerate terms, but also a sympathetic orientalist scholar like Massignon.¹⁰⁷ This is because for Said, already enmeshed with political interests, orientalism has "imposed limit upon thought about the Orient" (43). Thus,

¹⁰⁷ Said has praised Massignon's sympathetic approach towards Islam and his criticism of imperialism. However, his work still echoed the ideas of French Orientalists in seeing Islam in archaic terms such as "tribalism" and "radical monotheism". (267-273)

vocabularies about the orient were consistent and regularly evoked from the classical Greek texts down to the present popular stereotypes.¹⁰⁸

The issue of culture and its representation continues to occupy Said's thought mostly because of its continuing political relevance. In his article "Cultural Politics" (2000), Said states that the task of representing one's culture is always implicated in the reality of American cultural hegemony. He gave the example of Egyptian independent cinema that failed to receive domestic attention because the profit-making American blockbusters proved to be more amenable to Egyptian entrepreneurs. Ironically such indigenous films acquired reputation abroad, due to the western distribution expertise and also helped by positive critical reviews. Thus, in the new post-colonial era, western cultural hegemony continues to gather strength home and abroad. Said lamented that:

We have never understood the value of what it is that we are as a people and culture, and have steadfastly put our faith (a heritage from colonialism) in the whiter master or in middle-men. That is why films like Nasrallah's find audiences outside the Arab world, and acquires reputations there, rather than at home where cynicism and self-righteous posturing rule the day.

(*Al Ahram*, 4-10 May 2000)

From the discussion of culture in *Orientalism*, it is clear that culture is not a passive reflection of society and politics. Instead, culture plays significant roles in the maintenance of hegemony. This understanding of culture and power is not unique to the west alone. The political regimes in the formerly colonised nations were known for censoring cultural materials that were critical of the establishment.¹⁰⁹ This illustrates the capacity of culture to advance political ambition, and with equal measure, advance opposition to hegemony.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ See Said's critique of *Cambridge History of Islam* in which the work illustrates "the old Orientalist truism that Islam is about texts, not about people" (305) and the media reporting of Arab-Israeli conflict which has assumed a liberal veneer: by inviting both Jew and Arab representatives (from middle-class background) they were "being made to be representative for Western audience", and continuing the pattern of orientalism (293).

¹⁰⁹ See footnote 8 of this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Said provided an example of how indigenous scholars can actually support western hegemony. He cited the case of Kanan Makiya, an Iraqi scholar who supports US military invasion. For Makiya, only through US military intervention can the country be rid of its Islamism and militarism. Said describes

2.3.5 Developing a Framework for Analysis

The analysis of *Orientalism* is framed in the interest of interrogating the discourse on national history in Malaysia. After examining the arguments and issues, four lines of thought are salient:

- The continuation of orientalist patterns of thought in the field of culture, such as stereotyping of the orient in popular media. Explicit in this is the role of experts in representing certain knowledge about the ‘other’ cultures.
- The continuation of conditions that allow the prosperity that underlines western hegemony. Poverty, consumerism and imbalance of power in international systems are some of the elements that replicate the earlier structure of dependency that characterised imperialist practice.
- Resistance by formerly ‘mute’ and oppressed groups shows that orientalism is not a completely defining phenomenon. Challenges to hegemony are practically possible, through the role of intellectuals in exposing the underlying political interest and the role of populists in their everyday struggle.
- Collaboration in culture and politics between the west and the indigenous elites to ensure subordination and power hegemony. The exercise of power and domination has also involved local elites in perpetrating inequality and oppression, although the significance of this is not yet fully clear.

These are general points derived from the analysis of *Orientalism*. For this research, these thoughts will be extended analytically in studying aspects of national history in Malaysia. *Orientalism* is used in this research for two purposes. Firstly, the analysis of hegemonic discourses, specifically, the inter-relation of power and culture, is extended to analyse state uses of history for maintaining power-claims; and secondly, the analysis of “oriental muteness” and the practice of resistance in contemporary Malaysia. I will examine the challenge towards state cultural hegemony through the political memoirs authored by marginalised political subjects. It is my claim that the political memoirs represent a practice of resistance in the field of culture in

Makiya as an “intellectual that serves power unquestioningly; the greater the power, the fewer doubts he has” (in “Misinformation about Iraq”, *Al-Ahram*).

contemporary Malaysia. The practice of cultural resistance is one of the dimensions of opposition to state power. Integral to the process is the broadening of prospects for democratisation in politics and society.

The following section will provide theoretical discussion on conceptualising cultural resistance in Malaysia. The contribution of *Orientalism* to this aspect has been established earlier, but in itself is not sufficient to contextualise Malaysian experience. For this reason, a more developed categorical analysis is required. In this regard, I draw upon resources from post-colonial studies to build up a conceptual analysis. This framework will address the terms of culture, history and agency, and will return to the question of authority and resistance. It starts by making brief comment on the relationship between *Orientalism* and post-colonial studies. It then moves on to study some of the contributions from Malaysian academics to the discussion of the post-colonial situation in Malaysia. Finally, the conceptual categories that will be used to analyse the state-discourse of history, as well as resistance, will be discussed.

2.4 *Orientalism* and Post-Colonial Studies

Scholars have attributed the main impetus for the emergence of post-colonial studies as a systematic discipline to Edward Said in general, *Orientalism* in particular (Spivak 2003, 6; Kennedy 2000, 16; Parry 1997, 5; Prakash 1995, 201; Brennan 2000, 559). There are two main arguments for this view.

Firstly, post-colonial studies are concerned with historicising the experience of domination. Domination and subordination began with the moment of colonialism, and persist until now. The studies of such experiences constitute the core of post-colonial studies. In this regards, Ashcroft (2001) argues that post-colonialism concerns the analysis of the cultural production “that occurs through colonialism because no decolonising process, however oppositional, can be completely free from the cataclysmic experience” (2001, 12). The emphasis of colonialism as an indelible historical period and the cultural reflections of that experience established the link between post-colonialism and *Orientalism*. *Orientalism* did not deal centrally with the cultural productions of the colonised. Post-colonial theorists built up a comprehensive

picture of power relationship of both the coloniser and the colonised, filling the space that *Orientalism* had effectively created.

Secondly, post-colonial studies advocate a political philosophy of intervention. Young (2001) argues that the term “postcolonial” marks the “determined achievement of sovereignty, but also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and political domination” (2001, 57). For Young, although the historical process of colonialism is over, the reality experienced within the new nation-states pointed otherwise. Thus, in the former colonies resistance either against the ruling elites or the international corporations still continues.¹¹¹ By being grounded in dialectic experience of power and resistance, post-colonial studies “signal an active engagement with political positions” in order to “critique contemporary power structure” and “to intervene within such oppressive circumstances” (2001, 57-58). In this perspective, post-colonials expanded the notion of “oppressive circumstances” to include the experience of women, peasantry, indigenous communities and other marginalised groups.¹¹² The concept of political advocacy linked post-colonialism with the thrust of *Orientalism* which argues for the “critical oppositional consciousness” of an author to make visible the operation of dominant structure.

These two indicators are the crucial distinguishing factors that mark the departure of post-colonial studies from other critical practices. Like *Orientalism*, post-colonial studies are a discipline with political agenda to actively intervene and transform situations of domination of every conceivable power relationship. For these reasons, it has been claimed that post-colonial studies are a continuation of *Orientalism* as a critical practice of inquiry into hegemony, agency and culture.

¹¹¹ For discussion on political economy of post-independence states see Shaw (1982) “Beyond Neo-Colonialism: Varieties of Corporatism in Africa”; Dunning (2005) “Resource Dependence, Economic Performance and Political Stability”. For the role of the multinational corporations in deepening the structural imbalance in less-developed countries see Senghaas (1975) “Multinational Corporations and the Third World”.

¹¹² For works on related issues see Spivak (1987) *In Other Worlds*; Guha (1983) *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*; Povinelli (1998) “Australian Multi-Culturalism and the Crisis of Indigenous Citizenship”; Giroux (1992) “Multi-Culturalism as Anti-Racist Pedagogy”; Sachs (2003) “Post-Colonialism and Alexander von Humboldt’s Ecological Relationship with Nature”.

The continuation and expansion of *Orientalism* into post-colonial studies shows the relevance of this field to the current research. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that this research does not treat post-colonialism as a distinct paradigm of research. Instead, post-colonialism is used as a theoretical resource to expand discussion of *Orientalism* into Malaysian experience. Post-colonial studies are basically a repository of various theoretical instruments that are utilised to study the culture and experience of the colonised (Brennan 2000, 564; Young 2001, 58; Slemon 1994, 45). This implies trans-boundary perspectives and methodologies that are considered useful for providing broader understanding of experiences beyond the confines of specific disciplines. For this reason, the treatment of post-colonialism in this research will be limited to an in-depth discussion of three categories related to *Orientalism* namely agency, resistance and culture.

2.4.1 Defining Post-Colonialism

One of the earliest attempts to define post-colonialism as a systematic discipline of knowledge can be seen in the joint-authored book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). The authors define the sphere of the “post-colonial” as cultural production “affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 2). They refer to the literature produced in former colonies, namely African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka. According to them, the unifying element that brought these geographically disparate literatures together is the fact that “they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with imperial power and by emphasising their difference....” (1989, 2) The authors argue that post-colonial culture is a form of “writing back” to the imperial power in order to assert their identity and distance themselves from the dominant. From this description, it is clear that the authors intended to define post-colonialism as a perspective on culture in non-western societies from colonialism forward.

The Ashcroft et al. definition has been severely criticised for being too sparse and too vague. Shohat (1992) demonstrates the inherent contradiction of ‘post’ in such

definitions. The term implies both the end and the continuation of imperialism. Such indeterminism has resulted in an inability to state a clear opposition towards the continuation of colonialism and its reconfiguration. As a result, colonialism is “relegated to the matter of past and marked with a closure”. Furthermore, the reluctance to actually posit a clear source of opposition other than “imperial centre” shows the lack of activism that the proponents claimed to express. At this point, Shohat argues, post-colonialism lacked the political activism that characterised its predecessor, Third World theory¹¹³ that emphasised the “new modes and forms of the old colonialist practices” which addressed the situations of neo-colonialism. This perspective was “less passive” and allowed an active mode of engagement (1992, 108).

To the charge of unclear temporality, post-colonial theorists argue that the term “post-colonial” actually signifies a “dismissal of modernist views of history as a linear process” (Alva 1995). The term “post” implies a rejection of modernist conceptions of time and history. For this reason Childs & Williams (1997) argue that “post-colonial” does not connote the “chronological subsequent”, rather it is about “conceptually transcending or superseding” the parameter of “colonial”. In their view, the “post” is going beyond the ideology of colonialism and so enables it to assume active opposition (1997, 3-4). Thus, the term “post-colonial” does not carry with it ambivalence but an assertion of difference from the dominant ideology of modernism.

The problems raised by critics regarding the definition show the problem that continues to beleaguer post-colonial studies. However, this does not mean the term “post-colonial” is inadequate as a critical reference of the present power relationship. It only means that the terms proposed by Ashcroft et al. lack attention to other substantive variables such as political institution and economy. In fact, the concept was used, originally, to connote a political condition in decolonised states. Alavi (1972) utilised the term “post-colonial” in his article “The State in Post-Colonial

¹¹³ The Third World perspective is defined by its emphasis on the reconfiguration of colonial structure in international capitalism or a phenomenon known as neo-colonialism. Prominent works of this kind are Samir Amin (1974) *Accumulation on a World Scale*, and Frank (1969) *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. For comparison between post-colonial and Third World theory, see Kapoor, (2002) “Capitalism, Culture, Agency”.

Societies”. He describes the situation of a continuing imperialism in the new nation-states. This continuation of imperial process is seen from the following elements:

1. Modern nation-states established by imperial bourgeoisie during the colonial rule.
2. Modern nation-states ruled by a collective of “neo-colonialist bourgeoisie” whose power was constituted during colonial rule.
3. Post-colonial states with a new contest of power between the indigenous neo-colonialist bourgeoisie and the metropolitan bourgeoisie. While the previous colonial experience was ruled singlehandedly by foreign colonial interest, the present state is ruled through a mediation of competing interests between the local and the foreign bourgeoisie.

In this early exposition of “post-colonial”, the newly independent states were fraught with problems that remained a preoccupation throughout the period of the evolution of the term “post-colonial”. The ever-present foreign interest, the betrayal of the national elites and the persistent underdevelopment of the national economy were as resonant then as now. Against this development, post-colonial studies expanded the analysis of political economy into the field of culture. The aim is to show the corollary of domination that is not only structurally identifiable, but also culturally defined. For these reasons, post-colonialism is a useful term to describe the aspect of cultural practice in the context of continuing western political, economical and cultural domination.

2.4.2 Post-Colonial Theories of Resistance

In *Empire Writes Back*, it is argued that a distinctive feature of post-colonial text is its emphasis on “difference” from the assumption of the imperial centre (Ashcroft et al. 1989, 2). In order to mark-off their differences, a post-colonial author/text would either refuse the assumption embedded in the categories of the imperial culture, or use the imperial language to express the resentment of being colonised. According to the authors, such procedures of “abrogation” and “appropriation” show that a post-colonial text is “written out of tension between the abrogation of the received English which speaks from the centre, and the act of appropriation which brings it under the

influence of a vernacular tongue” (1989, 39). The “tension” that characterises the production of post-colonial text is not an inhibiting factor, but rather, the condition of its possibility to assume the task of opposing the imperial text.

The strategy of establishing difference from the centre continues to define post-colonial projects. Helen Tiffin (1995) has added to the catalogue of descriptions, describing post-colonial culture as a hybrid of imperial-European ontology and the local impulse to recreate an independent identity in order to break through the politico-cultural domination. This produced a post-colonial text through counter-discursive strategies such as:

- The revisiting of imperial texts, in particular, the canonical type, because such texts became the medium for western dominance of the rest of the world.
- The locating of criticism between the “two worlds” of imperial and indigenous culture.
- Through the intersection of the western and the local cultures, the assumptions of dominant discourse can be exposed and dismantled.

Through these strategies, resistance is conceived not as a local identity counter to the west. Instead, it involves a discursive interaction between local and imperial forces. Hence, the assertion of (local) difference is posited simultaneously with the western ontology which was accountable both for the formation of local identity and was later used as a subject of opposition. Opposition, in this case, is never about going beyond the west but a form of critical engagement that questions and destabilises it.

Post-colonial formulation of resistance offers two significant insights. Firstly, it reveals the historical fact of engagement between imperial-western and indigenous culture. Colonialism is not just about political or economic exploitation but also occurs in the field of culture. The violation of territorial sovereignty also involves the incursion of western influence in the local cultures that has since altered the way culture was received and performed. Through the emphasis on cross-cultural relationships, post-colonial theorists tried to suggest a different way of looking into resistance. Resistance may not always involve violent struggle; it is often subversive

or insidious. This, nevertheless, does not diminish the quality of opposition but enhances it by taking into consideration various strategies and subjects of opposition. Ashcroft (2001) thus argues for an integrative conception of resistance:

... that manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, a resistance which engages that which is resisted in different ways, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being. (2001, 20)

Secondly, post-colonial theorists articulated resistance as a form of strategic calculation. This is expressed through procedural schemes such as “abrogation”, “appropriation” or “two-world” criticism. The emphasis on strategy is not unique to discourse/textual universe alone. James Scott (1990) in his study of peasant resistance in Malaysia argues that resistance is acted out in schematic form. The peasantry, by virtue of their subordination (hence, lack of practical resources to contest the power), responded to coercion by strategic means. The use of rumours, jokes, plays and euphemisms, which formed the everyday practice of folk cultures, were expressive of ideological contest, albeit in disguised forms. These methods, known as “hidden transcripts’, were strategically calculated and *consciously* used in the dual functions of providing the appearance of consent, while offering the means for the subordinates to weaken the constraint of ideology imposed by the authority. Therefore, in reality resistance to hegemony often took place at the level of culture or social practice that involved the creativity of subjects who appear physically quiescent without necessarily rendering their thought completely subordinate. It is at this level that both power and resistance are persistent.

Discussion so far has indicated that the post-colonial notion of resistance introduced a new way of looking into resistance as *cultural*. To reiterate, cultural resistance does not suggest reverting back to the pure past or whitewashing colonial influence. As *Orientalism* amply demonstrated, essentialist doctrine of culture is not only reductive but also historically unrepresentative. Despite the admission of cross-cultural exchange, post-colonialism does not terminate dependence on imperial or neo-imperial centre as the source of identity and opposition. Elleke Boehmer (1998) called this trend “covert neo-orientalism”, referring to the insistent binary form of opposition

that located the metropolitan at the centre and the post-colonial at the periphery. The traffic of power and resistance flows from predictable locations but with ambiguous impacts, repeating the formula of colonial ontology that sees itself as the emanating source of authority and the non-west as the source of subjectivity. It is difficult to envisage resistance as something that empowers the colonised subjects, or as an act of “writing back” to the centre, if the basic opposition remains. The reluctance of post-colonialists to dismantle the centre as the source of authority has led several critics to argue that they are (by implication) complicit in regenerating western hegemony (Parry 1997; Eagleton 1998; Moore-Gilbert 1997; Dirlik 1999).

These criticisms notwithstanding, the basic premise of post-colonial studies remains attractive. Post-colonialism is a critical practice that interrogates the interest that inhabits the production of culture/knowledge. More importantly, it is committed to retrieving a range of subjugated knowledge that was repressed by dominant culture and knowledge (Gandhi 1998, 53). This research attempts to return to this basic critical function of post-colonialism. In doing so, it tries to draw attention to the practice of cultural resistance in colonial Malaya. The localisation of resistance suggests that the influence of imperial culture cannot be overemphasised. Some aspects of cross-cultural exchange have to be seen as politically calculated. Some ideas of western liberalism such as equality and democracy were prevented from gaining ground during the colonial times, although, they later become desirable in the post-colonial context. Interestingly, their repression was often enabled through the cooperation with local elites who were complicit in manipulating local culture for political survival.

2.5 Post-Colonialism from Malaysian Perspective

The enormous influence exerted by *Orientalism* has earned the book and its author a pioneering status in the critique of western cultural hegemony. Following the success of *Orientalism*, works on issues such as colonial representation, colonial discourse and marginalised groups proliferated and a wide-range of works have been drawn under the umbrella term, post-colonialism.

While the critique of colonial discourse seemed to take place rather productively in the metropolitan academia, the same situation is also taking place in the former colonies, although under less scrutiny. In Malaysia for example, debates on colonial history were taking place in history journals¹¹⁴ as early as in the 1960s. There was awareness among local historians that western historians were not immune from cultural prejudice when studying native history and understandably, saw colonial sources as tainted with colonial dispositions.

30 years on, the topic of colonial discourse re-emerged on the scene. A conference on “*Mempersoalkan Pascakolonialisme*” (Interrogating Post-Colonialism) was held from 8-10 December in 1998.¹¹⁵ The aim of the conference was to enquire and to reflect on whether the discipline of post-colonialism bears any influence or impact on Malay studies. In particular, it asks whether post-colonialism, as a field emanating from the metropolitan academy, can be a reliable framework to explain the situation that occurs in colonial and post-independence Malaysia (Mohamad & Zabidah 2005, xii). The consensus of the participants was that Malay (-sian) studies can best be understood by developing a paradigm which put emphasis on local experience and perspective. It was argued that post-colonialism’s arrival on the academic scene could not be conceived as a critical response towards colonialism and its legacies. One of the participants, Zainal Kling (2005) argues that “post-colonial (studies) arrived to restore and to preserve the memory and the legacies of British imperialism”. Texts which are considered as belonging to the post-colonial domain became the “symbols of living (western empire), just like a headstone on the graveyard of empire” (2005, 27). Another participant, a sociologist named Abdul Rahman Embong, argues there has been a well-established tradition of deconstruction of colonial knowledge in Malaysian academies prior to *Orientalism*. He instances a national conference, “The Role and Orientation of Social Science and Social Scientists” held in 1974, as an example of the awareness among Malaysian academics of the need to recognise the influence of colonial ideology. Another example cited was a work by Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*.

¹¹⁴ See Zainal Abidin “Some Aspects of Malay History” and Khoo “JWW Birch: A Victorian Moralist in Perak Augean Stable” and the reply by Allen, J.D. “JWW Birch and the Writing of Malaysian History”.

¹¹⁵ The conference papers have been compiled in a book *Pascakolonialisme dalam Pemikiran Melayu* (Post-colonialism in Malay Thoughts, 2005).

From these responses, the criticisms towards post-colonialism are based on the perception that post-colonialism did not introduce anything new to the local scholarship. It could be suggested that criticism towards post-colonialism may indicate the sense of despair that the native's effort at deconstructing western epistemology went unnoticed and unacknowledged. It was only when *Orientalism* emerged on the scene that such consciousness began to gain ground in western discipline, and remained there since.

This research tries to appreciate the contribution of local sources in engaging the issue of colonial knowledge and cultural hegemony prior to *Orientalism*. For this reason, it is imperative to examine the work of Hussein Alatas, described by Said as “startlingly original” and constituting “an interesting variety of hybrid cultural work”, engaging indigenous tradition in a critique of western imperialism (Said 1994, 295 & 296).

2.5.1 *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977)

The Myth of the Lazy Native is authored by a Malaysian sociologist Syed Hussein Alatas.¹¹⁶ He investigates the representation of Malays as an indolent race in colonial literature. The main thrust of the book is twofold: to “correct the one-sided colonial view of the Asian native and his society” and in the process, form a critique of colonialism (Alatas 1977, 9)¹¹⁷; and secondly, to demonstrate the persistency of this representation among the political elites of post-independence Malaysia. He believes that revealing the ideological root of the lazy native will contribute towards the effort of national integration in the post-independence Malaysia (17).

¹¹⁶ Syed Hussein Alatas (1928-2007) was an Amsterdam-trained sociologist and a founding member of a multiracial political party Gerakan (People's Movement's Party). *The Myth* was inspired when Alatas worked as the head of research department in *Dewan Bahasa Pustaka* (Hall of Malaysian Language and Literature) where he encountered an archive of colonial texts. According to Mona Abaza (2002), Alatas' interests in colonial ideology and decolonisation of mentalities were fermented through his association with the Muslim Brotherhood during his student years in Amsterdam. Alatas helped to start a Department of Malay Studies in the National University of Singapore where he taught and later became a full professor (1967-1978). In 1988, he was appointed as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya before he resigned in 1990 because of his insistence on a merit-based policy.

¹¹⁷ The reference from this book is from now summarised in page number.

The study of colonialism and its effect had been Alatas's interest since he was an undergraduate in the University of Amsterdam. In an article "The Impact of the West upon Asia", Alatas explored three consequences of colonialism to the new nation-states in Asia. Firstly, as a result of colonial exploitation of resources, the structure of modern economy in the decolonised countries was embedded with foreign rather than indigenous interests. Secondly, colonialism bequeathed a structure of dependency not only in the field of economy, but also in politics and society. And finally, the cultural contact between the west and the non-west had encouraged a re-evaluation of indigenous cultures. After independence, there were conscious efforts among the local elites to modernise culture based on the standard introduced by the west. Hence, there was emphasis on material development and scientific education to break away from the traditional mould that characterised colonial society and culture. Despite the attempts at de-colonising from western structure and thought, Alatas argues that colonial influence remained persistent and has real psycho-sociological implications in the post-independence nations. This assumption becomes the foundation for *The Myth*.

Alatas argues that the image of indolent Malays was formed in the context of colonial economy. There are two socio-historical realities that enabled and supported the representation of indolent Malays. Firstly, the Malays did not participate directly in colonial economy. Instead, they preferred to remain in their traditional occupations in the rice-fields or river-fishing. For this reason, a scholar-administrator Richard Winstedt believes that "because he is an independent farmer with no need to work for hire, the Malay has got undeserved reputation for idleness" (quoted in *The Myth*, 72).

Secondly, the non-participation of Malays in modern economy is juxtaposed with the Chinese labourers who concentrated in the urban areas and mining industry. An observer described Chinese labourers:

He is the mule among the nations – capable of the hardest task under the most trying conditions; tolerant of every kind of weather and ill usage; eating little and drinking less; stubborn and callous; unlovable and useful in the highest degree.

(Quoted in *The Myth*, 75)

The two realities put forward before thus combined to enable and support the image of the lazy Malays. Alatas refuted the association between capitalism and cultural behaviour, and argued that “the accusation of indolence against the Malays was not due to actual indolence but to their refusal to work as plantation labourers” (79). Alatas was critical of the negative attitude of European authors and administrators when it came to traditional economy. His criticism towards capitalism can also be seen in his article “The Weber Thesis and Southeast Asia” (1963). Western capitalism was presented as a superior economic system arguably because similar development could not have occurred in the non-western context due to the negative influence of religion. Such perspective was extended to the analysis of lazy natives, which demonstrated that the background of the image of indolence arose not from the local culture but from western cultural prejudice. The natives were denigrated as lazy because of their association with traditional sector. Instead, Alatas argues that the Malays’ non-participation in the colonial economy was a rational decision:

They avoided permanent routine work of the exploitative type in other people’s mines and plantations. Any observer could see how neatly the paddy fields were tended. So was the orchard at home. All these required sustained and permanent labour. ... What was a perfectly healthy, normal and human reaction was regarded as a strange shortcoming. Many labourers were averse to leaving their family and village. In some instances, in tin mining the wages for Malays were lower than for the Chinese. (79)

From his investigation of the representation of lazy Malays, Alatas discovered that the link between non-participation in colonial economy and indolence has limited truth. Despite that, the false image of the Malays continued to influence the British policy towards Malay development.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Alatas believes that the image of indolent Malays, despite its facile capitalist logic, had real political utility:

The degradation of the native population could be considered a historical necessity. Once their country was taken they had to accept a subordinate place

¹¹⁸ The pro-Malay policy was framed under the assumption that the Malays traditional life must be maintained because it was strictly adhered to and people would resist change. This aspect is dealt with in Chapter 1.

in the scheme of things. They had to be degraded and made to feel inferior and subservient for otherwise they would have cast off the foreign yoke. (24)

The Myth did not go into detail on the way capitalist ideology operated in the colonial political sphere. Alatas was merely concerned with the role of ideology that gave rise to the image of the indolent native. Nevertheless, he did demonstrate the way that ideology was translated for political use in post-colonial Malaysia. The persistence of colonial ideology is exemplified by a book sponsored by the ruling party UMNO called *Revolusi Mental* (Mental Revolution).

Revolusi Mental (1971) is a collection of essays written by UMNO-related politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, academics and journalists. The aim of the book is to find solutions to Malaya's socio-economic conundrum. The title suggests a "revolution" of Malay culture and mentality which the authors believe to have caused their failure in modern economy. Alatas argues that this book exemplifies the continuation of colonialist thought, depicting the authors as if "they resemble some American negroes who believe what white racialists say about them" (166).

Revolusi authors compiled a list of what they alleged were typical Malay traits:

- Lack of courage to fight for the truth.
- Preference to spend excessively during feasts, celebrations and on furniture.
- Lack of interest in science and technology subjects and occupations compared to arts and humanities.
- Lack of inquisitive mind and imaginative spirit.
- Fear of risk-taking in business.
- Preference for a short-range insight rather than long-term planning.

(Senu Abdul Rahman 1971, 62-63)

These traits were said to be the cause of Malay backwardness. Alatas saw that the authors were unconsciously repeating what had been said about the Malays in the

colonial literature.¹¹⁹ But worse than the colonialists, these authors who hailed from respectable segments of Malay elites, further specified the negative traits that were identified as Malay (and must be got rid of). There are two aspects that pointed to the authors' common prejudice with the colonialists. Firstly, the image of backward Malays was interpreted from their lack of activity in modern economy, and secondly, the image of entirely backward Malays was contrasted with the image of entirely industrious Chinese. The authors thus called for Malays to exert their energy and effort to emulate the spirit of discipline and enterprise of the Chinese. Like their colonial predecessor, the book adopted a false generalisation by assuming the existence of certain cases as having universal truth.¹²⁰ From these parallels, Alatas argues the book is "a confirmation of the ideology of colonial capitalism as far as the Malay is concerned" (150).

Alatas' critique of *Revolusi* is not only concerned with the sharing of colonialist prejudice. He also demonstrates that the book disguises the political objectives that underline its theme. Alatas rightly points out the connection between the authors and the establishment (154). According to him, putting the blame for Malay backwardness squarely on Malay culture and attitude absolved the responsibility of the state.¹²¹ On the other hand, drawing attention to the economic problems of the Malays would put pressure on the state to allocate more funding for Malay development.¹²² Such funding would then be channelled to UMNO division leaders, who later, would distribute this to contractors connected to the party.¹²³ Ultimately, the rhetoric of

¹¹⁹ Alatas quoted some of the general Malay characteristics observed by colonial administrators. Swettenham described the Malays as fatalist, superstitious and extravagant (44), while Raffles claims that Malays were capable of understanding simple ideas better than scientific or refined composition (38).

¹²⁰ Alatas criticised the reference to Malay proverbs to establish the existence or absence of particular character traits. For example, one of the authors of *Revolusi* argues that words like discipline, self-reliance and initiative were absent from Malay vocabularies, hence, from Malay culture. Alatas claims such reasoning is absurd, because it would erroneously imply the Malays did not think before the arrival of Islam since the word *pikir* (think) is derived from Arabic. (171)

¹²¹ The state failed to address the economic position of Malays because of the "politics of compromise" reached between the political elites who maintained the status quo of the Malays in politics and the Chinese in economy. See Chapter 1.

¹²² *Revolusi*'s call for state intervention in economy was a continuation of the economic agenda expressed in the Malay Economic Congress (1965 and 1968). The congress was initiated by UMNO politicians and was participated by the similar social elements as those of the *Revolusi* authors. The Congress proposal for institutional support for Malay entrepreneurship was adopted following the May 13th riot.

¹²³ The role of UMNO as rentier dispensing agent is discussed in Chapter 1. This role started during the colonial period with the formation of Rural Development Authority (RIDA) in 1951.

Malay backwardness was used for perpetuating power claims and the authority of Malay political elites.

Overall, Alatas argues the book expresses the inner contradiction of Malay elites. Despite assuming respectable positions in social, political and economic areas these elites remained ideologically subservient to their (former) colonial master. He states:

The Malay ruling party inherited the rule from the British without a struggle for independence. As such there was no ideological struggle. There was no intellectual break with British ideological thinking at the deeper layer of thought. The leadership of this party was recruited from the top hierarchy of the civil service trained by the British. Their emphasis on the individual as the dominant agent for change without sufficient consideration of the system reflected their powerful position. (152)

Alatas believes the problem of colonial ideology is not a unique phenomenon of a particular epoch. As evident in *Revolusi*, the ideology does not simply disappear once the colonial ruler has left the country. As indicated in the quote, these elites inherited the structure of politics and economy, as well as their position, from that very colonial system. The elites lacked a critical attitude towards the system that had placed the native into a subordinate position. This facilitated the continuation of certain elements of colonial mentality into the post-independence period.¹²⁴ To this effect, Alatas argued that the changing historical circumstances imply a change of style, but not the substance of ideology. He further states:

The political and economic relationship between Southeast Asia and the West has changed. Similarly, the image of the native has changed. The ideological elements have been transformed, and have assumed a new garb. The image of the indolent, dull, backward and treacherous native has climbed into that of a dependent native requiring assistance to climb the ladder of progress. (8)

¹²⁴ Alatas developed his idea on the ideological consequence of colonialism in his later works on decolonising social science. He use the term “captive mind” defined as “a product of higher institution of learning whose way of thinking imitates and is dominated by Western thought in an uncritical manner”. The captive mind has become an impediment for understanding and appreciating the problem of economic and social development in the former colonised nations. See Alatas (2000) “Intellectual Imperialism”.

The Myth argues that distortion of Malay character was a product of colonial ideology. Alatas' critique extended to the post-colonial representation of Malay backwardness by the indigenous elites. His work illustrates the parallel of the use of culture, by both the colonialist and the ruling elites, for political survival.¹²⁵ *The Myth* is an important resource for this research. In it, Alatas revisits colonial history in order to understand the past and to relate that to the contemporary situation. He believes the current issues of national integration and political corruptions are inseparable from the experience of colonial domination. Furthermore, *The Myth* shows the appropriation of culture for political ends. The stereotyping of Malays and Chinese was used by respective political parties to make claims and entitlement in their racial agenda. Not only was such abuse founded on a false proposition, it also deepens racial divisions in Malaysia.

At this point I would like to revisit the criticism by *Pascakolonialisme* participants in relation to post-colonialism. The debate regarding the relevance of post-colonialism to Malaysian experience invigorates the sentiment of the earlier works, notably from Alatas, that have pioneered and paved the way for a re-thinking of colonial legacies. The *Pascakolonialisme* participants assumed that post-colonialism claims knowledge and expertise of non-western cultures and society. Post-colonialism is thus seen as absorbing anything that concerns non-western cultural production, hence severing it from the place of origin. Having said that, it is also important to appreciate their call for recognition, from within and externally, of the ability of local academics to generate critiques of western thought without the need to be identified in a post-colonial enterprise. As one of the participants noted:

This entails recognition that there are diverse locations from which good social science theorising can emanate and, hence, question the exclusive and monopolistic location of theorising in the West and in Western traditions. In this sense, the restructuring of the social sciences requires social scientists to

¹²⁵ Alatas' insight has been used by other scholars to explain the continuation of colonial ideology. Zawawi (2005) argues that the myth of indolence has been used as a justification for hiring foreign labourers to work on the plantations who are more "hard-working" than the Malay planters. Although the main reason for the hiring was purely economic, Zawawi's research raised the fact that cultural argument is still coherent and unconsciously accepted.

explore the cultural and intellectual histories of their own societies to see what evidence there is of social thinkers and theorists. (Sinha 2005, 197)

This research argues that the critique of colonial legacies and the resistance towards domination can be understood and represented *comprehensively* by drawing sources from various fields, irrespective of their being western or non-western. Alatas' critique of colonial knowledge was made possible by appropriating insights from sociology and historical criticism. Likewise, post-colonial studies are using similar critical procedures in order to bring out a better understanding of the history and culture of the marginalised. The continuous process of criticism, revision and reformulation shows the dynamic and non-oppressive orientation that has and still continues to characterise development of post-colonial studies.

2.6 Cultural Resistance: A Conceptual Framework

2.6.1 Culture as resistance

From the previous discussion on *Orientalism*, culture becomes the privilege of authority that produces and distributes certain assumptions of culture, of the self, and of others. Following *Orientalism*, culture is referred as a discourse (which describes certain aspect of history and society) that constitutes authority and is relational to wider social processes. This analysis becomes the foundation for the critique of the colonial/elite use of culture in Malaysia. I will extend *Orientalism's* analysis into the critique of colonial/state power in three areas. These aspects have been dealt with in Chapter 1. The basic elements are:

- The political construction of Malay culture. This refers to the centrality of politics in the formation of Malay culture (Kessler 1992). The basic element in Malay culture is the role of the raja in bestowing an identity to his subject, and for the subject to accept the raja's authority. This constitutes a political process of legitimising the raja's and the subject's identity (as Malay). While *Orientalism* claims that the consistency of representation is supported by political power, I argue that politics alone is not sufficient. It requires an active

participation of the subjects who actually believe in certain historical ‘truths’ about their own culture.

- The manipulation of cultural symbols by the elite party UMNO to gain political support from the masses. Said’s proposition that cultural hegemony is basically a political invention cannot be overemphasised. The fact that there was a field of knowledge called orientalism shows that culture cannot be invented or made-up out of nothing. I argue that the political use of culture is possible only because such culture supports a particular worldview (e.g. *raja berdaulat* or sovereign ruler and absolutism) which political agency has appropriated for its own interest.
- The use of ethno-nationalist ideology to maintain authority. This ideology presupposed that the Malay is the legitimate inhabitant of *Tanah Melayu* (lit. land of the Malays) and accordingly, they are entitled to certain privileges over other communities. The protection and the implementation of such entitlement require political intervention, which UMNO has staked its claim to as the ‘protector’. The propagation of nationalist rhetoric has entrenched state power while at the same time it has lead to strain in a plural society.

Discussion so far has only talked about the exercise of power in *Orientalism* and how this can be extended to the Malaysian example. Another aspect that forms the focus of this research is resistance. *Orientalism* does not explicitly or implicitly denies the possibility of resistance even within a hegemonic situation. By offering a perspective from the subordinates, the illusion of “exclusive” western culture and experience can be put under pressure. The attempt at presenting a challenge to western hegemony from the perspective of the ‘other’ is the subject of Said’s other influential book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

In the introduction to *Culture and Imperialism (C&I)*, Said stated that the book is not just a sequel to *Orientalism* but “an attempt to do something else” (1993, xii). The book attempts to present the experience of colonialism from the “challenging alternative”, that is from the source of colonised cultures (1993, 58). Discourse of

orientalism operates on the assumption of silent “others” or “mute” subjects. Through their silence, western dominance was perpetuated and extended to various political and cultural pursuits. *C&I* envisaged an alternative to a totalising discourse (i.e. orientalism) by offering a concept of resistance. According to Said resistance is “an alternative way of conceiving human history” (1993, 260). This statement is taken to mean three things.

Firstly, resistance is not an exercise of counter-history in a limited version of essential natives versus the essential west. Said reinstated and elaborated the issue of cross-cultural interaction that was raised in *Orientalism*. Imperialism is not simply an act of political or physical aggression but also cultural. It was also a process of cultural immersion of the colonisers’ and the colonised. ‘African’ identity for example, was a collaborative effort between ‘African’ history and the study of Africa in England (1993, 158). This means that the invention of ‘African’ identity is not an isolated endeavour but a cumulative effort at engaging certain aspects of western cultures in order to represent and to express one’s own identity. For this reason Said argues that the experience of colonialism has rendered every culture “hybrid”, “heterogeneous” and “extraordinarily differentiated” (1993, xxix). Therefore, any programme or effort at resistance must embrace an inclusivist worldview that seeks to transcend the limit of essentialism.

Secondly, the *Orientalism*’s thesis that culture is a political construction is revived in *C&I*. While *Orientalism* emphasised the way culture was being used for western domination, *C&I* demonstrated the ways culture has been used for resistance. Culture becomes a medium of resistance during the anti-colonial movement. Central to the process of cultural resistance is a “rediscovery and repatriation of what has been suppressed in the native’s past” (1993, 253). Stories from local slaves, prison memoirs and folklores were restored to express the sense of national consciousness which was crucial in order to rally a united front against colonial power. In the process of discovering the “pre-colonial self”, nativism and radical nationalism emerged in the likes of “negritude”, “Islamic fundamentalism” and “Arabism” as alternatives to western imposed identity such as “negro” or even “orient” (1993, 258).

The propensity for cultural nationalism to slide into essentialist nationalism undoubtedly becomes a major concern for Said's advocacy of a humanistic version of cultural resistance. Said tried to reconcile this conflict by qualifying that the nativist ideology is transitory, a necessary first stage. This has to be seen as a "broadly cultural opposition" in which a particular culture tries to appropriate a simple oppositional concept (e.g. Arabs versus French or British) in order to appeal to a common cause (1993, 261). Another attempt at reconciling the nativist ideology is by proposing a new form of resistance that is ideological.

This is the third form of resistance proposed by Said. The notion of "ideological resistance" refers to the "pull away from separatist nationalism towards a more integrative view of human community and human liberation" (1993, 261). The key to the resisting or dismantling of ethno-nationalism is a notion of "secular interpretation". This subsequently became the main concern of the book and its criticism. The idea of "secular" expresses two concerns. The first one is the idea of a humanly produced historical experience, and secondly the role of the intellectual in drawing connections across variants of domination. The first will be discussed a little later under the category of history, so the current focus is on the latter.

The notion of "secular interpretation" is informed by Said's training in humanism. In the field of comparative literature, universalism expresses an ideal of hermeneutical understanding in textual interpretation. It assumes that every cultural text is accessible and can be appreciated from its artistic merit. In this regard, literature becomes a sort of "anthropological Eden, in which men and women happily produced something called literature" (1993, 52). Said criticised this form of universal culture because it disguised the politics that lie beneath the fiction of hermeneutics. The culture of high humanism, as evident in the texts produced by Yeats, Austen, and Verdi, assumed the superiority of western national cultures over others. This assumption was in turn, enabled by "the extraordinary privilege of an observer located in the West who could actually survey the world's literary output with a kind of sovereign detachment" (1993, 56). This shows that the rhetoric of universalism has been supported and was supportive in the pursuit of imperial expansion.

Despite being guilty of collaboration with the empire, Said believes that secular humanism is the only possible alternative to counter nationalism or other theological doctrines. In responding to a question of resistance in connection to *C&I*, Said spoke about his own struggle to formulate a type of resistance that is “contestory” without necessarily sliding back to nativism. Models of anti-colonial nationalism¹²⁶ were usually characterised by a combative spirit imbued with nationalist fervour. But this has only led to a disintegrative effect which is a predicted outcome of any essentialist doctrine. To counter the effect of what Said describe as “national consciousness”, he proposed a “non-coercive” model of resistance. This model requires the participation of universities and scholars who can make connections between various forms of domination which can later be presented as a unified experience (Said 1993, xxvii). In short, Said proposed a kind of multi-disciplinary enterprise in scholarship. The integration of human experience from various disciplines is what constitutes a secular interpretation of resistance as an alternative to a fragmentary vision of nationalism.

Said’s choice of secular humanism has been criticised by some authors. Arac (1994) argues that Said has conceded too easily to secular ideology. Said has failed to consider carefully the contradictory nature of secular thought. Secularism is known for trivialising the native’s customs, religion and its forms of knowledge. The right-wing attack on secularism in India for example, arose precisely because of this. Ironically, Said has demonstrated in *Orientalism* how scholars and authors like Gibbon, Vico and even Kant have “secularised” the orient into a “secular framework” (Said 1978, 119-121). The fact that secularism has been used for dominating the orient seemed to be forgiven in his later work in order to give way for a vision of universal integration.

Robbins (1994) asks how exactly an intellectual or any professional authority can assume the task of secular resistance? This is because *C&I* did not spell out the source of “counterauthority” other than that of secular criticism which ought to be addressed by intellectuals. From a practical point-of-view, “in the absence of a countervailing authority”, the question of who “speaks to power” and what would make power or

¹²⁶ Models of anti-colonialism such as Sukarno’s vision of communalistic socialism (*marhaen*) in Indonesia (arguably owing to the influence of a brief Japanese occupation), while the FLN during Algerian war for independence adopted both Islamic ideals and French universalism. See Kroef, J.M. (1972) and Connelly, M. (2000) respectively.

anyone listen leaves secular resistance a mere ethical programme without mobilising social support (1994, 29). This shows that secular humanism alone is insufficient to act as a counter-ideology to exclusivism since it lacks the mobilising power in the like of nationalist ideology.

Said's position on secular culture and resistance can be juxtaposed with another angle which sees culture or tradition as modern invention. Homi Bhabha has provided a similar thought on culture as construction. However, unlike Said, who thought 'tradition' belonged to the sphere of nationalistic adulation of past, Bhabha argues that 'tradition' is a necessary construction in a modern representation of culture. Bhabha (1994) argues that the representation of culture involves a process of signification through which "statement of culture or on culture differentiates, discriminates and authorises the field of force and reference". This suggests that culture is maintained and authorised by political agency that sets the rules and content permissible in specific cultural representation. A cultural field is thus invested with political interest whose legitimacy is maintained through certain cultural assumptions. The connection between power and culture enables political authority to use culture for purposes of ideological justification and building mass support. According to Bhabha the political representation of culture:

... Problematises the division of past and present, tradition and modernity....
It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic.

(1994, 35)

In the process of cultural representation, the aspect of tradition is used as a political strategy. History and tradition is not a faithful recollection or embodiment of past. It is rather a form of political invention. The use and abuse of culture in contemporary power practice signals the social and moral importance attached to the idea of tradition. While tradition does not assume objective existence, its symbolic significance as an archaic inheritance is a central constituent in the field of culture. In this regards, authorities are merely appropriating the objects which are already there

in the tradition. However, the difference lies in the repeated attempts at providing the mythical linkage between the past and present in order to establish an appearance of uninterrupted authority. This is the main reason why tradition or culture is immediately political. It has political usefulness which can both be demonstrated and challenged.

The previous discussion deals with the secular resistance model offered in *Orientalism* and *C&I*. The vision of secular humanism is offered as an alternative to a reductive form of nationalism. In addition to the criticism mentioned earlier, some remarks will be made about Said's model of resistance.

Firstly, in leaving the task of secular interpretation to intellectual will, Said has actually abandoned the populist agenda, which he believed to be useful only in the first stage, in favour of academic elitism. In colonial Malaya, an integrationist vision of nationalism was promoted by a segment of Malay-educated nationalists. Known as "radical" nationalism, its political program espoused a vision of equal citizenship under the category of 'Malay'. Although it is a racial term, it *includes* other communities such as Chinese and Indians and more importantly, it entails equal rights irrespective of biological origin. Moreover, the radical nationalists have also advocated for women's rights for education and for improved socio-economic condition for the poor. To the contrary, the aristocratic and western-trained nationalists were all opposed to the idea of democracy, independence and equal citizenship in favour of status quo, that is, the retention of colonial regime and exclusion of immigrant communities. This shows that nationalism is not a unitary political programme, but consists of various orientations such as progressive or conservative nationalism.

Another criticism of Said's secular alternative is the lack of a historical perspective on the term "secular". Secular ideas like individualism, democracy, and equality of gender and race had been discussed in the Malay press and in political writings during the colonial period. In fact, ethno-nationalist claims in regards to race were informed by the secular concept of individualism as opposed to a traditional notion of a raja-centred polity (*kerajaan*). In his study of Malay political discourse during the colonial period, Anthony Milner (1994) shows how liberal critique was used to counter the

kerajaan ideology that centred on the authority of a raja. Citing an example from an early 20th century text known as *Hikayat Abdullah* (lit. the story of Abdullah), Milner described the text as an indigenous experimentation of western liberal ideology. The author, Munshi Abdullah, presented a social criticism of Malay political and social systems. This is a departure from the *kerajaan*-type of literature that glorified the raja and custom (*adat*). Abdullah criticised the *kerajaan* institution for being responsible for Malay backwardness. For this reason, the author advised the Malay subjects to seek education in order to improve themselves rather than depending on their rajas. The post-war Malay nationalism has picked up on the idea of self-improvement in order to fight for their racial survival. The failure of their rajas to protect the subjects from the Malayan Union plan had led the people to organise themselves politically for the sake of their race, hence the cry of *Hidup Melayu* (long live Malay). This has spelled the beginning of a coherent secular national ideology grounded on race.

These criticisms show that secularism does not have a singular or predictable effect. It can sometimes be used to bolster progressive ideology, or at other times, used to support racial exclusivism. These criticisms notwithstanding, Said's notion of secular resistance can be applied to Malaysian experience but with some revisions.

Firstly, this research suggests that resistance has been a populist program rather than an exclusive domain of universities. Secondly, the study of resistance in Malaysian case must emphasise the socio-political context. In this respect, factors like religion or multi-communalism provide stimulating grounds for resistance to adapt to the current need. Thirdly, the reference to secular criticism can be used in conjunction with the more adaptable and less ambiguous term of "democratic criticism". The term "democracy" itself can be problematic, as theorists and critics like Robert Dahl (1989) or Noam Chomsky (2003, 145) have explained. However, its advantage is the clarity and consistency with regards to its basic premise, namely the assertion of a rational and shared process of criticism and judgement. Ultimately, the similarity between secularism and democracy is the emphasis on non-exclusive autonomy. This point is mentioned by Said in talking about the relevance of secular resistance in the present context. He said:

... I still believe this very strongly, that given an opportunity, people do still think in terms of such categories as enlightenment and liberation, and that it is of fundamental importance to the humanities and to intellectuals to reinsert them as agendas. (Said 1994, 22)

The continuation of a political program of democracy and liberalism from the colonial period until now shows the relevance of Said's emphasis on secular liberalism. The program for democracy in colonial Malaya was used to counter the ideology of feudal-conservatism. In the present time, the civil pressure for political reform, transparency and inclusive national ideology can be conceived as a form of democratic criticism against the state authoritarianism. Given the possibility of democratic ideology as a counter-weight to ethno-nationalist rhetoric, Said's revised notion of cultural resistance will be used to examine the practice of power and resistance in colonial and post-colonial Malaysia.

2.6.2 History as a field of struggle

History, or the study of the past, has been a familiar theme in Said's major works such as *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism (C&I)*. In a 1986 interview, Said stated that *Orientalism* is not an exercise of counter-history. Instead, it was about the interrogation of the social and historical process that produced knowledge of orientalism (Said 2005, 59). Similarly, the thrust of *C&I* is to relate contemporary political issues with the experience of imperialism. Said offers two reasons for the continuing preoccupation with the history of colonialism.

Firstly, the process of imperialism has significantly altered the configuration of local and global history. The histories, cultures and economies of the local were intertwined with the metropolitan, in the past and present. The sheer force of global capitalism certainly accounted for the inter-connectedness. But the global pattern itself is also a form of imperial expansion. In this regard, history becomes "contemporary and easy at hand" (Said 1993, 22). When history becomes easy and accessible for present consumption, the question of past becomes a source of contention.

This leads to a second point explaining why colonial history continues to be relevant. The past has always been used for interpreting the present. Some groups in post-colonial societies reflected on colonialism to understand the difficulties faced in the modern nation-state. In Malaysia, authors like Hussein Alatas discovered the persistence of the colonial ideology of the ‘lazy’ Malays among the peoples even after independence was achieved. In this matter, Said argues that the lingering of colonial influence raised the “uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over or concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms” (Said 1993, 1).

The possibility of interrogating history provides the opportunity for problematising history. Said is in favour of a constructivist approach to history and culture. In both *Orientalism* and *C&I*, Said promotes the view that history is man-made. In *C&I*, he explains what history stands for:

Let us begin by the notion that although there is an irreducible subjective core to human experience, this experience is also historical and secular, it is accessible to analysis and interpretation, and centrally important – it is not exhausted by totalizing theories, not marked and limited by doctrinal or national lines, not confined once and for all to analytical constructs. (1993, 35)

The emphasis on a secular construction, as opposed to a divinely-ordained history, is part of the strategy of resistance. As stated in the previous section, the notion of “secular” is a counter-poised to exclusivist nationalism. The political advantage of secular conception of history is described in his interview in 1985. Said noted that the representation of American settlers, or America as discovered by Europe, was characterised by the “pioneering spirit” and “continual sense of enterprise” (Said 2005, 49). The concealment of native extermination becomes a necessary construction of an imaginary ‘new’ settler community. In this sense, history was neither in a natural state nor was it a divine gift (e.g. “promised land” or “manifest destiny”). It is instead politically constructed and perpetuated for present consumption. This is the ground from which history can become a subject for critical activity. The fact that history is man-made, or secular, means it becomes accessible to rational analysis.

Said's notion of history as man-made is a useful insight in presenting a critique of a political construction of history. However, Said's theorising of history is quite limited on two counts. Firstly, 'history' as offered by Said refers to textual production. Said relies heavily on the persuasive rhetoric of ideology, namely secularism, to assume the task of resistance. This works well in discourse but its impact in social reality is ambiguous. Secondly, Said did not adequately address the role of agency in the construction of history, other than on a handful of writers and politicians. This clearly presented one side of history-making, but it excludes other significant players like democratic activists, cultural activists and civil groups.

In order to utilise Said's construction of history, some adjustments are required to reflect the interests of this research. The main interest is to build a framework that can emphasise resistance as a wider social process. Firstly, the notion of "elite historiography" will be introduced which refers to history as a shared social process of interpretation and counter-interpretation. This notion extends the construction of history to include the state and the subalterns or those at the margins of power and history. It is a departure from Said's reference to canonical works as a source of history. Secondly, the concept of "field" as introduced by Pierre Bourdieu will be utilised. This concept is used in reference to history as a field of social contest. Unlike Said's emphasis on discourse, Bourdieu tries to draw attention to the inherent feature of struggle in the field of culture. These two aspects will be discussed in detail.

In his research about colonial Indian history, Guha (1994) identifies two forms of interpreting nationalism. The first is a colonialist form which defines nationalism as "the sum of the activities and ideas by which the Indian elites responded to the institutions, opportunities and resources generated by colonialism". The second form is a nationalist interpretation, which describes nationalism "an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom" (1994, 2). What unites these two interpretations together is the partial view that reflective of the class interest that the two groups, the colonialist and the elites, shared. The elite position in society was a result of British patronage in areas of education, administration and economy. Since their position and survival depended on continuing British protection, it was in their interest to maintain British power and the stability of colonial rule.

Such elitist reading of history has only come to dominance because of their powerful position that ensured other oppositional voices marginalised. There are various strategies of delegitimation, for example, by labelling people's resistance as a problem of law and order and an act of irrationalism. According to Guha, the acts of resistance and rebellion, regardless of the interpretations accorded to them, presented a dichotomy in representation of Indian nationalism. The dual existence of the elite and the popular or 'subaltern' classes of nationalism "was the index of historical truth that is the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation" (1994, 6). Although elitist form of historiography presented resourceful readings into the ideological, bureaucratic and class structure of colonial India, researchers must be made aware of the groups and the views excluded from the colonial institutions and patronage. Hence, a study of colonial history always contains an underside which is a product of colonial power and control, but also one that was perceived as threatening to the dominant narrative.

The concept of elite historiography provides an important tool for analysing colonial archive. It raised attention to the unknown perspectives, and questioned why and how such silence was carried out to the present time. From sociological perspective, the issue of marginalisation is conceptualised as a social process and is subjected to continuing struggle and (re-) interpretation. In order to appreciate the role of social subjects in perpetuating and contesting domination the work of Pierre Bourdieu will be discussed.

Bourdieu (1990) referred to a "field" as a site of cultural practice consists of institutions, rules, rituals and categories that produce and authorise meanings. The idea of field is used to define domains of social life like arts, politics, commerce and education. He defines social fields as "arbitrary social constructs" which are produced in a gradual process of struggle, or as he put it, they are "games in themselves" (1990, 67). The concept is important because it pays attention to the reality of social conflicts that pattern social life. Social life is made of struggle between power interests and opposition to it. Subsequently, the interaction between the dominant and its counter-forces would structure and restructure the limits and expectations that govern fields. Unlike Said's treatment of culture as historically determined, Bourdieu treated culture

as social practices that consisted of rules (that set the limit) and the agencies that continually contested the rules.

Bourdieu's concept of field is useful for two reasons. Firstly, it refines Said's macro-level analysis of culture. Bourdieu focused on the conflict of meaning and interpretation at the micro-level of social practice. Secondly, field as an embodied form of social practice can be extended to the analysis of historical narrative. National history in Malaysia consists of a master narrative that claims its legitimacy to speak as a nation by asserting a certain foundational status. It also consists of its underside that is suppressed and marginalised. The interaction between these elements in history narrative can be seen within the fields of cultural practice.

From the terms introduced by Bourdieu, the notion of culture as fields of resistance is used in this research emphasises the following points:

- Field of national history as the site of resistance. This emphasises the inter-relation between culture and political context. History is not inseparable from power interest represented by the state faction and its challengers.
- Resistance in the field of history is a continuous process which is part of a broader socio-political struggle between the authoritarian power claim and democratically influenced forces.

In order to illustrate history as a social field, and given the relevance of autobiography in this research, the cultural production of memoirs in Malaysia will be discussed.

It could be claimed that national history in Malaysia is dominated by the theme of independence. The trend in publishing works that celebrates such achievement is evidenced by referring to the commemorative titles such as:

- *Perayaan Ulang Tahun Merdeka: Malaysia 10 tahun Merdeka* (The Celebration of 10 Years of Independence) published by UMNO in 1967.

- *25 Tahun Merdeka: Kenangan Abadi kepada Bangsa, Agama dan Tanah Air* (The 25 Years of Independence: An Eternal Memory for the Nation, Religion and Country) by Abdul Samad Idris, an UMNO veteran, published in 1982.
- *Buku Citra Merdeka 1957-2005* (The Special *Merdeka* Book), published by the National Archive of Malaysia in 2006.
- *Merdeka at 50*: A souvenir edition, published in association with Islamic University (UIAM) in three languages of Malay, Mandarin and English. The commemorative genre contains writings by previous and current state politicians.

The documentation of national independence was also available in autobiographical form. The writings of autobiography/biography were usually commissioned by research units of a political party, like UMNO or other state agencies.¹²⁷ As a result, studies on the independent struggle were limited to the figures of national importance like the former prime ministers¹²⁸ or other UMNO elites.¹²⁹

However, the biographic trend that emphasises the elite version of history has taken a different turn. UKM Publisher, a publishing arm to the state-funded National University of Malaysia (UKM), started a project known as the *Memoir Series* in 1991. This project is intended to revive interest in lesser-known subjects in colonial history. As a result, two memoirs of the former members of Communist Party were published, namely the *Memoir of Ibrahim Chik* and the *Memoir of Shamsiah Fakeh*.

The attempt to present history from a communist perspective was met with criticism. A certain reader, Putera Gubir, wrote to a national newspaper *Utusan Malaysia* to express his concern about the publication. In his opinion, communist ideology had “quietly seeped into our national history by placing their struggle on a par with

¹²⁷ An example is Zahidi Zainol Rashid, a State Librarian in the state of Kedah, has written three volumes of biography related to the life and career of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad. These works are *Mahathir di Mata Umum* (1999), *Che Det dan Pekan Rabu* (2000) and *Mahathir Menjulung Martabat Malaysia* (2003).

¹²⁸ An example is a hardcover edition of the late second Prime Minister of Malaysia Tun Abdul Razak’s biography *A Personal Portrait* published by the Tun Abdul Razak Foundation. The foundation is headed by his son Najib, the current Prime Minister and UMNO President.

¹²⁹ An example is a hardcover biography about UMNO veteran and permanent chairman of UMNO Tun Sulaiman Ninam Shah which was published by Utusan Publications in 2000. The publishing company is owned by UMNO that also owns *Utusan Malaysia*, the most-widely read Malay language daily newspaper.

UMNO” (*Utusan Malaysia*, 12 December 2004). Another reader has also expressed a similar concern. Putera Malaysia has warned that the university authority “must beware of the insidious threat that secretly tried to acknowledge the deviant struggle of the left-leaning Malay nationalists” (*Utusan Malaysia*, 24 November 2004).

Due to the public pressure, the university authority was instructed to launch an internal investigation to ascertain the level of threat (*Utusan Malaysia*, 30 November 2004). As a result, the memoirs of former communists like Shamsiah Fakeh were suspended, while a manuscript of another former communist Rashid Maidin¹³⁰ was relinquished to an independent publishing house, Strategic Information and Research Development (SIRD).¹³¹

From the state perspective, the revisionist attempt to write history, as exemplified by the radical memoirs, was seen as an evidence of anarchic¹³² or ignorant¹³³ attitudes towards the spirit of nationalism. It was claimed that such an attempt was tantamount to undermining the ‘genuine’ struggle of the independent fighters. The Prime Minister has responded to this revisionist attempt. In a commemorative book published to celebrate the 50 years of national independence, he explained why the present generation should be more appreciative of their predecessors’ sacrifice:

In particular, the younger generation does not understand how difficult it was to achieve independence. Very little concerning independence is spoken of in their circles, perhaps because they are happy to be where they are, because

¹³⁰ Rashid Maidin (1917-2006) was a former member of Communist Party of Malaya (PKM), and prior to that, a member of the radical Malay Nationalist Party (MNP).

¹³¹ SIRD is an independent publishing house that aims to publish works of non-mainstream academics for wider local and international distribution. Its sister company, *GerakBudaya* (lit. culture on the move) was founded in 1998 and is dedicated to releasing “alternative perspectives” and “hidden histories” of local and international scope. It is also a sole distributor for London-based Zed Books. See <http://www.gerakbudaya.com>

¹³² *Utusan Malaysia* interpreted anarchy as a political philosophy expressed by “a branch of a leftist group, which regarded the state authority and rule of laws as illegitimate, and therefore must be ignored and fought”. In regards to national history, the anarchist could easily influence those who were susceptible or refused to learn the historical truth. (*Utusan Malaysia*, 22 August 2008)

¹³³ An editorial column has reminded the Malays about the lesson in history in order to understand the root of the Malay’s special position. It says: “The Malays have been reminded time and time again not to release the dogs stuck between the branches. These dogs do not appreciate the goodwill of their master. This reminder is important to make us aware of the risk of being victimised by the dogs that we had helped. The Malays were known for being generous that had at times led to their own downfall”. (*Utusan Malaysia*, 7 September 2008)

development in this country has been so sustained and vibrant that they take progress for granted. ... Perhaps the present generation is accustomed to progress and success and is far removed from the struggles and sacrifices that are made in pursuit of independence. (Abdullah Badawi 2007, 5)

The controversy generated from the publication of the radical memoirs highlights the contestatory orientation of history. On the one hand, the state was intent on ensuring the radical memoirs would not corrupt the younger generation while on the other hand, the public were encouraged by marginal historical perspectives that were previously unknown. This shows the resistance activity in the field of culture, aptly described by the following quote:

Resistance is not a quality inherent in cultural products but rather an effect of the process of the product's creation and reception.

(Rosemary Jolly, quoted in Whitlock 2000, 171)

The emphasis on 'effect' rather than on a pre-formulated resistance is instructive because it draws attention to the larger social consequence rather than seeing it as an isolated or aesthetic cultural production. This means the cultural production of memoirs involves a dynamic interaction between the author, the public and the state.

2.6.3 Agency and Subaltern

In the previous sections, two concepts that are used in this research have been clarified. The main theoretical source elicited for the purpose is *Orientalism*, with occasional reference to Said's other work *Culture and Imperialism (C&I)*. The cultural resistance framework is aimed at emphasising the role of authority and social subjects in producing and contesting history. I argue that cultural resistance is a social process with significant political implications. The main problem with *Orientalism* however is its lack of attention to social dimensions in favour of universal philosophy. This is the area that this research tries to improve on without diminishing the importance of *Orientalism*. Next, the issue of agency will be discussed. This is because social subjects have been important players in the process of resistance.

The concept of agency in *Orientalism* refers to the role of the intellectual in exposing the political interest disguised in hegemonic discourse. It is possible that Said was influenced by Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals. For Gramsci, any programme or efforts to deal with the pervasiveness of power and control in society requires political education that can cultivate critical attitudes among the masses (Landy 1996, 55). Thus, *Orientalism* continues Gramsci's discussion on organic intellectual as seen from the terms such as "independent critical consciousness" or a "secular intellectual" (in *C&I*) who built upon tradition of critique of Eurocentrism. Despite his faith in the intellectual as a source of liberation, Said maintains that intellectualism has also been responsible for the excess of orientalism (see *Orientalism*, 288-305).

In a debate organised by the Middle East Studies Association, that took place in 1986 between Said and Bernard Lewis, he reiterated this position. The role of the orientalist in the present time is to become a representer of the Middle East for American media and foreign policy-makers. Knowledge in this instance is being put into use for misrepresenting the Middle East. This is why Said believes that the only deterrent to such intellectual abuse is by (counter) intellectual effort since knowledge is a powerful remedy for lies and ignorance. He stated that:

But I felt that the scholars who knew more about the Middle East ... that it is the duty of scholars to act in the interest of truth and justice and fairness and honesty. (Said 2005, 307)

Said's unwavering faith in intellectual agency is similar to that of Noam Chomsky, whose political philosophy has inspired Said's works. Chomsky speaks about developing a "mass support that can make a revolution meaningful" (Chomsky 2003, 139). The role of ordinary people in resistance is not included in Said's major works, although some of his political essays did pay tribute to people's resistance.¹³⁴ In order to address the role of social subjects, the insight from post-colonial theory will be discussed.

¹³⁴ C.f. "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals" and "Defiance, Dignity, and the Rule of Dogma".

Post-colonial studies have filled in the vacuum left by *Orientalism* by including marginalised subjects into analysis. The term ‘other’ is substituted with a more nuanced term “subaltern”. The term was introduced by Gramsci as reference to a social group that is “always subjected to the activity of the ruling groups”. Because of its subordination, the subalterns can neither organise themselves collectively nor can their struggle occur outside the mechanism of moral and political hegemony (Gramsci 1971, 52-55). The proponents of Indian subaltern studies have appropriated Gramsci’s definition for interpreting colonial history. In colonial history of India, subaltern is referred to “a figure produced by historical discourse of domination” which is capable of providing a “mode of reading history differently from the elites” (Prakash 1992, 9; see also Guha 1994). In Indian historiography, the subaltern is a class that is separated from the coloniser and the colonial collaborating elites. As a result of their severance from the network of interests and patronage that supported the elites, the subaltern is perceived as autonomous.

A more critical view has challenged the alleged autonomy of subaltern class. Spivak (2005) argues it is theoretically impossible for subalterns to assume a separate and independent existence from the elites. For Spivak, subalterns inhabit the position of “subaltern” as the result of the power-relation that they are situated in. Furthermore, by virtue of their marginalisation, the subalterns possess neither the means to speak directly to the elites nor the ability to represent themselves as “subaltern”. Their marginalisation necessarily renders their existence and representation as ineffective in such power-relationships.

Spivak’s position on subalterns can be seen in her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). She cited the practice of *sati* or widow burning which has been a controversial issue in colonial India. For the British colonialists, *sati* represented an instance of traditionalism that was barbaric, outmoded and outside the standard of modern and “good society”. Hence, the practice must be abolished in concomitance with the British civilising mission. For the Indian elites, *sati* represented a “nationalistic romanticisation of the purity, strength and love of the self-sacrificing women”. Since both of these positions advocated, to some extent, a notion of freedom, the issue of *sati* was caught “within discursive practices” of on the one hand, “the white men seeking to save brown women from brown men”, and on the other, of a “good

wifehood with self-immolation on the husband's pyre". Within this discursive contest, the widow or *sati* (lit. good wife), became unknown, invisible, a mere subject of *representation* of two dominant discourses that claimed to be her representer. The subaltern, thus, cannot speak except within the ideologies that render her position as subaltern.¹³⁵ Spivak states:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of the women disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation. (1988, 306)

Beverly (1998) echoes a similar dilemma about "representing" the subaltern. He asked, "How can one represent the subaltern ... when those forms of knowledge are directly and indirectly implicated in the social production of othering of the subaltern?" (1998, 305) For these scholars, since subaltern entails knowledge and history that is denied, the only way of turning a subaltern into a knowable subject is through intellectual representation. However, the reality of power-relations in the production of knowledge meant that the subaltern continues to become voiceless, as Spivak discovered:

The historian, transforming 'insurgency' into 'text for knowledge', is only one 'receiver' of any collectively intended social act. With no possibility of nostalgia for that lost origin, the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamour of his or her own (consciousness-effect, as operated by disciplinary-training) so that the elaboration of the insurgency, packed with an insurgent consciousness, does not freeze into 'object of investigation', or worse yet, a model for imitation. ... The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. (Spivak 1988, 287)

¹³⁵ When Said asked by an interviewer about his opinion on Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak", did not entirely agree with Spivak's argument that the subaltern can only be *made* to speak. Instead, Said describes the capacity of some anti-colonial texts from Africa and the Caribbean that have produced alternative discourses that overlap with the dominant ones, but by no means invalidate their oppositional strength and autonomy. (Wicke & Sprinker 1992, 234)

The issue of “representation” has a broader implication for autonomy. Subaltern studies have demonstrated various instances of uprisings and rebellions by deprived groups that sought to contest the power imposed upon them, although often they met with failure. Nevertheless, this historical evidence showed the capacity of subalterns to assert counter-force in the specific power relationship. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to the “complexity of intersecting discourses and struggles” and to make connections to other forms of struggle that are not merely confined to textual discourse (Childs & Williams 1997, 28).

In this research, the concept of the subaltern is applied to a marginalised group in Malaysian anti-colonial politics.¹³⁶ This group is collectively known as the “radical” nationalists. In the next discussion, I will demonstrate two aspects that are relevant for understanding the marginalisation of this group from Malaysian politics. These aspects are ideology and political orientation.

Unlike the UMNO nationalists, the radical nationalist group was the group at the fringe of anti-colonial nationalism. Means (1976) defines radical Malay nationalists as those who “held radical views, were contemptuous of traditional Malay elites and wished to pattern Malay nationalism after the Indonesian nationalist movement” (Means 1976, 88). This definition is representative, but not wholly adequate. There were some radical nationalists who worked within the UMNO organisational base, others who followed a secular or religious model, or even some who worked in a communist party. Nevertheless, what tied the disparate groups of nationalists, Islamists, and communists together was their commitment to immediate independence from colonial rule. This was the main reason that the group was marginalised from Malay nationalism and politics. The determination to achieve independence “by whatever means” had separated the radicals from UMNO nationalists who preferred to cooperate with the colonial regime. In order to achieve the ultimate aim, the Malay

¹³⁶ There have been studies of the groups marginalised by the process of history or development in Malaysia. These are: Rimmer & Allen, (eds.) (1990) *The Underside of Malaysian History*; Dentan, (ed.) (1997) *Malaysia and the Original People*; Zawawi (1998) *Malay Labourers*; and Root (1997) *From Minah Karan to AIDS*.

Nationalist Party¹³⁷ (MNP) was formed in October 1945. The MNP presented itself as a progressive force in Malay politics. This was stated in the party's newspaper:

If there were to be any difference between the MNP and UMNO, it would be confined to political ideology. The MNP is a leftist political party whereas UMNO is at the right. The MNP demanded a free and independent republic, whereas UMNO wanted a constitutional monarchy.

(*Pelita Malaya*, 14 May 1946)

The determined attitude towards independence became the main rallying force of the MNP. It was declared that independence must be achieved by whatever means, either through "blood or revolution".¹³⁸ The party had unhesitatingly used the term "radical" to signify their progressive attitude relative to UMNO conservatism. A party member wrote in a newspaper column that the MNP was radical "in the sense that it chooses to be progressive in outlook whether political, economic, social, religious or cultural.... It is radical only to conservative minds and from an imperial viewpoint" (*The Straits Times*, 28 November 1946). For its subscribers, "radical" implies uncompromising anti-colonialism and opposition towards socio-political conservatism. Furthermore, the radicals tried to present themselves as a viable alternative force to the aristocratic leadership of the feudal norm. One of its members wrote in a daily:

We (the party) stand for the dumb Malay masses and the downtrodden impoverished peasantry; the UMNO is interested in the conservative diehards and the selfish decadent aristocracy. (*The Straits Times*, 6 December 1946)

The radical's ideology and approach towards politics were considered as a threat to the Anglo-UMNO alliance. There were several strategies applied to marginalise the radicals. The Malay leader at the time, Onn Jaafar, warned the Malays against the influence of radicalism disguised under Islamist ideology:

¹³⁷ MNP was a parent body of Malay radical movement. It has formed several wings like the women's wing (AWAS), peasantry (BATAS) and youth (API). It has formed working relationships with other like-minded groups such as the Supreme Religious Council or MATA (Islamist) and Communist Party.

¹³⁸ In the *Memoir of Ahmad Boestamam* (see Chapter 4), the founder of a radical youth movement, wrote "independence cannot be achieved through talking or by begging; it has to be wrested by spilling the blood of youth".

There have emerged some efforts in Malaya today using the name of religion, claiming to stand on religious principles, but behind this façade they were not free from political motives. We have seen the danger that came out from the jungle in 1945, and today we are going to see the danger descending from the mountain on religious pretension. (Quoted in Firdaus 1985, 10)

Onn Jaafar, the UMNO founder, was drawing a comparison between the Islamist radicals (“danger descending from the mountain”) with the much maligned communists (“danger that came out from the jungle”). This comparison would naturally evoke suspicion among the *rakyat* of the communist peril that the radicals were associated with.

Another strategy to undermine the influence of radical anti-colonial nationalists is through state suppression. During the first month of the declaration of Emergency in June 1948, more than 1000 Malay leftists, communists and sympathisers were arrested and detained without trial. The radical parties’ leaders like Ahmad Boestamam, Ishak Hj. Muhammad and Abu Bakar Baqir (the founder of Islamist radical group, Supreme Religious Council or MATA) were arrested under the ordinance. Furthermore, radical parties like API¹³⁹, Ikatan¹⁴⁰ and the Communist Party were disbanded.

Various reasons were given for the downfall of radical nationalism such as the consequence of regime repression and its Indonesian ideology of republicanism and Greater Indonesia¹⁴¹ (Means 1976, 93; Firdaus 1985, 161). A historian explains the failure as a result of its democratic and republican ideology that was too far ahead of its time. Stockwell (1979) argues that the anti-conservatism attitude of the radicals was out of touch with larger Malay opinion. The Malay *rakyat* was still dependent on the leadership and protection of traditional elites assured by the UMNO power-base.

¹³⁹ *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API) or the Youth Movement for Justice was a youth wing of the MNP.

¹⁴⁰ *Ikatan Pembela Tanah Air* or League of Defenders of the Homeland is an offshoot of the youth wing of the MNP.

¹⁴¹ The idealism of *Indonesia Raya* (Greater Indonesia) or sometimes phrased as *Melayu Raya* (Greater Malay) refers to the union of Malays in Malaya and Indonesia that had during the early 20th century, found its supporters among the educated Malay nationalists in both territories. See Cheah (1979) “The Japanese Occupation of Malaya”.

UMNO's triumph over the MNP was an index of the importance of cultural symbols to Malay politics. The Malay cultural space, largely traditional and unaltered by the pressure of modernisation, had delimited the extent to which progressive ideology could be applied and accepted.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Aims

This research investigates the history of the struggle for independence in Malaysia through exploring three main questions:

- How is colonial history represented in national history?
- Is there an ‘other’ version of history?
- To what extent does this ‘other’ version undermined the representation of national history?

This research is situated within a qualitative research paradigm. Interviews were conducted in England and Kuala Lumpur to familiarise the researcher with the social, political, and security issues that occurred in the period after the war (post-1945). Archival research was carried out in London and in Kuala Lumpur in order to gauge the availability of materials related to post-war colonial Malaya. A search for an alternative perspective of history revealed the availability of memoirs or autobiographies authored by the marginalised political actors in the independence struggle. The memoirs are presented as the main source for studying the subject of national independence and the practice of anti-colonial resistance (1945-1957).

3.2 Epistemology

This research is influenced by the philosophical and theoretical exposition of Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). In particular, three elements of Said’s work have informed this research. The first is the notion of knowledge as political construction. Said argues that the discourse of orientalism, above all, pertains to the authority of western imperialists in the realm of politics and knowledge. The nexus of power and knowledge has real consequence for culture and society in general. It becomes the source by which the ‘other’ is controlled, and limits are imposed on what can be known about them. The second element drawn from *Orientalism* is the philosophy of

humanism. This again relates to the political construction. The existence of the 'west' and the 'orient', although a politically constructed reality, do possess a real existence and presuppose a real difference. The key interest for Said was exposing the political interest that perpetuated such differences by presenting an integrated view of history. Thirdly, the research is inspired by the aspect of resistance implied in *Orientalism*. To counter a hegemonic discourse such as orientalism, the history of the 'other' or the marginalised subject whose experience and voices were denied, must be revived.

The research attempts to apply Said's theoretical and conceptual framework to the investigation of national history in Malaysia. Following *Orientalism*, it adopts the position of social construction. Berger & Luckmann (1991) argue that to suggest society is a form of construction requires attention to structures that define, maintain and perpetuates certain norms. In their view, structures like politics, religion or economy, regulate social behaviour and "objectivated" them through the use of either sanction or persuasion. It must also be stated that such institutions have a history that was responsible for their own existence and perpetuation. In this regards, Berger & Luckmann noted that authority is historical: it is built in history. Hence, its legitimacy is dependent on continuing the myth or as they put it "hearsay", "the same story must be told to all the children" (1991, 79).

From this, history becomes the site for legitimising authority. History is vested with political interest. This aspect has been discussed by Eric Hobsbawm (1992) who describes the "invented tradition" as a set of social practices that "seek to inculcate certain norms or values of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1992, 1). In Hobsbawm's formulation, tradition is essentially a contemporary production of meanings or symbols in which its legitimacy is derived from certain references to a "historic past". The 'past' or even 'history' need not assume a truthful existence. What matters is its reliability in assuming a function as a reference point accessible for present use.

The reason that motivated the reinvention of tradition in Malaysia was the need for socio-cultural security in the face of rapid transformation that had weakened some aspects of inherited social practices. As an example, the process of urbanisation has encouraged younger generation to seek better education and to engage in lucrative

professions. As a result, the lifestyle of village life which was characterised by communal spirit and tradition had come under threat. In order to respond to these changes, certain objects or codes were ritualised. I have illustrated the case of inventing tradition in several places in Chapter 1, namely the change in religious attitude and the state presentation of history. What enabled this appearance of continuity is what Hobsbawm described as “imposing repetition”. By developing conventions or routines (such as wearing head-cover for Muslim women and annual National Independence Day) certain practices were able to be carried out repeatedly and appear continuous. In inventing a myth of continuity, social practices were invoked and regularised as binding. Consequently, social cohesion was built around the notion of tradition which, although a reinvention, appeared ‘traditional’.

Hobsbawm’s analysis of reinventing tradition is useful for understanding the use of history in contemporary Malaysia. History and tradition assumed its legitimacy from certain ideas of an archaic past. Yet, they are modern inventions to address a practical need to meet changing circumstances. This research extends Hobsbawm’s analysis by suggesting that tradition is a political construction. In this regard, history was used by the state to maintain its legitimacy as well as to respond to the perceived threat to its existence. The notion of ‘peaceful’ independence illustrates this process.

3.3 Data Gathering

The first stage of the data collection, the archival research, took place in London in August 2007. Over a period of five weeks, I visited the Public Record Office, Rhodes House, and the British Library to gather materials on official perspectives of colonial administration in the post-war Malaya.

In the Public Record Office (PRO), I had the opportunity to examine some official documents that covered the period from 1945–1957. The Colonial Office papers, marked with CO, comprised original memoranda, reports and minutes of meetings between the senior administrators in the Colonial Office and the officers in the colony. It was observed that these sources were mainly pre-occupied with the question of the security of Malaya after the war and during the communist insurgency. Thus, it contained some reports about local political activities and the way they had

affected the continuation of British political and economic presence after the war. These sources were used in this research to explain British policy after the war and the accommodation with UMNO prior to Independence. After the visit, I discovered that a series of compilations of the CO papers on Malayan subjects had been published. The issues were edited by a prominent historian of colonial Malayan history, Anthony Stockwell (1995). The edition that has been referred to in this research is *British Documents on the End of Empire Part 1 the Malayan Union Experiment (1942-1948)*. The advantage of this compilation was the balanced selection of materials which covered both official perspectives and descriptions of socio-political landscapes. This facilitated the search for relevant materials, such as the social consequence of Japanese occupation and the activities of radical nationalists, which otherwise would be difficult to trace given the large numbers of official papers in the PRO.

The Rhodes House Library in Oxford contained materials such as reports, diaries and books written by former administrators in the colonial service. One of the important holdings in the library was a journal *British Malaya*, sponsored by the Association of British Malaya (est. 1920). The library holds volume 1 to 26 (1926- 1951). The contributors were former members of the Malayan Civil Service such as Richard Winstedt, George Maxwell and William Carter. Since this research only focuses on the period after the war (post-1945), I only refer to selected volumes that had similar interests on security issues and the administrative planning for the eventual self-governing Malaya. However, since most of the journals' content emphasised security issues, they were treated as complementary to Stockwell's compilation.

The British Library Colindale holds the complete collection of locally sourced (English-language) newspapers published in Malaya. Newspapers like *The Malay Mail*, *The Straits Times* and the *Malayan Daily News* are stored in the form of microfilm. Although the issues were dated, the quality and readability were very good and well-preserved. The newspapers offered interesting insights on the political and social situation of post-war Malaya, such as the communal clashes, inflations, labour strikes, political rallies and the communist insurgency. It was noticeable that these papers demonstrated considerable pro-colonial views in their reporting and editorials. For example, *The Sunday Times* editorial "Training Malayan for Self-Government"

(13 January 1946), criticised the call for democratic practice in the administrative selection. Another example was *The Malay Mail's* "Individual Expression is Not Always National Movement" (11 May 1947). The editor criticised the "progressive element" that expressed "fantastic assertion" for independence. This notwithstanding, the newspapers have been used for in this research to illustrate the colonial control of public opinion and their attempts at undermining opposition.

The second stage of the research took place in Kuala Lumpur in October 2007. Since the researcher is a government-sponsored student, the maximum time allowed to do fieldwork was two months. Unfortunately, the net duration was reduced to five weeks due to her unexpected illness. The fieldwork involved several visits to the National Archive and the National Library and also included several interviews with individuals who lived through the colonial era.

The National Archive of Malaysia contained a reasonably good collection of Malay-language materials published during post-war colonial Malaya. The materials of this era (and earlier) were printed in *Jawi* script (Arabic script in Malay language) which can be read by the researcher. Two newspapers were considered important for this research. These were *Utusan Melayu* and *Malaya Merdeka*. They were important because they expressed the views of conservative nationalism represented by UMNO. This can be seen by their explicit support for Malay birthright and their criticism of the proposal for citizenship for the non-Malays. *Utusan Melayu* was known for its reporting of Malay socio-economical plights and was believed to be the early proponent of Malay nationalism (c.f. Milner 1994). Their support to UMNO was due to the latter's pro-Malay agenda. *Malaya Merdeka* was an UMNO-run newspaper. It was an important source for reporting the run-up towards independence and for documenting UMNO's role as primary to the process. Besides the pro-conservative views, another newspaper available in the archive was *Pelita Malaya*. It was a newspaper of the radical Malay Nationalist Party (MNP), a party that demanded democratic changes and immediate independence from Britain. It was started in 1946 but was suspended after less than a year. *Pelita Malaya* offered a critical perspective towards the British and expressed support for Indonesian revolution and the merger of Malaya-Indonesia (*Indonesia Raya*).

These newspapers were analysed from a critical-analytic view. This involves asking, “How the document represents the events which it describes and closes off potential contrary interpretation” (May 1997, 174). In the newspaper *Utusan Melayu* there was a tendency to express views favourable to UMNO position, such as their support for UMNO’s opposition to the Malayan Union (MU) plan. *Utusan Melayu* stated that “the more the British ignores the Malay opposition it becomes more likely that the Malays trust towards them, having declining fast then, would immediately ends now and the clearer it seems the British intention to occupy Malaya” (*Utusan Melayu*, 16 May 1946). Similarly, *Pelita Malaya*, which was a press-arm of the radical MNP, was initially supportive to the MU proposal. Therefore, *Pelita* reports were inclined to present the radical views favourably. For example, it claimed that UMNO opposition to the plan was because “the right wing did not like changes. They preferred the old ways; to return to the pre-1941 arrangement” (*Pelita Malaya*, 5 April 1946). Hence, on both sides, there was exclusion or pejorative comment of others’ views in order to strengthen their own position. By bringing to the fore the conflicting views, this research intends to question the interest that underlines the representation of news.

Another source of information was interviews conducted in both Malaysia and the UK with people who had lived through the colonial period to gain a wider picture of the era. The selection was made based on two criteria. The interviewees were drawn from various occupational backgrounds such as security, politics, academic and religion. This enabled views from various perspectives and from various locations. The second criterion is practicality. Given the limited resources, in terms of financial and time, the interviewees were selected based on accessibility and availability within the time allocated for fieldwork.

The interviews provided background information that supplemented the other collected materials. The questions asked in the interviews were not structured so as to allow the interviewees to express their recollections of the period. Various opinions and experiences recounted to the researcher. A housewife interviewed by the researcher, Halimah Yusoff, recalled her experience as a young girl greeting the arrival of the British army after the end of the Japanese occupation. The armies provided not only security but also food supply to support the armies and the populations. An UMNO veteran, Mohd Yusuf Latif, provided information on his

direct participation in the independence struggle and recounted how Malay nationalism was represented by UMNO's, while the radical groups were marginal to the process. A political activist and a well-respected public intellectual, Kassim Ahmad, offered interesting views from non-mainstream perspective.¹⁴² He remembered various groups involved during the independence struggle such as the MNP, not just UMNO. He believed that history of independence must be seen not only from the perspective of the winning side but also those who were at the fringe.

In the UK, interviews with a British soldier, a medical doctor and a priest were carried out during spring 2008. These individuals had worked in Malaya and in the early post-independence period. They provided some insights into the security, social and cultural dimensions of peoples in Malaya. They were generally sympathetic to the Malays who they thought were way behind from their Chinese counterpart. Mr. John Norton, who was in the British army during the Emergency Wars against the communists in 1951, believed that the fortune of the Malays depended upon British protection. He argued that the Malays were too weak to defend themselves from the submergence of affluent Chinese communities. Dr. Pamela MacCartney, who had worked as a medical doctor for 10 years in various places of Malaysia, recalled her experience of treating a Malay patient who was injured in a violent brawl over fishing rights. Malays were dependent on the agricultural sector for food and sustenance, and clashes over limited resources were not uncommon. Father David Bingham worked as a Catholic priest for 41 years in the interiors of Sarawak (a state in Malaysia). He recounted his direct experiences with peoples who lived in the interiors and who were in his impression, at the margins of development. From this interview, the researcher gained some understanding of the situations of post-independence Malaysia in which some developments which had occurred in the Peninsular, such as the state rhetoric of *bumiputera* nationalism, failed to benefit the non-Malays *bumiputera*. The Ibans, the largest ethnic *bumiputera* in Sarawak, was less dependent on the government hand-outs since they were assisted mostly by Catholic missionaries. Provisions like schools,

¹⁴² Kassim Ahmad (b. 1923) lives a controversial life and thrived on it. An ardent supporter of socialist values, Kassim became a member of People's Socialist Party (PSRM) and involved in various anti-government protests. This led to his detention under the draconian ISA for five years. In 1986, he published a book, *Hadith: a Re-evaluation* to challenge the attitude of religious *ulama* towards *hadith* (recorded Prophetic sayings and deeds). Kassim argues that *hadith* have been accepted uncritically by *ulama* despite problems of authenticity and conflict with the Quran. The book was banned in Malaysia and Kassim was labelled as anti-*hadith* (hence, anti-Prophet?) by *ulama*.

hospitals and basic modern farming were introduced by the missions who had strong institutional presence in the interiors since 1883. However, in the post-independence, there have been considerable state-sponsored rural developments which benefited the people.

The most important source of information that provided alternative perspectives of independence came from the memoirs or autobiographies. The National University of Malaysia (UKM) has organised a project known as the *Memoir Series*. It began in 1991 and to date, 30 titles have been printed. The series covered the lives not only of those in the establishment, but also formerly marginalised subjects in politics and history. Thus, the narratives of former radical nationalists were documented for contemporary consumption. In this sense, the memoirs are a contemporary production of history from different perspectives than the conventional ones.

The memoirs became the main source for this research because they better addressed the issue of resistance raised in the research. The memoirs selected were the memoirs by Khatijah Sidek, Ahmad Boestamam and Shamsiah Fakeh.¹⁴³ They were formerly engaged in anti-colonial movements known collectively as “radical nationalism”. The memoirs were chosen because they shared the following characteristics:

- The memoirs were written by marginalised groups in the anti-colonial struggle. They were collectively labelled as “radical” nationalists. The appendage of “radical” implies their brand of struggle as an aberration from the “peaceful” nationalism represented by the elite nationalists.
- The memoirs were politicised productions. Their production and re-emergence in different contexts reveals the role of politics in determining the acceptability of the discourse.
- The memoirs represented perspectives of the past from non-elite positions. These positions were identified from their roles (radical nationalist,

¹⁴³ These memoirs presented the best available alternative sources by those who engaged in anti-colonial nationalism. Although there were other memoirs which critically challenged the state perspective on history, for example *The Memoir of Mustapha Hussain* (2005), their story reflected areas which are not covered in this research. For example, Mustapha Hussain’s narrative is relevant for understanding Malayan social history prior to the war, while this research is concerned with the post-war anti-colonialism.

communist, and female activist), setting (prison, political party, and jungle), and methods (institutional, guerrilla). They represented a common cause in terms of their critical attitude and approach towards conservative nationalists. They fought for change from feudal structure and attitude to progressive reforms which they believed could lead to personal and national liberation.

The features that underlined the memoirs pointed to the significance they offer in understanding the practice of resistance. Collectively, these memoirs represented one of the aspects in the oppositional trend towards the ruling elites. The memoirs represented alternative political imaginaries and narratives of the past which has been dominated by official sources. Subsequently, through pluralising the representations of history, the memoirs challenge the power claim sustained in the official sources.

3.4 Definitions of Memoir

Smith & Watson (2001) identified two genres of writing about self. ‘Life-writing’ refers to forms of writing that deal specifically with lived experience. ‘Life-narrative’ refers to forms of self-referential writing which includes autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, diaries, journals and personal letters. Despite the generic difference, life-writing and life-narrative shared similar characteristics, namely life representations and self-constructions. The works of narrative that constitute this genre have been the subject of studies to understand personal experience and how an autobiographer relates her/his roles and experience to history.

A memoir can be understood in relation to its adjacent term, autobiography. Philippe Lejeune defined autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (Anderson 2001, 3). A memoir shares the features of retrospective and self-narration. Literary theorists often make a distinction between a memoir and an autobiography. Weintraub (1975) saw autobiography as a serious form of self-writing, whereby an author was “intent upon reflection of inward realm of experience”. He also speaks about “genuine” autobiography that refers to the autobiographer’s commitment to leaving imprints of his point of view on life and history as he interpreted it (1975, 824).

A memoirist meanwhile, is more interested in the external happenings or significant histories. The apparent personal detachment of the author from the narration of history has devalued memoir into a mere disinterested recording of events. This had somehow eclipsed the primacy of the author's inner thought and experience in narrating those important events. Weintraub points out the limit of memoir as a document of self-thought and consciousness in comparison to autobiography. As a result of the latter's self-awareness of its relations to the external history, an autobiography can serve various functions such as self-explication, self-discovery, self-clarification, self-presentation and self-justification (1975, 823).

From the discussion above, there are three characteristics of memoir:

- Both memoirs and autobiographies are the products of self-awareness.
- There is a varying degree of external awareness for public spectacle, of which the memoir is being at upper scale.
- As its outer awareness exceeds the inner consciousness, a memoir is not a document of "genuine" reflection in the way that autobiography is.

For research purpose, the term 'autobiography' and 'memoir' are used synonymously. This does not distort the significance of memoir either technically or substantively since its crucial character in narrating self-experience remains. Having established that the terms memoir and autobiography are in fact addressing primarily the aspect of self-narration, the aspect of theorising autobiography as a subject of critical study will be the subject of the following discussion.

3.4.1 Biographical Research and Approaches to Studying Autobiography

This research used the selected memoirs to illustrate the case of resistance in contemporary Malaysia. The emphasis on memoir allows for a biographical analysis of sources. Roberts (2002) defined biographical research as a "range of types of research (e.g. in oral history, sociology) and biographical data (text, oral, visual,

multimedia)” which aim to “collect and interpret the lives of others as part of human understanding” (2002, 15).

There are several advantages of the biographical method. It helps to illuminate the process of social change, both structurally and meaningfully, through individual accounts (Roberts 2002, 5). Biography can also offer insight into the experiences of the marginalised. The growing assertion of identity politics in the social sciences has pushed the boundary for the exploration of different formations of social identities (Evans 1993, 6). The proliferation of documents and sources relating to the experience of minority groups now provides different insights into the past.¹⁴⁴

Linda Marcus (1994) outlined three general approaches in studying autobiography. These are the existential phenomenologist approach, the liberal culturalist and historicist approach. In brief, the first approach prioritises the value of individual autonomy in reaching the realisation of selfhood within the linear development of narrative from birth to the peak of life-career. The liberal cultural approach refers to shared values understood as universal. In the case of autobiography, values such as individualism and patriotism are represented as possessing legitimacy in a particular historical epoch. The historicist approach focuses upon the historical consciousness of the autobiographer. An autobiography is read as a historical document: the narrative embodies life stories and experiences of the subjects that constitute the frame of reference in the present effort to understand history (1994, 154).

Another approach used to study autobiography in the social sciences is the sociological approach. Since 1990s onwards, autobiography has been accepted as an important source in sociological inquiry. In 1993, the journal *Sociology* ran a special edition on autobiographical research. The introduction to this volume outlined several aspects that marked the entrance of sociology into autobiography as a field of study:

¹⁴⁴ For studies on the marginalised narrative, see Sabbioni, J., et al. (eds.) (1998) *Indigenous Australian Voices*; Sartwell, C. (1998) *African American Autobiography and White Identity*; Crisp, R. (ed.) (2004) *Women in the Malayan Anti-Colonial Struggle*.

- The treatment of autobiography as a social process, which relates the activities of writing and reading. In other words, the production of a memoir and the public reception of it points to the social process that was involved.
- To renounce the distinction between social and individual. It was often assumed that sociology is concerned with collectivity, in which autobiography is seen as the opposite in its concerns for individual. A sociological approach to biography sees a text as interwoven with other subjects or issues that became the concern of the autobiographer in a particular moment of narration.
- Autobiography is a form of life-construction. This involves the autobiographer's choice of certain events or subjects and the omission of others. Autobiography cannot, therefore, become a 'truthful' representation of life. Instead, it requires theorising experience, "for experience is always mediated by these kinds of structuring processes" (i.e. selection and interpretation). (Editorial 1993, 2-3)

The sociological approach to autobiography has thus expanded the avenue for studying society by examining the life-experience of individual subjects. This has partly enabled by the new interests in identity politics generated by research on women, subaltern, and marginalised groups such as slaves and aborigines. The studies of identity politics argue that researching the lives of forgotten subjects provides the potential for liberation of society and intellectuals (Evans 1993, 7). Such development had an immediate effect on sociology, in that an autobiographer is socialised in such a way that her/his identity, perspective and experience are not inseparable from broader social formations.

This research adopts the position of sociological thinking in the study of memoirs. The theorising of resistance in autobiography is founded upon the socio-political context that informed the particular moment of narration. The theory and practice of autobiography and resistance will be explored next.

3.5 Cultural Resistance in Memoir

Returning to the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2, the basic premise that underlines the cultural resistance framework developed in this research is culture as construction. I argue that the field of culture is politically, historically and experientially constructed. Additionally, culture is often inseparable from the questions of authority, control, meaning, agency and counter-agency. Emphasis on authority and agency is a prerequisite in the critique of colonial history. This research interrogates the assumptions of colonial history and presents alternative perspectives from the marginalised subjects.

This section will elaborate the cultural resistance framework in order to examine the perspective of colonial history documented in subaltern memoirs. The memoirs are read with a specific purpose that is to construct colonialism as a concrete *process* which was promoted and resisted by different agencies. It is suggested that the memoirs multiplied the representations of colonial history to include various subjects, locations and forms of domination. In this respect, this research argues that the memoirs performed political intervention in their critique of colonial rule and feudal culture. Three assumptions relating to the function of memoirs as political intervention will be discussed:

- Relationship between autobiographical subject and the immediate socio-political forces.
- The potential and spaces for opposition in autobiography/memoir
- The construction of colonial history in autobiography/memoir

3.5.1 Autobiography and Society

The phenomenological approach to autobiography is inclined to emphasise the autonomy of a subject in providing the meaning and interpretation of her/his personal life (Weintraub 1975; Gusdorf 1980; Mason 1980). According to this view, the origin of autobiography is tied to the beginning of self-awareness of one's place in history. In this regard, autobiography becomes a document of personal achievement that

marks an individual's control over her/his own life-history. Autonomy is reflected in autobiography-writing as the author is fully responsible in selecting the period, the events, and the ways the self and others are presented.

This approach therefore sees autobiography as a purely personal and isolated endeavour. Susan Friedman (1988) argues that the emphasis on individualism is “a reflection of privilege” (1988, 75). Through its claim of the author's exclusive place in writing, it denies the role of community as the informant of individual identity. Friedman asserted that individual autonomy in autobiography is an illusion that hides the cultural prescription that defined a subject. For this reason, the process of writing and reading autobiography should be seen as inseparable from their social formation.

In this research, the social constituent of memoir is emphasised. Liz Stanley (1992) has argued for a socially constructed autobiography. A socially produced autobiography entails two assumptions. Firstly, an autobiographer is a member of particular social groups. Secondly, and following from that, her/his views are informed by socialisations unique to particular groups. For these reasons, Stanley claims that a memoir is always ideological since it advances a particular worldview over others. She thus suggests a useful approach in reading autobiography is to ask “from whose viewpoint?” The possibility of showing that an autobiographer is speaking from a particular subject-position effectively shows a choice is made among a range of options (1992, 93). The term ‘choice’ here does not always refer to autonomy, as an author is always informed by worldviews specific to her/his socialisation. The sociological approach therefore, is interested in learning the condition of possibility that motivated an autobiographer to write a story about certain aspects and to exclude others that may be considered unimportant or disruptive to the narrative.

3.5.2 Resistance in Autobiography

This research suggests that to speak of culture requires simultaneous recognition of political authority that maintains and promotes certain cultural assumptions. As stated earlier, a sociological approach to memoir alerts us to the role of ideology that

underpinned the narrative-writing and self-representation, and leads us to interrogate the extent to which a memoir is ideologically or culturally determined.

Sidonie Smith (1987) in her studies of Anglo- American autobiography argues that women's writing must be read in conjunction with ideology of gender. Taking her cue from Bakhtin's "object-sign", Smith argues that traditional women's autobiography reinscribed the ideology of phallogentric discourse that has constructed "women's symbolically as the mirror before which they (men) can see themselves reflected" (1987, 48). But ideology is not only implicated in the narrative-writing, its authority is also manifested externally. Women in the early enlightenment period "maintained the expected public silence" and so were inhibited from representing their lives publicly. Nevertheless, there were some women-autobiographers who were "desiring to become a generator rather than to remain merely an object of representation" (1987, 42). Despite that, traditional autobiography remained complicit in sustaining the patriarchal system that denied woman's agency "to name herself and her own desires" (1987, 49).

Smith's criticism is made in reference to works of autobiography in 15th and early 16th century Europe. At the time, the idea of modern secular culture began to take its form and influence in an array of activities such as literature, trade, politics and science. Women's autobiography, in this context, was an individual response to the current thought and development. However, Smith raised the caution that the pursuit of individual autonomy through autobiography-writing is always subject to cultural constraint. Since the idea of autonomy is a product of particular period and culture, the study of society is an integral aspect in critical approach to autobiography. Another concept that emphasised the importance of history in the production of identity is the notion of 'performance'.

Judith Butler (1993) described gender as a construction. By construction she refers to "a process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface" (1993, 372). In relation to identity, be it gender, race or class, identity construction is a process that involves not a singular act but an ongoing process of enactment through reproduction or reinterpretation. To illustrate, the concept of black race, as a product of occidentalist discourse and history, had been

associated with slavery and discrimination. However, the civil rights movement in the 1960s, as the culmination of much longer individual and labour protests, had altered the socio-legal arrangement that had previously marginalised people of colour from the mainstream. This example illustrates that identity is not a stable attribute but always in the process of making and re-making.

The idea of identity as a *process* is a contrast, hence a challenge, to the ethno-nationalist ideology. This concept is applied to autobiography in order to present a multi-faceted representation of identities. Marcus (1994) argues that an autobiography's subject does not possess fixed identity but rather performed identities. This means the subject is "an enactment of situation and position" (1994, 283). The previous example of black identity shows the inter-play of history, institution and society that collaborated to produce the marginalised subject. This is the point where identity can be debated and contested. The interpretation of identity in memoir is thus "revealing the multiple construction of gender identity" as well as the "proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings" (1994, 284). Similarly, Sidonie Smith (1987) has also expressed the importance of pluralism, or as she described it "politics of fragmentation", a counter-point to the modernist or nationalist notion of unitary subject.

The previous discussion served as an entry-point to the interrogation of resistance in this dissertation. This involves considering the aspects of politico-cultural reality that produces a subject's action, identity and opposition.

3.5.3 Construction of History in Autobiography

Autobiography has and continues to be a source of history, both for academics and for public at large. Egerton (1988), in his study of war memoirs, described two factors that contributed to the function of memoir in the imagination of the past. The first is the privileged access that an autobiographer acquired by virtue of her/his direct involvement or contribution to significant events. Secondly, given the authoritative claim founded upon the experience of a memoirist, a memoir constitutes an important element in contemporary consumption of history. For example, the growing publication of personal accounts and photography on the World War II have increased

the profile of the event, in particular the representation of heroism and sacrifice of the armies and the ordinary people. Altogether, an autobiography assumes a status of authoritative representation of the past that the public is eager and willing to consume.

The association of authority with autobiography is founded on the realist account of writing as a truthful representation of meaning and intention (Smith & Watson 1998, see introduction; Joan Scott 1991). This view is problematic because it is inclined to see text as a reference to life itself. Anderson (2001) states that the consequence of such thinking is to disregard the way an autobiographer and her/his work are constituted in historical process. Therefore, a reader is supposed to accept what was being narrated and any critical examination is confined only to the verification of factual 'truth' (2001, 86-87).

As the criticism implied, it is important to conceive autobiography not as an end in-itself or an answer to a problem, but rather the beginning of inquiry and interpretation. Hence, autobiography is treated in this research as a form of construction. In this regards, Stanley (1992) sees autobiography as "an artful construction within a narrative" (1992, 128). The narrative is a construction because it involves the process of selecting events that are considered worth knowing, or assigning reported speech or examples to illustrate a point and piecing them together to convey the appearance of coherence. Therefore, Stanley claims that autobiography is "not and cannot be referential of a life". The idea of construction brings into attention what is included and excluded, which is ultimately an ideological decision. By treating memoir, hence history, as a construction, the past can be questioned and interpreted.

The use of memoir for understanding colonial history can be seen in Gillian Whitlock's *The Intimate Empire*. Whitlock (2000) does not treat colonial history as a context but a "moment" where identity or subjectivity is located and produced. In other words, history is conceptualised as a "field" (to borrow Bourdieu's term) in which "the shifting relations of domination and subordination come into view" (2000, 6). The idea of history as a shifting moment means two things. Firstly, it refers to colonialism not as a singular event or experience but a differentiated *process*. Colonialism is a process that relates authority with the subordinates in different series of relationships. In colonial Malaya, British rule was tolerated not only by the

indigenous elites but also by the *rakyat* (people). However, certain social subjects did mount challenges to the regime indirectly and directly at various times. This mixture of realities pointed to the limitations in reading Malayan history as predominantly peaceful or benign.

In relation to the first, the second meaning of colonialism as a process concerns the issue of identity-formation. Whitlock sees identity in autobiography as something emergent. This means identity is produced in specific moments, that is, through the intersection between colonial imposition of identity (i.e. 'subject-race') and the subordinate attempt at self-definition (2000, 5). For example, one of the autobiographers studied in this research, Khadijah Sidek, was described by her contemporary as 'radical'. The label was accorded to her because she was once imprisoned for allegedly conspiring to bring down the colonial regime. She however, saw herself as a 'progressive' political activist who fought for women's rights. This example alerts us to two aspects. Firstly, Khadijah's identity as radical is institutionally and socially produced in the colonial process. Secondly, it shows that the subject did not simply submit to the imposing category but tries to navigate it by offering her own interpretation of struggle. The simultaneous co-existence of identities shows the complexity that comes when identity is not settled but always shifting and in flux.

The concept of history as construction and process are important insights for studying the way resistance can be understood in memoir. By stating that a memoir constructs or perhaps invents history, the possibility for multiple readings and interpretations are kept open. In the same way, by looking at colonialism not so much as an administrative rule or a stage in history than as a process, the narrative could unravel various points at which agencies and histories are made and remade. Altogether, I suggest that the act of resistance in memoir is located through a non-oppressive reading that refused to foreclose on the possibility for interpretations. This is a contrast to a totalising form of reading and interpretation of the past invented and promoted by authorities.

This section has raised some issues related to the ways this research is going to read and interpret the subaltern memoirs. Central in the previous discussion is the notion of

culture, or history, as a field of struggle for interpretation between authorities and opposed entities. This aspect is addressed by arguing that memoir is a form of political intervention. This is enabled by conceptualising the memoirs as form of construction. The subject, identity and ideology are constructed by an autobiographer who belongs to a social group. The inter-relation between an autobiographer and society indicates the possibility for a politicised interpretation of memoirs.

3.6 Research Ethics

“The best feminist analysis”, wrote Sandra Harding, “insists that the inquirer be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny” (Harding 1987, 9). A feminist practice argues that a researcher must make transparent her/his political, social and gender assumptions and to discuss how these elements bear influence on the research process. A researcher, female and male, is not free from bias and prejudice inherited from cultural ideologies. One of the ways to limit distortion as a result of their ideological preferences is to make visible their assumptions and to avoid labouring under the assumption that the researcher is ‘neutral’ and above board when it comes to selecting and processing research information. In this way, researcher’s background is treated in the same critical way as the researched and is made available for examination within the scientific community.

This approach is consistent with the political agenda put forth by women studies as a critique of androcentrism that has characterised ‘traditional’ research practice. The study of women’s experience from women’s perspective arguably can address the problem of marginalisation that women suffered under androcentric discourse (Harding 1987, 8). The critique of androcentrism does not preclude critique of feminism as a problem in research. The difference between the ‘traditional’ and the feminist research practice is the latter recognised the subjective elements (such as gender and class) that implicitly determined the process and the outcome of research.

The feminist insistence on personal biography as an element within research has been criticised for being overemphasised. Hammersley (1995) supports the argument for self-criticality but questions whether the validity of researcher’s cultural assumption

has been stretched too far. By accepting personal biography into research, Hammersley doubted whether it alone could act as corrective to bias which 'traditional' social science has been accused as. Furthermore, he asked if there is any method or procedure developed to minimise false cultural assumptions instead of accepting them as an expression and product of ideology. Notwithstanding Hammersley's criticism, what perhaps is an oversight is his assumption that (researcher's) experience is privileged in feminist research. The use of experience involves the issue of accountability and integrity central in research and knowledge production. According to Harding, by including the researcher as a subject, and not just an observer in a research, "the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests". What this entails is the researcher engaged with the research and the researched reflexively, hence, allowing her/his values open for examination.

My own experience in collecting information, interviewing subjects and reading the memoirs has in some ways influenced especially by my previous training during undergraduate study. We were being taught to be sceptical (rightly so) of the ideas such as individualism and liberalism which were perceived as quintessentially western product. Instead, Islamic values, which are communitarian and egalitarian in spirit, were taught to be the best practice as opposed to the western values. But what I have learned from *Orientalism* is that the ontological division of human experience into the East and the West is a political invention that served the interests of imperial and post-imperial powers. *Orientalism* has taught us to be critical of ideas and concepts that tend to exclude, divide and silence those 'different' from us. Through reading the memoirs, I realised that ideas like democracy and gender equality has been experimented by those who fought colonialism and feudalism. This pointed out the availability of discourse of liberation in Malaysian social and political history, and now, they become the source for inspiration among the younger generation, including myself, in working towards a just and tolerant nation.

3.7 Research Issues

This research had to confront several issues that could pose some limitations in gathering necessary information. The first problem related to interviews. There were some candidates who refused to be interviewed for one reason or another. Some were either too young or too old to recollect the events, and others claimed they were too busy to be interviewed. This research used the material that was available but recognised the limitation of the small sample. However, the research is primarily a study of the history of independence struggle through an analysis of the memoirs rather than the primary data collected in the interviews.

The second issue related to the quality and availability of the archival materials. In the National Archive of Malaysia, the quality of the microfilm was sometimes so poor it was difficult to read. In the National Library, the issue concerned with the availability of materials. The online catalogue sometimes failed to record the materials that were missing or lost. For example, some of the backlog newspapers that contained reports of Shamsiah Fakeh (one of the autobiographers referred to in this research) were missing. Another handicap related to the library policy which states that every book located in the general section published before 2000 must be disposed because it was believed that readers would no longer consult old books. Although the policy mainly affected books in the general collection, some of the important political books written in the 1960s or 1970s had inadvertently been disposed of. Two of these were Muhammad Yunus Hamidi (1961) *Sejarah Pergerakan Politik Melayu Semenanjung* (the History of Malay Political Movement in the Peninsula) and Abdul Samad Idris (1982) *Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa Melayu* (the History of Malay Struggle). These works were authored by a former editor of the national press during the colonial period, *Majlis*, and a political activist directly involved in the independence struggle. Although these books are available in major university libraries, unlike the public libraries, they are not open to public. This imposed constraints not only on the researcher but also on the public who relies on free and open access to reading materials.

The third issue is related to the question of reliability, and the epistemological position suggested earlier, in regards to the inter-relationships between power and

knowledge. This research has used newspapers as a source for old and contemporary news. In Malaysia, it has been noted that the mainstream press was owned by either a state-party like UMNO or its ruling partner like the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA). The Fleet Holdings, UMNO's investment arm, owned an English language press *The New Straits Times* and also Malay press like *Berita Harian* and *Utusan Malaysia* (Wang 2001, 72). *The Star*, the largest circulation of English language press is owned by the MCA. Furthermore, private television stations are owned by companies related to UMNO.

The state control of the mainstream media testified to two aspects of Malaysian politics and society. Firstly, it signalled the state control of information for the public. Such control would not have been possible without the authoritarian measures already in place to ensure the state's predominance in politics as well as the economy. The use of censorship, legislative provisions and a network of business and politics have entrenched state dominance. Secondly, the state's media control imposed restrictions of different perspectives from the mainstream. In this case, the chances of views from opposition parties like PAS, DAP and KEADILAN being reported in mainstream media is almost nil, unless such reporting would cast a negative perception of the opposition. Fair reporting is not a common scenario in Malaysian press.

However, the rising profile of the internet and websites has changed this trend. The opposition parties have started online news to update their supporters on the situation in the party and on issues of public interest. Internet has an advantage that mainstream media does not possess as it is relatively free from state supervision. This means there is a degree of independent opinion although this does not necessarily entail reliability and authoritativeness. However, the internet sphere is an approximation of what press freedom would look like if it was allowed. In countries with limited press freedom, the public resorts to the internet which offers perspectives previously unknown. This has a positive correlation in encouraging the awareness of democracy (Ferdinand 2000; Ott & Rosser 2000; Bray 2000). In fact, even in countries where democracy is already developed, the internet continues to play a significant role in educating the people on democratic values and practice (Stromer-Galley 2000).

This research is thus aware of the partisan nature of both mainstream media and the opposition. But this is not to be taken as a constraint. Instead, it highlights precisely the contention of this research, that is, the interrelation of politics and knowledge. As John Scott (1990) argues, the use of surveillance through newspapers or official documents points to the fact that these materials are never to be taken as impartial. Instead, it is important for researchers to identify the interests that lie behind them and to understand that such documents are primarily intended for social control. This research used such materials as a foundation for the critique of the state's representation of the history of 'peaceful' independence.

Finally, the issue of reliability and accuracy in regards to the narratives of the memoir requires some mention. Scholarly works on the memoirists studied in this research are also available. Some scholars, for example Ramlah Adam (1992), have written a political biography about one of the memoirists, Ahmad Boestamam. The materials in the book were mainly based on primary sources, like interviews with the late Ahmad Boestamam and his wife Rabitah, as well as Boestamam's memoirs. Moreover, the activities and histories of radical nationalism in colonial Malaya have been studied quite extensively. Ramlah (2006), Khoo Kay Kim (1991) and Firdaus Abdullah (1984) are among scholars who have studied the subject. In addition, William Roff (1964) has written a ground-breaking study, *The Origin of Malay Nationalism*, which discussed the formation of nationalism in Malaya from the early 20th century until 1941. Their works have been used here to check the accuracy of the historical events described in the memoirs.

CHAPTER 4

Subaltern Memoirs: Autobiographical Narratives of Malaysian Independence

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, three memoirs that are of principal interest in this research will be presented. I try to bring to the fore the politics of production that enabled these memoirs to emerge into the current socio-political context. The memoirs have been repackaged from an earlier version by a university publisher and distributed for present consumption. They are presented as a narrative of the politics of the marginalised, and are intended to be read as such. My next concern is the autobiographer's assertion of difference. There were conscious attempts by the narrator to present her/himself as 'different' from their immediate social group, ideologically and practically. It was through the construction of difference that these autobiographers were able to assert their sense of importance and commitment to progressive ideals in politics and culture. These aspects will be illustrated in the discussion of each of the memoirs.

4.2 The Memoir of Khatijah Sidek: *Puteri Kesateria Bangsa*

4.2.1 Background and Context

The memoir was a rendition from the original text published in 1964 in a Hong-Kong based magazine, *Eastern Horizon*. The original title was *Riwayat Hidup Saya* (My Life-Story), assumed under the pseudonym Ardjasni. Khatijah Sidek (1918-1982) was, at the time, a member of the opposition Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PAS) and also was a Member of Parliament from 1959-1964. Perhaps the political climate in Malaya at the time was not favourable for the domestic consumption of her memoir.

The National University of Malaysia (UKM) revised her life-story into a new format, a 'memoir', in 1995. At this juncture, it is relevant to learn what prompted the revival and rejuvenation of Khatijah's memoir. In the preface page, the university director of the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation, Wan Hashim Wan Teh noted

Khatijah's "radical" and "extraordinary" ideas, which were "different from the moderate perspective of Malay politics which at that time preferred compromise and patience. No doubt, her ideas were seen within UMNO as too radical and beyond her time" (Khatijah Sidek 2004, 13)¹⁴⁵.

The director's introduction of Khatijah as a "radical" became an identity-marker to distinguish Khatijah from other women activists in the colonial period. I was also influenced by the introduction, although it was already established in academic discourse that Khatijah was indeed a "radical".¹⁴⁶ In the notes on the back cover, the publisher states that her memoir is an illustration "of how our political style has always marginalised people like *her*" (my emphasis). It appears that Khatijah's memoir must be read as a narrative of a "radical" activist.

The rationale for insisting on the label "radical" for Khatijah can be understood by comparing her thought and strategy to her predecessors in women's leadership. The previous chief of UMNO's women section *Kaum Ibu*¹⁴⁷, Ibu Zain, who headed the section from 1951-1953, was from an aristocratic family and like others from similar background, received the privilege of an English education. Her aristocratic background was in harmony with UMNO's conservative stand. The common perception preferred the integration of women into politics as secondary to men. Their task was merely to *assist* rather than to lead changes (Mahani Musa 2006). Khatijah's incursion into UMNO changed this trend significantly, as the memoir testifies.

The memoir was published in the new format in 1994, and was translated from English into Malay by a sociologist, Abdul Rahman Embong. Several photographs that highlight some of the moments during her political career and her retirement are added as well. The original title was revised into *Puteri Kesateria Bangsa*, which was literally translated as the "Warrior-Princess of the Nation". Could this title suggest a

¹⁴⁵ Any reference from Khatijah's memoir is from now summarised in page number.

¹⁴⁶ See introduction of the memoir by Saliha Hassan. Mohamad Salleh Lamry (2006), a social anthropologist, in his latest book *Gerakan Kiri Melayu dalam Perjuangan Kemerdekaan* (The Malay-Left in the Independence Struggle) including Khatijah's picture at the front page although there was no discussion about her in the content.

¹⁴⁷ *Kaum Ibu* was founded in 1949 with Putih Mariah was elected as the first chief. *Kaum Ibu* functioned not only as a welfare organisation but also a political body to rally support, especially among women, for *merdeka*. See Manderson, L. (1977) "The Shaping of the *Kaum Ibu*".

re-interpretation of Khatijah's role and possibly a step towards her recognition as a national independence fighter?

4.2.2 Personal Life

Khatijah's life narrative is intertwined with external happenings throughout the memoir. It was impossible to separate her personal life from her political life, and she was keen to show the inter-relationship between the two. In the first chapter, Khatijah tells her readers of the difficulty her mother experienced in conceiving a daughter. Khatijah was originally from Sumatera, Indonesia and was raised in a Minangkabau culture that practised matrilineage. Therefore, a baby daughter was important for Sariah Muhammad, Khatijah's mother.

In her effort to conceive a daughter, Sariah went to *Gunung Kera* (Monkeys' Hill) to offer bananas as gifts to the monkeys in hope that the monkeys would be pleased. Another effort was to ask for the blessing of the holy-man in his tomb in Ulakan. The holy man was a certain Sheikh Burhanuddin who was said to be the first Arab who landed in Sumatera to spread Islam. The *imam* who guarded his tomb read some verses from the Quran. After that he told Sariah that he saw some roots creeping out from the Sheikh's tomb, and later said "May God's will be to give you the baby girl, rest assured in the Merciful God Almighty". Finally Khatijah was born in 1918. The custom dictates that when a baby girl was born, she must be 'sold' to an old woman. This was in order to divert the attention of evil spirits that would curse a newly-born baby girl. The old woman would later return Khatijah to her mother when convinced that the evil spirit had been deceived. Interestingly, Khatijah reflected on the episode of her birth to account for her subsequent experience:

Upon reflection, I realised that maybe it was because I had been sold that caused my never-ending miseries. This happened either when I was fighting for women's causes, or my own life, or for *merdeka* (freedom); it seemed that one after another, obstacles and misfortunes would befall my life. (36)

In 21 June 1948, Khatijah married Dr. Hamzah Taib, a physician and a member of the state-based political party *Lembaga Kesatuan Melayu Johor*. It was a match-making

affair after a friend introduced her to Hamzah in a bid to get Khatijah married in order to facilitate her political activities. She said, “The first time I looked upon his face, I felt sorry for him. He had begged me to stay in Malaya in order to assist the women’s movement” (96). Shortly after, on 17 August 1948, Khatijah was arrested under the Emergency Ordinance. She was accused of smuggling opium from Indonesia although she vehemently denied the charge. The investigating officer later accused her of forming an alliance with radical elements to overthrow the British regime in Singapore. As a result, Khatijah was imprisoned in Outram Prison in Singapore for almost two years.

In prison, she was confined in a small dark cell. Since she was pregnant, she was allowed walking-exercise for half an hour accompanied by a guard. When the moment arrived, she was rushed to the hospital to deliver her baby. She was feeling the labour pains. Her pain was aggravated as she recalled a European doctor saying “Ignore her. She is a communist from Indonesia. Just send her back to where she was from”. After the baby was born, she was left alone in a dark operating room, with only an Indian police officer to keep check on her. She described him as a kind man. When Khatijah told him that she was “very hungry” after the labour, the police “without any doubt, went out of the hospital to buy some bread and a small can of curry” (106). His kindness caused him to be punished by his superior. Her narrative seems to be less critical about the fate received by the policeman, possibly because she accepted it as a normal consequence for disobeying orders.

Khatijah was later returned to her prison bloc to serve her remaining sentence. There were 40 female political prisoners and she was the only Malay while the rest were of Chinese origin. When Khatijah was released on 30 January 1950, she was banished to Johor (a neighbouring state to Singapore) for 10 years. Release from prison did not signal the end of her misery. In fact, her release announced the arrival of domestic and political obstacles. Khatijah portrayed her marital life as full of obstacles. Her husband spent more time with his first family and often neglected her. The first family of her husband had viewed Khatijah with hostility. They blamed Khatijah for agreeing to polygamy and were worried that Khatijah might persuade her husband to divorce his first wife. Khatijah realised that even her husband was “not happy”, but since he did not divorce her, she did not “care what others had said” (108). Despite tasting

freedom, Khatijah found her life outside prison more difficult. And this continued after she was sacked from UMNO in October 1956.

After her sacking, Khatijah saw herself no longer a politician but a “widow struggling to support three small children with another one was on the way” (165). In addition, she also had to support four former workers who served her during her term as UMNO women’s chief and an adopted daughter from a Chinese family. The mention of them in the narrative is significant. It conveys the impression that her political commitment matched her personal responsibility. That is, she still assumed the responsibility of caring for her female workers despite being no longer formally tied to politics. She started her new life by opening a fashion/tailor shop and named it *Taman Pembangunan Wanita Melayu* (The Malay Women’s Development Centre). The business went well because of her specialisation in European and Chinese dress. She also promoted life-insurance to her customers to bolster her income. The business was good, but there were not many Malay customers because she was socially exiled as a result of her expulsion. Although the business was relatively stable, the income generated was barely sufficient to sustain her children and the workers. She would use the money to buy the “cheapest rice”, “a bit of anchovies” and “some chillies” as daily diet (167). Khatijah reflected how this difficult life had brought her to bear with the consequence of her political struggle. She tried to convince herself of the worth of her struggle as she wrote:

I quietly cried sometimes, but I forced myself to remain strong. This is what it means to be leader. Leadership is measured not in times of success but in times of hardship. If I could overcome this, I am a true leader. (167)

4.2.3 The Politics of Women’s Emancipation

Khatijah’s incursion into politics emerged from her formative years in Indonesia. Her experience under the Dutch colonial system had fostered an anti-colonial spirit. At the age of 15, Khatijah had started a solidarity group with five of her school friends. They

named it Ardjasni¹⁴⁸ and the purpose was to encourage learning among them. This inspired her belief in later years that political struggle was best pursued collectively. The early stage of her political struggle was carried out on a physical level during the Indonesian Revolution that aimed to achieve independence from the Dutch. Along with other women, Khatijah participated in assisting the men at the frontline. The female front was formed in 11 November 1944 and known as *Puteri Kesateria* (female warriors).

Khatijah's subsequent political and social views were informed by her early experience in Indonesia. The equal participation of women in Indonesia during the early struggle for independence was in stark contrast to the situation in Malaya. When Khatijah arrived in Singapore in 1946, she observed the women "were oppressed and weak, the same can be said about their organisation" (80). She aspired to change this situation by integrating women into the independence struggle. She later organised a charity body known as the Gathering of Indonesia Malaya Woman or HIMWIM. There was no mention why she preferred a charitable over a political association. Her early public involvement in Malaya was not political but social. HIMWIM was funded through the sale of handicrafts made by the members and by cultural and theatrical performances. Khatijah presented herself as a central figure. She taught the members "to knit baby clothes" (88) and she also "founded a lot of branches in various villages" (87).

When Khatijah was released in 1950, the only political party operating was UMNO. Khatijah was invited to join the party in 1951. However, her status as a former prisoner was deemed to be unfit due to the nature of the UMNO alliance with the British. When the party founder Onn Jaafar left in 1952, Khatijah was later accepted into the party by the new party president, Tunku Abdul Rahman, in 1953. Khatijah described Tunku as personally unperturbed about her previous background:

Tunku said, 'we must pay respect to those who were sent to prison for fighting for our people and our independence. We should award them with medals for their bravery'. (123)

¹⁴⁸ Ardjasni was a name of a common flower, which Khatijah felt symbolised her group as belonging to the common class. Ardjasni also became her pseudonym for her original life-story.

Khatijah was faced with an uphill task in trying to win back people's support to UMNO after Onn Jaafar left the party. The party was in disarray, and UMNO leaders had toured throughout the country to gain back its popularity. Khatijah saw the main obstacle was actually within UMNO. Khatijah tried to introduce change within the party by suggesting that the party must elect a female information chief who could mobilise the women into political struggle. Another proposal was to select five women to represent UMNO in the federal election in 1955. The first proposal was accepted after some heated debate but the second proposal was shot down. "This shows", she stated, "that men were still looking down on women. They only used us as working tools" (132).

Khatijah's priority for women's mobilisation had its practical side. Khatijah believed that women "can easily be persuaded" and "they are most likely to vote". To emphasise the women's contribution, she made a comparison between men and women members: "Look at the women's section; we have managed to gather \$500 by selling our sewn handkerchiefs. What about the men, what they have done?" (132). Her hard work in the women's section produced results. Ten months after her joining UMNO, the women's membership increased to 10,000 and another 130 branches opened. Her contribution to the party was recognised when, during an UMNO assembly in October 1954, she was elected as chief of the Women's Section (*Kaum Ibu*). This did not go without controversy. Khatijah's nomination paper was allegedly missing, and she threatened to walk out of the party unless the "process of democracy was restored". Her threat caused "instant uproar" (*keadaan menjadi gempar*), "unrest" (*hingar-bingar*) and "chaos" (*kacau-bilau*) among the delegates (147). The party finally relented and she was elected to the post.

Khatijah claimed that her forthright attitude did not fit into the frame of UMNO. The first attempt to remove her was in 1955. She was charged with leaking information that an UMNO leader had opposed her proposal for a woman to be elected as Information Chief. Khatijah asked for a public hearing to adjudicate the charge, but it fell on deaf ears. She quoted one of the responses to her sacking from the UMNO's section in Penang: "They lamented that, 'When we tell the truth, people would consider us guilty. What would happen to this world if nobody was allowed to speak the truth?'" (152). However, through the influence of UMNO's President the decision

was reversed in Khatijah's favour. The second attempt took place a year later. On 9 October 1956, she was sacked as Women's Chief for allegedly misappropriating \$100 of party funds. She was denied the opportunity to defend herself before the UMNO High Council. She needed time to find money for the lawyer's expenses, but the Council denied her plea for the meeting to be adjourned. She felt "very distressed" and "helpless" at the same time (163). She realised that her detractors would continue their efforts in making sure she would be ousted from UMNO. They believed "If Khatijah and her firebrand head stay in UMNO the party's good name will be tarnished" (164).

Her expulsion from the party proved to be difficult, financially and socially. She stopped receiving the monthly allowance from her post as a women's chief. Furthermore, after her husband died, she was forced to vacate the room at the clinic where she lived with her children. But Khatijah did not express despair neither at her husband's passing nor her home's dispossession. Instead, it was the sacking from the party that had left her hope "shattered" (*berkecai*). "Now", she wrote, "I was really alone with no place to go to and no one to talk to" (165).

The narration of her political experience in UMNO was undoubtedly the significant phase in her life and in the memoir. In this moment, her political achievement occupied the narrative while mention of her personal life was suppressed. True, both her personal and political lives were fraught with frustration and obstacles. However, it was only through her involvement in politics that her status as a "female leader" (*pemimpin wanita*) was earned and consolidated. Only in this could she found and asserted prominence as a fighter for women's emancipation. Although there were attempts to undermine her, she was also able to claim her triumph. In this regards, UMNO was presented as the feudal antagonist that Khatijah felt she belonged to in spite of her criticism of its conservatism. This is because her political identity was produced through her affiliation with UMNO and not contra to it. Her expulsion from the party not only ended her career, but also turned her into a social outcast and left her emotionally feeble.

4.2.4 “My Dream”

This is the title of the last chapter of her memoir. This chapter was not a recapitulation of what she had achieved in life and career, but what she and the women in Malaya, had yet to achieve. What she in effect portrayed, was a situation of neo-colonialism, or lingering effects of colonial attitude and mentality. Khatijah discovered that what appeared to be a national independence was in fact the beginning of neo-colonialism. She gave an example of an anniversary of the national independence in 1958:

Those rich Chinese merchants who contributed money at the right time were rewarded by the King; some of the former British colonisers suddenly became Malayan while still retaining British citizenship; while someone who was taking over my place for just over eight months (as chief of UMNO’s women section) was awarded for her ‘contribution to women’. (174)

Despite being free from colonialism, the progress of women was far from convincing. The weakness of the women’s movement was attributed to a betrayal of the female leadership. She described the women’s associations as being “dominated by aristocratic (*bangsawan*) groups, and managed by the wives of state ministers”. According to Khatijah, these groups “were not interested in the welfare of women, they were only interested in having their faces printed on the front page news” (182). As a result, the organisation would “prefer to talk about femininity and the secrets of a happy household or how to look attractive to men”. The realities that faced women were ignored, as she described:

The girls did not go to school because they were married at 13. When they reached 20, they had lots of children. Some of them were divorced before they even reached 20. Where would they go after that - work in the coffee-shops and become prostitutes? What else is there left to do? (183)

In the area of government policy, the state was clearly favouring the former imperial companies. Khatijah stated that, “We felt the government was only interested in helping rich capitalists and not their own people, namely the Malays. Yet they claim to be the government of Malay people” (180). Some of the policies that Khatijah felt

represented those foreign interests had adverse consequence on the Malays. The examples she cited were tax exemption and the national language policy that sidelined Malay language in order to concentrate on the more lucrative English language. From this Khatijah concluded that, “The Malays are suffering from a new form of imperialism: the imperialism of mind and attitude: This is not a true meaning of independence” (181).

Finally, how did Khatijah feel about her political struggle for women’s emancipation amidst the challenges and disruptions? Towards the concluding paragraph, she wrote:

When I was writing this memoir, I was 45. For almost 30 years, I have fought for the people, for women, and for anti-colonial struggle. I know that if I had given up at least once or twice, I would be wealthier than I am now. But I will never surrender, that is not my soul (*ini bukan jiwa saya*). (184)

But in spite of this, there were moments when Khatijah felt despair and wished perhaps things could go differently. During the *Merdeka* celebration in 31 August 1957, she compared herself standing on the ground with UMNO leaders who stood proudly on the big stage. She noticed that “some of them saw me and just laughed”. “Others”, she recalled, “said to me ‘Mother, you have toiled and sweated (for the achievement so far), but others reaped the seeds that you sowed. This is utterly not fair’” (*benar-benar tak adil*) (173).

Although Khatijah admitted her frustration that her sacrifice and efforts to the party went unacknowledged, she tried to convince her readers (and herself) that her struggle was sincere. She wrote, “I have worked tirelessly for the party and I have no regrets. (Even though) My efforts are successful, I am not” (173). The narrative conveys that Khatijah was not only battling the social perception of her struggle as a failure or unaccomplished, but also confronting her own doubt on this.

4.3 The Memoir of Shamsiah Fakeh: *Dari AWAS ke Regiment ke-10*.
(From AWAS to the 10th Regiment)

4.3.1 Background and Context

Shamsiah Fakeh (1924-2008) described the main motivation for writing her life-story:

I did not write this memoir to glorify my life story. This writing was simply a brief story about my life as a gift for my children and grandchildren ... so that they could compare my side of the story with the one they read in the magazines and newspapers in Malaysia. (Shamsiah 2007, 13)¹⁴⁹

What was initially a record of vindication and a gift for her grandchildren had prompted a public response about the appropriateness of allowing a former communist to assert her name and story in writing. A high-ranking military officer commented on Shamsiah's memoir as a work of "deception" (*helah*). He argued that:

Because of that, there is no need for the younger generation, especially, to read the book because they are not really familiar with the history of the communist armed struggle (and if it was read) could lead to a negative revolutionary mindset. (Abdullah Samsuddin 2005)

Shamsiah Fakeh was a controversial figure in Malaysian history because of her identity as a member of a communist party despite her being Malay and received religious education. These combining markers were not surprising. There were other communist members who were Malays and former religious teachers,¹⁵⁰ too. It could be interpreted that the attention accorded was due to her identity as a *female* Malay communist which appeared quite untypical to the norms of traditional Malay society.

¹⁴⁹ Any reference from Shamsiah's memoir from now is summarised in page number.

¹⁵⁰ An example was Musa Ahmad, a President of the Communist Party, who received religious education from a prominent religious institution of *Al-Masyhur*. He surrendered to the government in 1980.

Shamsiah started writing her life-story (*riwayat*) in May 1991 whilst she was still in China. Whilst abroad, she realised that the Malaysian public were eager to find out who Shamsiah Fakeh really was. This curiosity was prompted by the publicity surrounding her application to return home from exile in China. Through some of her family members in Malaysia, publicity was generated in popular press, and stories about her began to emerge.¹⁵¹ In the preface, Shamsiah tries to battle public perception of her by presenting herself in a non-ideological term:

In actual fact, I was not a female leader of the communist party and I was not any big-time political leader. I am only a freedom fighter, fighting against British colonisers for the pursuit of national independence and women's emancipation. (12)

This declaration was an attempt to discredit the stories published about her and to shed the ideological association of the communists' 'red menace'. This signals Shamsiah's attentiveness to her readership especially among the younger generation, who were eager to read the history of a controversial and yet less-known figure.

4.3.2 Personal Life

Shamsiah was born in the state of Negeri Sembilan in 1924 into a family of eight. Despite her father being a poor vegetable-seller, Shamsiah was intent upon "learning as much as possible". When she was 13, she was sent to a religious school *Madrassah Al-Yunusiah* in Indonesia. However, her father pulled her out because of the imminent war. She continued her study in a religious school in her home-state known as *Madrassah Alamiya Islamiah*, but her study was interrupted again, this time, for an arranged marriage to her school-mate, Yasin Kina. As result of this marriage, she had two children. Both died when they were small due to malnutrition. After three years of marriage, she was divorced. This was because Yasin was to marry with another lady who Yasin's family was keen on.

¹⁵¹ Stories about her were published in *Dewan Masyarakat* from February until August 1991.

Her second marriage was to a Japanese informer named Rusdi in 1944. Shamsiah described Rusdi as a flamboyant guy who “rarely returned home” (26). The marriage lasted only for five months. Shamsiah recalled the moment of divorce: “Rusdi informed my parents, ‘I return Shamsiah to you. Looks like our partnership ends here. Sorry’: It was just a short remark from him” (28).

Shamsiah decided to become active in politics after the war. This interest was sparked by the growing political awareness at the time. She chose to become a member of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) that fought for immediate independence from the British. She married Ahmad Boestamam, her colleague in the party, in December 1946. Shamsiah was aware of the risk of marrying Boestamam, because he already had a wife and a family. She agreed to marry Boestamam because she thought through him she “would be able to learn how to be a good politician” (40). The marriage was opposed by Boestamam’s sister who accused Shamsiah of wrecking her brother’s marriage. Unlike her previous marriages, this time she took the liberty to leave. She recalled the moment: “I threw my bags out through the window and left the house for good”. Despite the divorce, Shamsiah was aware that her third marriage was not the same as the last two “which were the consequence of men using power to oppress woman”. The third divorce was a “mutual understanding” to resolve the problem of polygamy. From this experience, she realised that “polygamous relationships were not liked (*tidak disukai*) by women” (44).

Around April 1948, British authorities began to actively repress labour unions and other left - leaning political bodies. Because of the uncertainties, Shamsiah fled into a jungle along with other left-wing activists. Thus began her new life in the jungle. She became officially a communist member based in the state of Pahang. She was convinced that the communists engaged in “an armed struggle (*perjuangan senjata*) against the imperialist British”. She later married her fellow comrade Wahi Anwar, the Commander of the 10th Regiment, an all-Malay armed regiment based in Pahang.

The narrative of her life in the jungle is dominated by her attempt to clarify the misrepresented episode of her life-story. This refers to an incident that occurred in the late 1949. Shamsiah was pregnant with her first baby with Wahi. In the midst of the shoot-out with the British troops, Shamsiah gave birth to a son. When the baby was

just a month old, she escaped from the camp with him. She described her fear at the time, “I could feel the rain of bullets coming in my direction”. Shamsiah and her son were lost in the jungle for three nights. Wearing “just a shirt and an underwear”, Shamsiah felt the chill while her son was “naked with no clothes on” and “had to drink from the raindrops” in order to survive. Despite such difficulty, she remained “strong and spirited in facing the test of struggle (*ujian perjuangan*)” (68).

After three days, they were discovered by her comrades. The comrades told her that Wahi had surrendered to the British troops and they tried to persuade her to give up the baby for adoption. She wrote, “They convinced me they had found a suitable rich Chinese family who could take care of him”. Furthermore, they claimed that it would be difficult to raise a child in a revolutionary struggle” (70). Shamsiah was torn between personal and political struggle. In the end, she agreed to release her “beloved child” although “with a heavy heart” (71). But her faith in political struggle came under challenge. Three years later in 1952, Shamsiah was told by her colleague, Musa Ahmad, that her baby had actually been killed. Despite the upper hierarchy knew about the incident, the comrades who had promised to send her baby for adoption escaped punishment. The reason cited was because “the three comrades were fighting for the revolution, while the little baby had not contributed to the cause yet” (72). Although she had learned the truth, she continued to portray her politics as more important than personal matters. She wrote that “since I was still loyal to the party and the revolution and so I accepted the party’s decision calmly and in good faith” (72).

Public knowledge of the episode ran contrary to her claim. She was aware of this, and she mentioned that she could not fathom why her comrades “had the stomach (*boleh tergamak*) to deceive our society” (72). Her memoir provided the opportunity to write back to her detractors. In a section “I am not a murderer” (*Aku bukan pembunuh*) Shamsiah decided to respond to the allegation that she had killed her baby-son by crashing his head against a stone. The charge was made by her former schoolmate Syed Alwi. Another accusation levelled against her came from Musa Ahmad, the very comrade who had told her about the party’s decision. In a television interview, Musa had claimed that Shamsiah purposely drowned her baby in the river to avoid attention from the enemy troops. To this charge she asserted that:

The accusations (*fitnah*) made against me were absolute lies and slander. Could anyone imagine that I, as an independence fighter (*pejuang kemerdekaan*) and a mother who had saved her baby from the rain of bullets in the middle of a deep forest, and then endured four trying days and three horrendous nights, would be so cruel as to kill my own baby? (75)

In her narrative, the aspects of political and personal life went hand-in-hand. However, there were persistent attempts to present her political struggle ahead of personal interests. Her marriage with Boestamam and decision to send the baby away were two significant events that were used to substantiate her claim of political commitment. In this sense, the aspects of her personal life were only important insofar that they could be used to support and validate her self-construction as an independent fighter.

4.3.3 From a Radical Nationalist to a Radical Communist

Within the climate of anti-colonialism and Indonesian independence, the only Malay party that fought for independence was the left-wing Malay Nationalist Party (MNP). Shamsiah noted that “throughout the history of independence struggle, left-wing activists or progressive mass movements were the most likely to be caught, imprisoned and hanged” (31). The struggle for the nation’s freedom was to become the principal guide in her political vocation. The subject of freedom was for her a necessary pre-condition for women’s emancipation.

Shamsiah attributed her political awareness to her personal experience as an oppressed wife. The experience that she had gone through since had motivated her to change the fate of women through independence movement. Another factor that contributed to her political interest was gained through her *madrassah* (religious) education in Indonesia where she was made aware of the revolutionary struggle. Back in Malaya, she encountered similar “progressive nationalism” (*bersifat kebangsaan yang progresif*) represented by the MNP. She became an active member of the party and was elected as the chief of the women’s section known as the Women Progressive

Corps (AWAS). Her faith in the struggle for national freedom had encouraged her “to sacrifice time, heart and soul (*jiwa dan raga*)” for her political ambition (33).

In the run-up towards the emergency period, Shamsiah was forced to flee into the jungle. She participated in a communist training camp in late May 1948 which was designed to provide ideological training for Malay cadres. She noticed from the training camp that some of the former MNP members were participating in the training which made her felt quite at ease. For Shamsiah, communism was an extension of her prior struggle, “what I knew about the communist party was that we were fighting for our country’s independence” (54). This became the main attraction for her: to be part of an arduous struggle in the jungle base. The ideological nature of communism was not elaborated; readers were to be convinced that the sole motivation was not the ‘red’ ideology but the noble effort for independence.

In the jungle, Shamsiah became part of the Malay military wing of the communist party, known as the 10th Regiment. Realising that she needed to persuade the reader that the 10th Regiment was a genuine Malay independence movement, Shamsiah pulled out supporting evidence from a book authored by a veteran of UMNO, Abdul Samad Idris. In her memoir section “The evaluation towards the Malays who were fighting in the jungle” (*Penilaian terhadap orang Melayu yang berjuang di dalam hutan*) Shamsiah quoted from Abdul Samad:

The rebellion launched by the Malay regiment that allied themselves with the communists should not be viewed in ideological terms as communist struggle. It was clear that these Malays were true nationalists. The difference was they were choosing a different path through rebellion to achieve their aim for independence. (64)

This was a convincing technique for drawing parallels between UMNO’s and her struggle as a legitimate cause. By citing a statement from an UMNO veteran nationalist had bolstered her claim that the communist struggle was equally genuine. Shamsiah directed the reader to what is relevant, that is, the struggle for freedom by whatever means. This was the very position that she had persistently pursued and projected throughout her memoir. Thus, she justified her entry into communism not

because of the ideology but because it represented a continuation of her struggle for the nation's freedom.

4.3.4 Permission to return home

Her final chapter documented her homecoming after decades of exile in China. Shamsiah returned to Malaysia on 23 July 1994 after living in exile for almost 38 years. She described the feeling: "How I longed to breathe the air and step my feet on my beloved home land (*tanah air yang tercinta*) that I left 37 years ago" (129). When she and her family landed in the airport, she was greeted by the Special Branch police and was taken to an unnamed resort for security clearance. Since she was considered by the government as a communist, she had to stay in the resort for ten days for her statements to be taken. She noted the Special Branch officers were "polite and courteous" in their interactions. Although she understood the precaution taken as a result of her political identity, she also tried to resist her labelling as a 'communist'. She wrote, "I return home using my own name and not the communist party's, and I did not come out from the jungle but from China with a Malaysian passport" (130).

After leaving the resort, Shamsiah received visitors from former and current members of the police force, as well as her long-separated families. The atmosphere was friendly and everyone seemed to "sympathise with me as an old women who deserved respect and empathy" (131). Shamsiah further added, "These people (the veteran and police forces) have no need to be revengeful towards me. I have never fired a gun in my life. In fact, I was the victim of their gun-fire" (131).

The events surrounding her return were narrated to convey the sense that Shamsiah was no longer the notorious communist as previously accused by the colonial British as well as the post-independence administration. As mentioned in her "Introduction", she wished her life-story to be read as a narrative of an "independence fighter" and a "nationalist" (13). To some extent, this aim has been successfully conveyed.

However, it is also observed that autobiographical identities are contextual, that is, she was a nationalist at a certain point and a communist at another. Shamsiah has to confront the state's propaganda of communist violence as well as public perception of

communist's struggle. This illustrates the autobiographer's struggle to present her identity as consistent amidst the changing context.

If Khatijah's memoir illustrated the spread and the influence of Indonesian nationalism towards anti-colonial struggle in Malaya, Shamsiah's memoir provided us with description of the local manifestation of international communist struggle for independence. The election of a socialist-leaning politician, Subhas Chandra Bose, as the President of the Indian National Congress in 1938¹⁵², the defeat of western-backed nationalist Kuomintang in the hands of the communist army in 1949, and the outbreak of Korean War in 1950 are some of the movements that indicates the appealing power of Marxism as the ideological source for nationalism and anti-colonialism. Malaya was not immune from the socialist influence. Indeed, the Malayan Communist Party was one of various strands of people's nationalism in Malaya. Shamsiah's memoir introduces the story of those whose contribution to independence was denied.

4.4. The Memoir of Ahmad Boestamam: *Merdeka dengan Darah dalam Api* (Independence with Blood in Fire)

4.4.1 Background and Context

Ahmad Boestamam (1920-1983) was born on 30 November 1920 into a family of Indonesian origin. His given name was Abdullah Thani. His father, Raja Kechil, was a peasant and owned a rubber-farm. He received an English education in the Anderson School, but in 1937, failed his Junior Cambridge examination. His biographer described Boestamam's early interest during his school years as mainly reading political texts of Sukarno and Subhas Chandra Bose¹⁵³ and actively

¹⁵² Chandra Bose was re-elected as a President a year after he defeated Mohandas Gandhi's candidate. He later resigned after finding himself under pressure from conservative politicians within the INC. Bose formed a new organisation, Forward Bloc, to unite socialist supporters to fight for Indian independence. For Chandra Bose's political career see Kearney, R.N. (1983) "Identity, Life Mission and the Political Career".

¹⁵³ Subhas Bose was a former President of the Indian National Congress party before he resigned as result of ideological differences with Mahatma Gandhi. He was a founder of armed resistance in the form of the Indian National Army, which comprised overseas Indians that worked especially in plantations. His responsibility required him to travel to certain countries, including Malaya, in order to whip up support for anti-colonial resistance. Boestamam was inspired by his political speeches after attending his political rally in Malaya, to the extent that he used a pseudonym Boestamam (from Bose) that he was remembered by.

participating in a debating club. He was not interested in sport, and would usually play as a goalkeeper (Ramlah Adam 1988).

Boestamam's memoir was published in 2004. The memoir was a compilation of three of Boestamam's previous works¹⁵⁴ re-presented in a memoir-format. His former colleague in the *Utusan Melayu*¹⁵⁵ press, A. Samad Ismail, wrote the preface of his memoir. Boestamam was described as the "pioneer of Malay radical nationalism". In addition, Samad described him as, "a fighter and a leader of the Malays whose place in the history of the country was well and truly deserved" (Boestamam 2004, 36)¹⁵⁶. In the sense of public visibility, Ahmad Boestamam was a high-profile figure compared to the other radical nationalists studied here. As the "Introduction" by Samad Ismail testifies, Boestamam was *recognised* as the "pioneer" of radical nationalism, and as someone whose place in history was not disputed. Boestamam's life-history was well documented¹⁵⁷ and his political profile soared after his release from prison. He was a President of the Socialist Front and won a parliamentary seat in the federal election in 1959. In 1976, Boestamam was awarded a state-title *Datuk* by the Sarawak state-government. Given these facts it was obvious that Boestamam had a respectable profile compared to the previous memoirists. What then, is the reason for studying Boestamam's memoir?

Boestamam's memoir is an ideal type description of the radical nationalist movement in colonial Malaya. His narrative was thick with political process and historical events that happened in Malaya after the war, in particular, during the height of radical nationalism (1945-1948). Boestamam was the main player in this process and the narrative was presented in the wider context of nationwide struggle. His memoir was a story of his never-ending quest for 'genuine' independence

¹⁵⁴ These are *Merintis Jalan Ke-Puncak* (Carving the Path to the Summit), *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang* (Seven Years of Long Nights) and *Lambaian dari Puncak* (Waving from the Summit), published in 1972, 1976 and 1983 respectively.

¹⁵⁵ *Utusan Melayu* was a Malay newspaper published in *Jawi* script. It was founded in Singapore in 1939, and moved to Kuala Lumpur in 1958. It became synonymous with the voice of Malay nationalism in the past and present. In a survey conducted by AC Nielson in 2005, *Utusan Malaysia* (its current name) is the most-widely read Malay-language daily with readership around 1.4 million.

¹⁵⁶ Reference from Boestamam's memoir is from now summarised in page number.

¹⁵⁷ A comprehensive biography of his life and career can be read from Ramlah Adam (1988) *Ahmad Boestamam: Satu Biografi Politik* (A Political Biography).

4.4.2 Training in Politics

Boestamam's memoir, in its compilation format, was arranged to reflect a chronological phase of his life. The first sentence of his memoir is, "I started to be active in politics during the early 1940s" (39). This is the early sign that his narrative is mainly concerned with politics and events of political significance. The highlight of his political career was pursued consistently throughout the memoir. In this part, I will locate the early experience that had oriented Boestamam into a radical nationalist. The discussion is based on the first part of the memoir, *Lambaian dari Puncak* (Waving from the Summit).

Boestamam portrayed himself as someone who, from his early years, was destined to become a political activist. His interest in his school days was reading newspapers that were "filled with nationalistic fervour which stirred the spirit". His narrative was therefore designed to conform to his destiny in politics. Every step was directed for the attainment of his political ambition. He recalled that his first attempt at public speaking made him realised that he needed to acquire political skills as early as possible. He wrote, "Immediately I was eager to read as much political materials as possible to improve my writing skills" (40). His skills in public debate and his journalistic talent were assets to his later success in politics.

During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), Boestamam became a propaganda officer to the regime. This was the first experience in state-administration for Boestamam and other young men from a common background. Before the war and after, the business of state became the affairs of British officials and a handful of Malay aristocrats. Apart from administrative duties, these young men had been given military training known as *Giyu-Gun* and *Giyu-Tai*. Boestamam believed that acquiring military skill "would have important uses later for the people and the homeland" (80). In the narrative of his post-war politics, Boestamam recalled the influence of military training that had inspired him to form a military style youth movement after the war.

Boestamam's memoir described the rationale behind his pro-Japanese strategy as tactical. The leader of the Young Malay Union (KMM), Ibrahim Yaacob, tried to

convince the members, included Boestamam, of the merit of cooperating with the Japanese. He recalled the message from Ibrahim Yaacob, “The Japanese victory was not the victory of Malays. We must continue the struggle for our ambition (to gain freedom)”. Boestamam interpreted the message to mean that, “It is acceptable to work with the Japanese in order to achieve our ambition, as long as we are not turning into their lackeys” (56).

Overall, the Japanese occupation had left legacies that were to shape post-war politics. The youth from peasant background began to assume a more assertive direction in politics. The military training had not only taught them about armed fighting but also had instilled nationalistic feelings. This was to become an asset most feared by the British in succeeding years, when these youths formed a youth party known as *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* or API (Youth Movement for Justice), whose members were well-trained in military tactics. In summary, the benefits accrued from the Japanese occupation had conveyed the impression to Boestamam that Malay leadership would soon shift from the hands of aristocrats to the *rakyat* (people).

4.4.3 Radical Anti- Colonialism

The second part of the memoir-compilation, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak* (Carving the Path to the Summit), chronicled his political activity after the war. This was the important section in the memoir as it highlighted the formation of radical nationalism, its rise and decline in anti-colonial politics. In fact, *Merintis* was the first part of Boestamam’s trilogy published in 1972. Boestamam presented himself as the key player in the formation of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) and the Youth Movement for Justice (API).

The Japanese occupation had left the country in disarray. The absence of central authority provided the opportunity for the underground communists to reign in towns and cities. In the midst of this chaos, a Malay daily *Suara Rakyat* (Voice of the People) was borne. The newspaper was the brainchild of Boestamam. The editorial board and the reporters consisted of friends whom he knew from the Left Movement of the Homeland (KITA), an anti-Japanese underground movement that Boestamam had helped to form. Boestamam presented *Suara Rakyat* as a press that was critical of

the colonial administration. He recalled an incident when a British officer paid a visit to the office in regards to the reporting of the army's handling of a demonstration. The press called the action "violent" (*kejam*) and "un-democratic". The officer threatened to stop the press from operating unless Boestamam agreed to apologise, which he did. "From then on", he wrote, "I have been called and asked to apologise almost every day" (125).

The significance of *Suara Rakyat* was not its journalism but its role in the formation of the earliest Malay political body in the post-war. Boestamam was the co-founder of the party but not the originator of the idea. He was honest in his admission that Arshad Ashaari, a member of a communist party, put "the most effort" into the plan. Boestamam's accommodation towards communist influence was seen earlier when he agreed to accept the funds for the operation of *Suara Rakyat*. The reason for the communist interest and its supports for Boestamam and his activities were not mentioned in the memoir. He confessed that he "did not know why" the idea for a political party was suggested to him. "Whatever the reason was", he stated, "we have long been ready" (132).

His recollection of the meeting that took place in September 1945 to discuss the proposal for a political party was vivid. There were altogether twenty people present from the communist party members and the reporters of *Suara Rakyat*. He recalled that one of the participants claimed that, "if Indonesia can achieve its freedom there was no reason why Malaya could not do the same". Another participant argued that "the way to achieve independence was through a political party". There was also an expectation that the party was likely to invite challenge from the British. Boestamam recorded one of the responses to such concern:

In other words we must not let them (the British) become the reason for stopping us, although we would welcome them to stop us. If we refrain from handling a *parang* (a machete) and we concede it means our hands had not actually touched the *parang*. But if we were prevented from using the *parang* when it was already in our hand, we ask, 'would we let them stop us using the *parang*, or would we use it to serve our best interest'. (134)

After consensus was reached for the formation of a political party, the communist representative, Arshad Ashaari, suggested the party be named the *Parti Sosialis Malaya* (Socialist Party of Malaya). At this moment, Boestamam realised that the communist section tried to exert their influence on the party in the same way that they had done to the press. Boestamam stated clearly that he and his colleagues “did not oppose the idea of socialism”, but for him the priority should be the struggle for a free nation-state (135). He suggested the party to be named *Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* or the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) which would reflect their aspirations. The idea was accepted and the next day the publicity for the new party began, “the MNP had now arrive and its existence was to be acknowledged” (137).

The MNP was formed at the time when a united political leadership was lacking. This was an importune moment, as the British had started to negotiate with the rajahs of every state for surrender of sovereignty to the British Crown. A Malay Congress was proposed by Onn Jaafar to unite every association to oppose the Malayan Union plan. The MNP accepted the invitation to the congress because, according to Boestamam, the party “agreed that Malayan Union must be opposed and destroyed with the mammoth energy (*tenaga raksasa*) of every *rakyat* (people)” (159). The congress was later institutionalised into a political party known as the United Malay National Organisation or UMNO, and the MNP became an allied member of UMNO. “In the fifty bodies within UMNO”, Boestamam wrote, “MNP was the only left-wing body”. The uneasy alliance between the MNP and UMNO soon resulted in their break-up. Boestamam stated there was an underlying ideological difference between the two:

While we were demanding a hundred percent independence for Malaya, UMNO had only wanted to return to the status quo. Because of different political views, sooner or later we would be separated. (178)

The split from UMNO was presented as the MNP reassertion of “its own political ambition to achieve full independence for Malaya” (180). A second party congress was held in Malacca in 1946 to showcase the strength of the party “since there was an allegation from the enemy side that the MNP had lost the support of the people” (191). The support from the public towards the congress was described as “very impressive” (*sungguh hebat*). In the morning, a “giant rally” (*perarakan raksasa*)

which stretched for about a mile was held, followed by a public gathering.

Boestamam described the congress as important because it spelled the beginning of API, a youth movement that was proposed by him. This youth association was to be moulded in military fashion. They were to wear white uniforms with red armband with the inscription “API” in black. API’s agenda was outlined in a pamphlet authored by Boestamam.¹⁵⁸

The objective for API was stated in the pamphlet as follows, “The youth of API and the rest of Malay youth: Let us fight for our freedom because only in a free country can Malays regain their honour” (Boestamam 1946, 18). The emphasis on youth captured the sense of direct politics. Boestamam believed that youth are inherently radical in feeling, thought and action. “Within their hot-blooded soul”, the pamphlet stated, “lies a stirring spirit and a high, noble ambition” (1946, 2). Boestamam argued that such spirit can be useful for independence struggle since the youth “would not hesitate to choose a difficult and radical path”. Furthermore, API aspired to create an egalitarian society. Politically, it demanded a “true democracy” (*demokrasi tulen*). Economically, it supported a planned economy that eliminates division between the rich and poor. Socially, it aimed to eliminate the division between the aristocracy and the common class (1946, 9-10).

API was presented in the narrative as a party that was taken seriously by the colonial administration. Boestamam recalled two incidents where a senior British policeman was dispatched to ascertain the level of threat. The first officer, Mr Brown, was sent to verify the claim that API planned to resort to uprising (*pemberontakan*) in its bid to achieve the country’s freedom. Perhaps an attempt to impress the officer had prompted him to confirm the allegation “without fear” (183). In a second incident, he claimed to another British officer that there were “around four thousand active API members from various states” (186). On 1 July 1947, API was banned by the regime. Boestamam was “extremely shocked” to hear the news, as he felt that the party’s life was ended prematurely. “I thought”, he recalled “that the Communist Party of Malaya would be the first to be banned” (231). The strength of API grassroots and its

¹⁵⁸ The pamphlet was appended to the current memoir-compilation.

propaganda had provided reasonable cause for the regime to be worried. A security intelligence report stated that:

From then on the API started to organise itself in earnest. Branches sprang up almost overnight. Members gradually increased in numbers. The API, which was formerly initiated through a three-man effort, has its branches all over the Malay Peninsula. Every radically-spirited Malay youth has now joined the API as it is the only organisation that has a radical policy.

(Quoted in Ramlah 2004, 231)

A year after API was banned Boestamam was arrested under the Emergency regulations. According to him, other left-leaning activists who had escaped the arrest started a guerrilla fight from the jungle base “to retaliate and to vent their anger towards the British colonialists (*penjajah Inggeris*) for their harsh treatment”. But the colonial regime was not the only one that benefited from the opposition crackdown. As result of the repression, he stated that, “UMNO became the only legitimate body available and that enabled it to achieve the major success it has continued to have until today” (249). His arrest, however, did not spell the end of his political journey. Instead, it continued into his life in prison. This is the advantage of the recent compilation compared to the individual format published earlier in 1972. The recent format presented Boestamam’s struggle in a continuous narrative to convey the impression of continuity of life and politics.

4.4.4 Prison Experience

The third instalment of the memoir, *Tujuh Tahun Malam Memanjang* (Seven Years of Long Nights) documented Boestamam’s experience in prison following his arrest in 1948. The autobiographer constructed a narrative that could function politically under the prison regime. There is both the existence of structure that incorporated the subject into ‘prisoner’ and there is also insistence on agency in the sense that he refused to submit completely to the system. This dual-presence of structure and agency will be highlighted across the discussion.

Boestamam recalled the moment of his second arrest: “It was the afternoon of Thursday, 1 July 1948. I was lying on the bed, still recovering from fever. My wife came to me in hurry, saying there was a truck stopped in front of our house full of special police” (248). As he was being taken away by the officers, emotions suddenly surged. His wife flung herself on Boestamam and cried out loudly, followed by his mother and his two children. He wrote, “When my wife and my mother cried, I could still be strong, but not when my children started to cry. The wall around me suddenly crumbled. I did not believe any father could remain unmoved when faced with such sorrow” (262).

Boestamam was later escorted to Tanjung Malim Police Station. There he was told that he had been arrested under the Emergency Ordinance. He described his feeling at the time: “I sat on the bench and my eyes were wandering around the room. For quite a while I was without thought. There was not anything I could think of” (266). He was later interrogated by a Special Branch officer. The officer claimed that Boestamam “attempted to crush the government”. To his allegation, Boestamam responded, “I am not against the government, only colonial occupation” (*menghentam penjajahan*) (278). Throughout his seven years detention, Boestamam was moved from one detention camp to another. The high and the low points of his prison experience were documented in the narrative.

Pudu Prison was the first prison where he served his sentence for crimes against the state. In a title chapter “In Hell” (*Di dalam neraka*) Boestamam described the condition of the prison as quite comfortable. Due to his status as a political prisoner, he was placed in a different cell from the other inmates. The prison warden was “kind-hearted” and often secretly supplied cigarettes to Boestamam and other Malay inmates. The inmates were allowed to walk around the prison compound and communicated with each others. Despite the flexible rule, Boestamam felt far from happy, “deep down in my heart I missed the freedom outside the prison” (295).

Next, Boestamam was moved to Seremban Prison. The conditions in this prison were much better. The inmates were allowed to smoke, to receive visitors once a week, and also to cook their own lunch and dinner. While in the prison, he received the news of his mother’s passing. He felt “heartbroken, only God knows how” (311). His

application to attend her funeral was rejected by the Special Branch. Following this incident, he stated, “I was determined, and even swore that as long as I lived I would fight colonialism to the end” (315).

After remaining in Seremban for more than a year, he was transferred to Tanjung Beruas Detention Camp. It was a huge army camp that housed inmates from different backgrounds. This was Boestamam’s first experience in detention camp. He described that, “In each corner of the camp was a high tower with guards carrying machine guns day and night”. Furthermore, “there was a separate area that contained ‘dark rooms’” (320). Those who committed offences would be confined in these rooms for days, provided only with water and bread.

On his arrival, he observed: “The prisoners rushed out in joyful happiness and greeted us ‘welcome’! But that was all they could do because we were separated by high fences and barbed wires” (321). The structure of the detention camp was flexible. The inmates were allowed to cook and each block had a sports field. Boestamam and his cell-mates in bloc J formed a mini-government that practised a “direct democracy”. There were ‘prime minister’ and ‘ministers’ who held portfolios in education, sports, food supply, and celebration. His block had written a digest, *Siasat* (Politics), a cooperative effort that contained political articles, short stories and poems. Since only a single copy of the digest was available, it was passed around within the block. In 1955, Boestamam was transferred to Ipoh Detention Camp. He was placed in Block 12, along with other prominent political prisoners like Ishak Hj. Muhammad¹⁵⁹ and Ustaz Abu Bakar Bakir.¹⁶⁰ Boestamam and other political inmates had timetables for their regulated activities. Each community of Malay, Chinese and Indian had their own cooking rotation. A Malay language class started after breakfast at 9am and ended just before the lunch break. A Mandarin class¹⁶¹ started at 2pm, and

¹⁵⁹ Ishak Hj. Muhammad (1909-1991) was a former president of the Malay Nationalist Party. He was a prolific writer and whose his pen-names were Hantu Raya and Pak Sako. He was an editor for *Pelita Malaya*, the MNP-backed newspaper. He was created a National Laureate in 1976 for his contribution to Malay literature.

¹⁶⁰ Abu Bakar Bakir was a prominent religious leader of Madrasah Gunung Semanggul, known for its anti-colonial activity. UMNO’s founder, Onn Jaafar warned the Malays “of the threat from the mountain and the jungle”. The “mountain” enemy refers to Bakir’s religious constituency.

¹⁶¹ Boestamam said the Mandarin lessons received in prison enabled him to speak reasonably well in Mandarin, an important asset in winning Chinese votes during the General Election in 1959.

ended at 5pm for dinner preparation. From 5.30pm to 8pm, the inmates engaged in sports such as basketball and badminton. At 10pm they retired to bed.

Despite the apparent flexibility, a tight monitoring procedure was in place to prevent radicalism among the detainees. The inmates were not allowed to mix with other groups (codes) except in certain situations. In order to communicate with other inmates, Boestamam and his friends organised inter-block (viz. inter-code) badminton competitions. Camp authorities consented the matches under two conditions, namely only blocks with participating players were allowed to attend the game, and the matches were to be held in sudden-death format.

Inside prison, Boestamam had explored his literary talent in writing poems and short stories. His interest began when he responded to an advertisement for a literary competition organised by ASAS 50.¹⁶² The problem was how to smuggle out the scripts without getting noticed. He decided to seek help from a prison guard named Yusuf. Yusuf would hide the scripts in his shoes or rain clothes in order to avoid getting caught. Boestamam won a first prize in the poetry and short-story categories. He continued to smuggle out his works under the pseudonyms *Ruhi Hayat* (Life-Spirit) and *Jiwalara* (Broken-Hearted). His experience in Ipoh detention camp was described as “the most beautiful ornament (*jambangan paling indah*) in the whole of my prison life” (344).

Boestamam’s eventual release was facilitated by, ironically, his erstwhile enemy UMNO, now with a new leader, Tunku Abdul Rahman. This was made possible when the Ruler of the state of Pahang, after visiting Boestamam in prison, gave his personal assurance. Boestamam’s anti-feudal attitude was softened at this moment. He wrote that “immediately my respect and admiration towards His Majesty soared high and higher” (351). From this, one would expect that Boestamam had been won over by the ruler’s gesture. However, in the penultimate page of the memoir, he reinstated his criticism towards UMNO and its feudal base. He insisted that “the cooperation between UMNO and the Alliance was a cooperation between leading capitalist

¹⁶² ASAS 50 was a literary movement that fought for the principle ‘art for society’ (*seni untuk masyarakat*). It referred to the politicisation of arts in response to the needs of society, as opposed to ‘art for art’s sake’ (*seni untuk seni*).

classes, while the MNP concept of cooperation was with the people - the labourers and the peasants, not the upper classes and the capitalists” (374). This shows the narrator’s insistence to be seen as a committed radical nationalist from the moment he entered into politics, throughout his imprisonment and after he was freed.

Boestamam was released on 28 June 1955. The release was kept secret for security reasons. At 6pm, Boestamam was escorted out of the Ipoh Detention Camp. His heart was screaming, “seven years of my life was spent in hell, and I will not set foot in a prison again” (357). When he stepped into his home, he described the “feeling of happiness that filled the air. And I could see the tears of joy running down the cheeks of each and everyone that I embraced” (366). In the final paragraph of his prison narrative, he reflected on what it felt like to finally achieve freedom:

One or two days after being released, I still felt as if I was in a dream. But now I was in a free world (*alam bebas*), it was a reality (*suatu hakikat*), a real life (*kenyataan hidup*) that was true in all its certainty (*segala kepastiannya*). (375)

The memoirs discussed previously demonstrated how individual subjects experienced colonialism. These autobiographies, written by anti-colonial activists, documented not only personal experience but also contained some insights into the wider social and cultural processes. In the next chapter, the inter-relations of individual and society will be explored in relation to the practice of cultural resistance.

CHAPTER 5 Examination of Cultural Resistance in Subaltern Memoirs

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the potential of autobiography as an alternative source of colonial and elite history of Malaysian independence. My interest is to apply the theoretical and methodological framework developed in Chapter 2 and 3 into the study of cultural resistance. The framework focuses on the sociological interpretation of autobiography that attempts to connect the work of autobiography/memoir with the external forces of politics and culture. This chapter elaborates the theme ‘resistance’ from perspectives of culture, agency and gender. In focusing on memoir as a site of competing meanings and interpretations of colonial past, I argue that the memoirs constituted from their beginning a potentially active political intervention in producing and representing individual experience and politico-cultural identity.

5.2 Culture

This study supports *Orientalism*'s argument that culture is inseparable from the question of authority. Since authority is a product of specific time and history, so it follows, that culture is not a fixed and timeless attribute. Thus, *Orientalism* insists that culture has to be studied with history and power as its constituent elements. In this section, I will discuss the (re-) making and (re-) interpretation of cultures within the subaltern memoirs, and try to locate and assess the points where culture functions as an effective counter-discourse to the elite production of history.

Early British colonialists in Malaya interpreted Malay culture and attitude as an inevitable outcome of indigenous politics. This was according to Hugh Clifford, in a speech to the Royal Colonial Institute, attributed to the fact that:

... native administration with all their eccentricities was the only form of government of which people as a whole had any personal knowledge, the natives did not even realise the gravity of the ills which they were called upon to suffer. If they were oppressed and ground down, their forebears had been in

a like condition for countless generations....

(Clifford 1899, Kratoska 1983, 241)

The ills of the “native administration” were said to be responsible for the vicious pattern of poverty suffered by the ordinary people. The system was presided over by a Sultan, whose “passions were one and all given to him to satisfy to the full, not to curb or restrain” (1899, 231). The administration of justice was performed by “incompetent persons” who adjudicate cases “by the Law of Muhammad (where) many barbarities are permitted such as no European Government could countenance” (1899, 235). Furthermore, the economy was run by royal prerogative to the extent that the taxation was measured “only from the sole point of view of the convenience and the welfare of the Sultans and his chiefs” (1899, 239). The life of the Malay *rakyat* prior to British rule was characterised by oppression and a single-rule tyranny.

In this regard, British administrators felt that the introduction of British rule actually relieved the subject-races from the ills of their political system. In his book *Studies of Brown Humanity*, Clifford described some of the positive changes introduced by the British. He wrote:

We open up the most inaccessible places; we bring Trade, and Money, and Prosperity, and Material Comfort, and Sanitation, and Drains, and a thousand other blessings of Civilisation in our wake. (Clifford 1898, 124)

Colonial rule was therefore seen to provide the occasion for material improvement of the natives. The political circumstances that had subjected the Malays to political, social and economic exploitation were justifiably removed with colonial administration in place. But the rhetoric that justified British intervention was not a sustainable claim.

As stated in Chapter 1, the British were hesitant to bring about change to Malay society. The lesson from the assassination of the first British Resident J.W.W. Birch and the lack of security-military logistics would mean that the British must be cautious in their dealings with the natives. Once the *realpolitik* of the situation is appreciated, it becomes apparent that the colonial policy was dictated by political

survival more than any supporting rhetoric of progress. When the political argument for supporting changes had lost its rigour, the state of material well-being of the Malays was interpreted as a cultural affair. Clifford, despite his glowing praise of British rule, recognised that the conservative inertia of native culture was largely responsible for Malays' poor condition. He noted:

That the sudden introduction to an elaborate civilisation, which is itself the result of long and slow evolution from very primitive beginnings, should not always tend to immediately improve the moral character of the bulk of the native population is unfortunate but inevitable. The fault obviously lies with the moral nature of the native, for which no man can hold us responsible; and we do our part of the business very well indeed... and the majority of us quite ready to wear our souls out in a struggle to realise what we believe to be for the ultimate good of the folk we try to rule and serve. (Clifford 1898, 125)

The “moral nature” of the native can be interpreted to refer to the “robust conservatism” that dominated the interpretation of colonial Malay culture.¹⁶³ For that reason, despite its contact with the “elaborate civilisation” of the British, Malay culture remained resistant. Hence, according to this opinion, there was nothing much the colonial rule could do to assist the Malays into a better material life.

The motive for linking culture with politics has been indicated earlier, but the question whether the strategy of making the natives appear unchanged (despite being exposed to modern changes) in order to justify the principle of colonial rule remains open. *Orientalism* discussed the discursive effect of binarism or “positional superiority”: by constructing the ‘other’ as timeless and ahistorical so that the West appears dynamic and modern. But the sources from Clifford quoted above pointed to something quite different. The optimism underlined earlier that the native’s character can be improved significantly under British rule was replaced later by a cautious undertone that the superiority of British civilisation “does not tend to immediately improve the moral character” of the natives. What this amounts to can be understood

¹⁶³ Hugh Clifford described the Malays as a people who exhibited “robust conservatism” and who “adhered faithfully to their old manner of life with an extraordinary tenacity” (Clifford 1899 in Kratoska 1983, 227).

from Bhabha's term "ambivalence". The concept described the moment when the positioning of colonial narrative as the dominant-self *differs* from reality on the ground. Bhabha thus argues, "representation of colonial authority depends less on a universal symbol of English identity than on its productivity as a sign of difference" (1985, 150). The political representation of culture does not only inform us about the claim of power asserted by the dominant. It also expresses the feeling of doubt and insecurity as colonial discourse discovered its failure to maintain the normative justification for colonial rule.

The previous discussion shows the politicisation of culture does not always produce an effective strategy for domination. But can the appropriation of culture become an effective instrument for resistance? In Boestamam's memoir, 'culture' is described as a reality produced by colonial oppression. Under colonial rule, three elements coexisted albeit in unequal positions. First, society was divided into several structures of politics, economy, education and religion. Second, oppression (*penindasan*) pervaded in every structure. There were various groups of oppressors such as the coloniser, the feudal lords, conservative religious leaders and local and foreign capitalists. And finally, the social arrangement was not natural but was created by men (*di-ada-kan oleh manusia*). He revealed the humanly produced reality:

For API, the existence of the aristocrats (*bangsawan*) and the commons (*murba*), the dignified (*mulia*) and the shamed (*hina*), is because of their deception (*tipu- muslihatnya*) in creating classes within the social being.

(Boestamam 1946, 10)

The criticism of the class system as a 'deception' was a challenge to colonialist literature that tended to explain Malay culture as something inherent. Boestamam believed that analysis of culture and society must also include the fact of colonial domination. It was only when the relationship between culture and politics was established that the root of social injustice could be traced. Since Boestamam identified inequalities existing in the cultural system as *produced* by combination of various types of oppressions, it opened up the space for the role of political agency, or specifically, the power of youth, to challenge the system. To provide an antidote for the injustices brought by colonial oppression, an egalitarian society based on the

principle of democracy was envisioned. The political pamphlet of API, authored by Boestamam stated that:

API demands a social organisation that is fair or what is known as social justice. Social justice is like a spine, the most crucial and important condition that can ensure whether a system is truly democratic or not. As long as social justice is not set in the system there could be no hope for a hundred percent pure democracy. (Boestamam 1946, 10)

The call for a fair and just social organisation was to be realised through physical struggle because “freedom cannot be achieved with saliva or requests (*meminta-minta*) but with struggle (*perjuangan*), with the blood spilled from the youth” (1946, 19). A radical youth believes in “HARDLINE FOUGHT WITH HARDLINE” (*KERAS LAWAN KERAS*), while a radical thought expresses the intentions:

- To demand simultaneous changes (*serta-merta dan serentak*) in every aspect.
- To apply a hard-handed approach (*jalan yang keras*) in national movement (*pergerakan kebangsaan*).
- To fight (*berjuang*) for democracy in order to achieve a real justice (*keadilan baharu ada dengan sebenarnya*). (1946, 2 & 18)

Here, the term ‘radical’ appears to advocate physical approach as a method of achieving independence. This was not an uncommon thought for youth movements involved in anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Indonesia which were, directly or indirectly, inspired by socialism (Hargreaves 1993; Gordon 1986; McVey & Semaun 1966). Boestamam was inspired by the international trend as can be seen when he adopted the slogan used in Indonesia, “Let the youth perish (in their struggle), but not the motherland” (1946, 3). More significantly, the term “Malayan youth” (*pemuda Malaya*) used in the pamphlet indicated the movement’s ambition to transcend race barriers. Given the prevalence of inter-communal clashes after the war, the attempt to mobilise youth from Malay and the non-Malay communities was indeed ‘radical’.

It can be argued that the cultural thesis put forward by Boestamam, which identified the objective existence of oppression, provided a crucial entry for the imagination of freedom and social justice. Having demonstrated the way culture was politicised for the purpose of resisting colonial domination, the next concern is whether this strategy can become an effective countervailing political ideology. Due to limited space, ideology is discussed minimally.

Ideology symbolises certain assumptions of values and truths.¹⁶⁴ From the previous discussion on colonial discourse of Malay culture, there are certain ideas and values which can be extracted. The idea of progress and the superiority of British civilisation were thought to be synonymous with colonial ideology. Indeed, this must be the case, because the absence of immediate change of the natives under the colonial rule was considered to be no reflection on the British since “the fault obviously lies with the moral nature of the natives”. Meanwhile, the ideology of culture developed in API’s pamphlet is secular, democratic and socialist. Terms like justice, democracy and oppression functioned as rhetorical devices to inspire support for the radical’s struggle for independence. But if Boestamam’s cultural ideology is grounded on the reality of anti-colonial resistance waged by different types of nationalism (secular, Islamist, communist), a broader picture emerged. The rallying cry for democracy, the marching of thousands of men and women demanding independence, and the road-shows organised by political parties in towns and villages proved that the struggle for justice and freedom was no rhetoric. They were real, ordinary people fighting real a struggle. It took the declaration of Emergency on 1 July 1948 to de-activate the radical nationalists and other forms of political and socio-economic protests.

The presentation of memoir as a critique of colonial culture is not confined to Boestamam’s memoir. In Shamsiah’s memoir, the narrative was used to present a challenge to the conventional views in regards to the communist armed struggle. She believed that the notoriety attached to the communists was the product of colonial propaganda.¹⁶⁵ Unlike Khatijah and Boestamam’s struggles in the mainstream of

¹⁶⁴ For introduction on the topic see Schmid, H. (1981) “On the Origin of Ideology”.

¹⁶⁵ This can be illustrated by a statement made by David Rees-Williams, an Undersecretary for the Colonies, in regards to crimes and violence perpetrated by the communists in Malaya. He was quoted as saying “the recrudescence of crimes and lawlessness has brought Malaya violence, defiance, murder

anti-colonial politics, Shamsiah had the experience of fighting from the jungle-base. Her struggle from the jungle began only after the British repressive policy towards the left-wing activists started to threaten the anti-colonial front. She argued that the British triggered the armed struggle:

For those who were fighting for Independence (*Kemerdekaan*), there was no other method except by armed struggle to overthrow the colonialist when peaceful means were closed. It was not because of us (that the door was closed) but the British colonialist. All democratic associations and political parties were banned, and thousands of their members were arrested, imprisoned and locked-up in detention camps all over Malaya.

(Shamsiah, 59)¹⁶⁶

Her justification for participating in the communist movement was that it was the only avenue left to continue her struggle for *merdeka*. She tried to persuade the reader of the ‘fact’ that the Communist Party of Malaya (PKM) “was the only party that was willing to lead the armed rebellion in the enduring struggle to fight the British imperialist” (Shamsiah, 61). But to draw attention to the communist cause for freedom was not enough. Shamsiah realised that she had to engage with the common perception about the “communist terrorist”. She asked:

Who was the terrorist? The British accused the fighters (*pejuang*) who went into the jungle and carried arms of being ‘communist terrorists’ (*pengganas komunis*). That was the tactic of the colonialist to defame the names of our Independence fighters who were fighting bravely against the strength of the colonial troops.

(Shamsiah, 62)

Since the communist movement was the only group who fought for the country’s freedom during the Emergency, Shamsiah argued that it was warranted for the communists to be labelled as fighters (*pejuang*) not as terrorists (*pengganas*). At this moment, she appealed to ideological reasoning founded on a universal cause for

and intimidation. In recent weeks there have been at least 13 serious incidents, including 10 murders and three attacks on European managers or estates” (*The Malay Mail*, 12 June 1948).

¹⁶⁶ Reference to the memoirs is summarised by indicating the name and page number.

individual and national freedom. Such appeal, according to her, did win support from the people at the time. “The people”, she wrote, “had continued to resort to various means and ways to provide food and support to our armies despite being restricted by the British in such mean manner” (Shamsiah, 63).¹⁶⁷

Using the universal concept of freedom, Shamsiah had not only justified the communist struggle as legitimate but also had discredited British colonialism. She wrote that, “It was actually the British who were the real terrorists (*benar-benar pengganas*). They burned the people’s houses and the armies had raped lots of our Malay girls in the villages” (Shamsiah, 62). However, Shamsiah was aware that she could not escape from the fact of the communists’ complicity in the armed violence. When she had to explain the excess committed by the communists, the universal argument was substituted with a realist one. She stated that:

In war, whether it is fair or not, killings and bloodshed (*pertumpahan darah*) are difficult to avoid. Anyone who stood armed at the side of the colonialist would surely receive their due – it was their fault to stand alongside the colonialist. (Shamsiah, 62)

This shows the autobiographer’s selective interpretation in which the standard of human right applied to discredit British colonialism was not used to explain the communist violence. The act of violence, either from the British or communist perspective, was difficult to justify. Thus, the only choice for Shamsiah was either to silence the communist violence, or, to confront it in her own terms. The latter course was taken by the autobiographer.

It is apparent that in the case of Shamsiah’s narrative, the autobiographer appealed to libertarian ideology as a strategic reversal. But the use of rhetorical device to criticise colonialism is not the only recourse. There was an instance when the reader was presented with a historical reading of ideology. She presented two contexts to explain the concept of ‘freedom’. The first context refers to the British refusal to grant

¹⁶⁷ She refers to the resettlement plan known as the New Village which was a British plan to isolate the people from the communists. The village was surrounded by high-towered barbed wire, guarded by security forces, and had to adhere to a curfew and rationing in order to limit the people’s capacity for communicating with and assisting the communists.

freedom for Malaya since they were in a powerful position to ignore the demand. The British were not only in control of the situation (“there was no other method except by armed rebellion”); they were also in control of the propaganda machinery. The second context when ‘freedom’ was referred to was in the post-colonial era. The term ‘freedom’ here was used to question the validity of the state’s account of communist violence. Shamsiah argued that the state’s refusal to acknowledge the role of the communists in the independence struggle was a proof of continuing colonial influence, as she elaborated:

According to one of the sources involved in the war in Pahang state, there were about 1000 men and women fighters killed in the war against British colonialism. This number did not include those who had fought in other states. It was clear that their blood was shed for the nation’s freedom. They had made a huge sacrifice (*berjasa besar*), which must surely be remembered and appreciated for a long time. UMNO prides itself on fighting a bloodless struggle for independence. This is of course, a hundred percent not true. What we have is a National Monument that celebrates government victory in fighting against the communist. It is not a monument to celebrate a victory over the colonialist. (Shamsiah, 87)

She noted that the colonial and the post-colonial discourse of independence shared similar attitudes in their rejection of communist struggle. But what motivated the continuation of propaganda, and whose interest does it serve now? On this account one can read the political realism exercised by the autobiographer. She was aware that the definition of her struggle was subjected to political authorisation. UMNO, in its authority as the ruling party, presented itself as the legitimate independence fighter. In order to contest the UMNO version, which she described as “hundred percent not true”, she drew upon the example of the National Monument. The Monument was constructed by the state to immortalise into public memory the heroism of soldiers who fought against the communist violence. However, Shamsiah challenged the notion of violence by interpreting it as an evidence of the state’s cooperation with the colonialists. It can be argued that this illustrated the unequal access to representation that presented the state-version in a stronger and authoritative status that others did not possess.

In the previous memoirs, both Boestamam and Shamsiah presented themselves as fighting outside the dominant culture. There was a boundary between radicalised youth and the feudal-colonialist factions and also between the imperialist British and the communist guerrilla. In each of the constructed spaces different ideology was expressed and presumably unshared by those external to the group. Khatijah's memoir provided a different perspective from those previously discussed. Although she was an Indonesian immigrant, she identified herself as a Malay who, similar to the rest of her brethren in Malaya, dreamed of independence. Although she was not a *bangsawan* (aristocrat) she believed she could make a change in a staunchly feudalistic party, UMNO. Next, criticism of culture from the perspective of an 'insider' is discussed.

When Khatijah first arrived in Singapore/ Malaya in June 1946, she noted that, as in Indonesia, the social landscape of Malaya was intensely political. As part of a delegation known as the Association of Indonesian/Malaysian Labour (Perkabim), Khatijah toured around the peninsula to meet with other social and political associations. She had the opportunity to meet with two of the main political bodies at the time, namely UMNO and the MNP. The direction of political movement was somehow ambiguous. Khatijah noted the irony of the main political body at the time, UMNO, preferred to adopt a chant *Hidup Melayu* (Long Live Malay) instead of *Merdeka* (Freedom). She asked, "what about the other races – the Chinese and the Indians – were they not to be part of the struggle (for freedom)?" "In Indonesia", she continued, "they had a slogan *Merdeka* and this is for all races" (Khatijah, 81).

Although Khatijah was critical of the party's hesitation to fight for immediate independence, she attributed this to the social reality that hindered the effort. As a consequence of an earlier British and later, Japanese policy, the Malays and the Chinese were politically, economically and socially segregated. As a result, there was a mutual feeling of suspicion and distrust between them, which developed into full-blown confrontation in the aftermath of the Japanese withdrawal. She wrote, "In Malaya, they (the Chinese) were proud and arrogant, and have always accused us of being lazy and other sorts". Furthermore, Khatijah has also described the Chinese as "oppressors" who had enjoyed better lives because they have "worked in better occupations" both in the towns and villages. Her sympathy with the plight of Malays was without doubt natural, owing to the common background. However, by

explaining the inter-racial antagonism during the period, it appears that Khatijah was persuading readers of the post-independence generation on two aspects. Firstly, about the colonial root that enabled the triumph of feudal leadership. She tolerated the feudal leadership because she believed that they had been helping the Malay. She wrote, “I am explaining this now so that people can understand why we revered and respected Onn Jaafar. We know that he was fighting for all of us” (Khatijah, 127).

Her description of colonial society was also used to explain the complication that undermined the growth of inclusivist nationalism pivotal for *merdeka* (freedom). The antagonism between the communal groups had a complex historical origin. Khatijah clearly realised this when she tried to comprehend the attitude towards *merdeka*. This lack of unity undermined the effort for independence and ultimately stabilised the colonial position in the country. There was sense of regret that in spite of her belief in a united Malaya of all races as the essential first step towards *merdeka*, she could not ignore the reality that had imposed limits for such an aim. To this effect, she wrote “since we were seeing more of the Chinese than the British, our feelings of dissatisfaction towards the Chinese sometimes were stronger than towards the colonial power....” (Khatijah, 126)

Her narrative on society changed its form when she began to describe her forays into UMNO in 1953. If previously her attitude towards traditional leadership was described with measured support, she assumed a critical language when describing her involvement in UMNO. The term “feudal” was used to explain the values and practice of UMNO leadership. This can be seen in description such as:

They believed that leaders must have the title *Tengku* or *Datin*.¹⁶⁸ When the (UMNO) meeting resumed, the VIP ladies sat on a specially designated place while the others sat on chairs behind them or on a mat below them.

(Khatijah, 129)

The feudal culture within UMNO was believed to be a hindrance for the progress towards *merdeka*. Nevertheless, she was convinced that such attitudes could be

¹⁶⁸ This refers to designated namesake for aristocrats and nobility.

changed. There were two strategies adopted for this purpose. Firstly, through her appeal to *rakyat* (common people) which was expressed in her statement that “my struggle is among the people” (Khatijah, 129). In her capacity as an information chief for UMNO’s women’s section (*Kaum Ibu*), Khatijah toured around the country educating women on political and social issues. As UMNO was widely seen as a party of the elite, her entourage was often received with elaborate feasting and celebration. Khatijah changed the norm. She wrote, “In places where I had been to, I told the villagers not to prepare a feast for me. I did not want them to slaughter chicken for my sake since they were too expensive for the poor”. Furthermore, she used her position to propagate awareness about *merdeka* among women. It was noticeable that the earlier reluctance that characterised the attitude towards *merdeka* persisted into the middle 1950s. This again invited a contrast with Indonesia. Khatijah recalled her past experience in Indonesia:

The leaders (in Malaya) were not forthcoming or direct like (those in) Indonesia. They only wanted independence gradually and gracefully, and maybe perhaps, they did not really want (*bukan benar-benar mahu*) *merdeka* in full. (Khatijah, 141)

Khatijah believed that *merdeka* was both an ideological and a practical struggle. In terms of ideology, she realised it was important to address the people’s fear about using the word. For the *rakyat* the word *merdeka* means opposition to colonial authority and that was something not readily reflected upon. Khatijah recalled what was said to her about *merdeka*:

If the colonial government left, maybe we would be starving here. What the Malay could do? The Malay could not even make a needle. To buy a needle we must get from outside. If the British left, we would not even have a needle. (Khatijah, 134)

The fear was compounded by UMNO’s hesitation to use the term. UMNO’s president Tunku Abdul Rahman advised Khatijah “not to use the word *merdeka* outspokenly” (*berapi- api*), an advice that she ignored. Thus, she described some of the ways to inculcate the spirit of *merdeka*. She advised mothers to teach their children to chant

merdeka before they went to school and to greet their friends with *merdeka* (Khatijah, 141). She also tried to convince people in her speeches that *merdeka* is a natural attribute from God. She recalled one of her speeches about *merdeka*:

The word (*merdeka*) is a gift for us from God: in it was God's strength. Therefore, we do not have to be scared to fight for *merdeka* because God is with us. This strength will grow from time to time just like a baby grows into a child. (Khatijah, 134)

Another attempt to change the feudal culture within UMNO was through a leadership contest. She agreed to contest for the post of the chief of the Women's Section (*Kaum Ibu*), a position that was normally held by someone from an elite background. Another contender for the post (who later withdrew) was Halimahton Majid¹⁶⁹, described by Khatijah as someone who "boasted like an intellectual" and who was often "lying on the beach wearing shorts" (Khatijah, 142). The two candidates hailed from two opposite classes. Khatijah was an Indonesian immigrant who lived on the second floor of her husband's clinic while Halimahton was an English-educated lady whose husband was a District Officer. Khatijah represented her success in the party's election as a triumph of the common class in a staunchly feudalistic party.

The two strategies to bring change into the party were described by Khatijah as successful. Her strategy to represent people's struggle managed to attract more support from the *rakyat*. She wrote, "They have never met a female leader like myself who was willing to meet them, talk to them like equals (*sama darjat*) ... have a meal with them and who cared about their children" (Khatijah, 137). As result of her campaigns, in ten months, the membership of the women's section rose to 10,000 and 130 branches had opened. She interpreted her success as an evidence of women's achievement against men. She stated, "Who among men has a better record than what I have done as a woman?" (Khatijah, 148)

Khatijah's account demonstrates an individual attempt to bring about change in a society that was dominated by feudal values. When Khatijah was released from prison

¹⁶⁹ Halimahton Majid was the head of *Kaum Ibu* branch of Negeri Sembilan, and in 1955, became the first woman who contested and later won the federal election in 1955.

in 1950, the only political party operating was UMNO. Clearly, Khatijah's supported UMNO's struggle because she believed UMNO had genuinely worked for the interest of the *rakyat*. It has to be pointed out that such belief was also widely held by the large section of *rakyat* that preferred UMNO and its brand of exclusive nationalism as opposed to the progressive nationalism spearheaded by the radical MNP. However, Khatijah's personal involvement in the anti-colonial movement in Indonesia influenced her thinking into an action-oriented approach. Her suspicion of feudal values and her vocal campaigns for *merdeka* were not uncommon in Indonesia. This shows that social reality did have an impact on the autobiographer's perception of society and the way she related to it.

In the three memoirs discussed, different strategies of constructing culture are observed. The autobiographers shared similar awareness of the oppressive role of colonialism and feudalism. But what made these individuals oppose the existence of oppression, while other social subjects, presumably, were 'unaware' of the fact? If I can briefly recapitulate: one of the arguments developed in *Orientalism* is that the western discourse of the orient was powerful, all-embracing and made the orient *appear* silent. But the memoirs discussed represent the experience of those marginalised as 'radicals' and the picture of how a subject became politicised. It is thus possible to interpret the source of Boestamam's radical nationalism which hailed from Indonesian revolution, while Shamsiah was exposed to Chinese socialism through her association with communism, and Khatijah's experience during the war of independence in Indonesia shaped her thought and action. From these, *cultures* of resistance consisted of various influences, actors and narrations.

5.3 Agency and Identity

The notion of agency has been interpreted in various ways.¹⁷⁰ In literature of liberalism, agency is associated with the element of free will and rationality. For Marxists, agency is limited by economic determinism. For neo-Marxists like Althusser (2008), agency is a product of ideology, which functions to 'recruit' or 'transforms' "the individuals into subjects" (2008, 48). Parallel to the idea of agency

¹⁷⁰ For introduction to the topic see Fuchs, S. (2001) "Beyond Agency".

is the question of identity, and whether it is produced by conscious choice or unconscious submission.

In their study-from-below approach, post-colonial scholars argue that identity, especially of the subalterns, is an “effect of power relations and expressed through a variety of means- linguistic, economic, social and cultural” (Prakash 1990, 400). By arguing that subalternity is an effect of power, agency and identity is thought of as relational to the social and political world. This is further discussed in a separate work by Stuart Hall (1990). The formation of identity, according to Hall, is subjected to the continuous play of history, culture and power” (1990, 225). In relation to the memoirs under study, the presentation of identity is made through the experience and the memory of the past. Following Hall’s formulation, this would imply two aspects of identity. Firstly, it reflects the autobiographer’s choice of positioning her/himself in a specific context. Secondly, by positioning oneself in a particular history “marked with western colonial dominance”, an autobiographer is inevitably drawn into “subjective conformation to the norm” (1990, 226). This view claims that identity is ultimately an interactive, albeit, unequal process that involved authorities and subjects in shifting power relations.

The issue of agency has important implications for studying resistance. Sherry Ortner (1995) criticised the way the term subaltern has been treated by post-colonialists like Spivak and Guha. By “dissolving the subject entirely into a set of ‘subject effects’ that have virtually no coherence”, the subaltern’s internal politics and culture is left untreated (1995, 183). Consequently, there was too much emphasis on the role of power and control exercised by the dominant group in the studies of resistance (1995, 176).

The inadequacy of archival research in addressing internal politics of subalterns can be addressed by autobiographical method, in particular, the aspect of identity as self-construction. Autobiography reveals the politics that underlined the making of identity and agency. Smith & Watson (2001), in their study of autobiography, have demonstrated that subjects had actually used the imposed identity “to assert their cultural difference and subjectivity” (2001, 45). But to see identity as simply ‘imposed’ ignored the way an autobiographer “is an active agent in the biographical

process” (Stanley 199, 9). From these views, one can suggest that autobiography provides an insight into the way identities are made and remade. The politics of radical identity in the memoirs will be analysed next. The focus is two-fold. Firstly, it asks the extent to which a subject is attached to a given identity; secondly, the extent to which such identity becomes the source of repression or empowerment for the autobiographical subject.

Khatijah described herself in various roles. The emphasis was made through attaching prominence to her action that was considered ‘different’. She described her roles as a brave student (*gadis berani*), as a young woman involved in Indonesian revolution, a political prisoner and a leader of the woman’s section of UMNO (see 4.2.2 and 4.2.3). In the first chapter, she gave an early impression about her entry into politics. When she was 15, her secondary education was cut short after she was expelled from school due to her participation in a student body known as Indonesian Youth (*Indonesia Muda*). This was because the school authority was concerned that the body might promote political agitation among students. Her narrative in regards to her defiance towards colonial authority continues in chapters two and three. She described her involvement in the struggle for Indonesian independence from the Dutch. She co-founded an all-woman volunteer resistance army known as *Puteri Kesateria* that consisted mostly of poor, unemployed and rural-based youth. *Kesateria* (lit. fighter) was well received by other political and paramilitary groups which supported women’s participation in armed struggle. However, the religious section of the community was opposed to the movement because *Kesateria* adopted a masculine-styled military uniform. The argument presented by the *imams* was that it was against Islam for women to wear men’s attire. Khatijah counter-argued the *imams* by drawing another religious position:

In religion, one who fought (*berjihad*) to defend religion from an enemy, if s/he dies in struggle, would proceed directly to heaven. However, not even one of these religious leaders had fought to defend the honour of women or our religion’s good name. And I said, ‘if there was any one (of the *imams*) who had done it, I would write a book about him with a pen in a gold tinted (ink) and I would build a warrior monument for him’. (Khatijah, 70)

Khatijah defiance has to be contextualised in the historical scene of social revolution¹⁷¹ in Indonesia. The conservative groups such as the aristocrats and the *imams* were considered anti-populist by serving the interest of the colonial Dutch. The spirit of revolution possibly influenced Khatijah, and the *imams*' opposition to the female fighters, which she helped to form, increased her awareness of the prejudice against women in the hands of conservatives. Her early acts of defiance were symptomatic of the political landscape of nationalism and social unrest not only in Indonesia but also in colonies like Malaya and India during the final stages of the war. This pointed to the importance of social reality in the formulation of an individual's action and thought. Although I do agree with Spivak that a subaltern cannot speak outside the discursive language of power (see 2.6.3), coercion and control are not the only concepts available in social text. The role of emancipatory ideals such as freedom and equality has become important in the articulation of the discourse of anti-colonialism in Malaya. The formulation of identity as a strategy for emancipation will be discussed next.

In Shamsiah's memoir, the notion of time and place is important for her identity-construction as a 'communist'. Before the Emergency declaration in 1948, Shamsiah described herself as a leader of a political party, AWAS, who fought for female emancipation. During the Emergency, she was forced to flee into the jungle to continue her struggle for independence as a communist guerrilla. She wrote, "From *baju kurung* and *batik*¹⁷², I went into the jungle and changed into military trousers and shirt" (Shamsiah, 56). It is apparent that her shift of identity from a non-communist to a communist member was contextual. Since the left-wing nationalists were brought down by the regulation, the only option left was either to join the communists to continue their fight for the country's freedom, or to retire from the scene. Thus, Shamsiah tried to maintain her identity as an independence fighter (*pejuang kemerdekaan*) by joining the communist armed struggle. This means she tried to present her struggle as continuous despite the shifting ideological allegiance. However, it soon appeared that her identity as a communist could not be easily discarded by choice.

¹⁷¹ For literature on social revolution of 1945 see Soejatno (1974) "Revolutions and Social Tensions in Surakarta" and Anton Lucas (1977) "Social Revolution in Pematang, Central Java".

¹⁷² *Baju kurung* is traditional Malay long dress wear by women, while *batik* is a piece of decorated cloth worn by both men and women, and can be sewn into a dress or shirt.

After Shamsiah and her husband Ibrahim went abroad in the middle of 1956, they were sacked by the communist party for disciplinary offences.¹⁷³ Although officially, she was no longer a member of the communist party, she was still considered a communist by the Malaysian government. Since the communist party was made illegal under the law, her status as a legitimate citizen was denied. Her family of five lived in exile in China. She described her feeling of being an exile in a foreign land:

We were categorised as people without state. On our identity cards, we were categorised as foreign immigrants. We felt really disgusted and discontented when we were labelled as stateless. (Shamsiah, 128)

At this moment, her identity as a communist became a liability. Her anti-colonial struggle within the communist movement had shifted into a struggle to contest her naming as a communist. She insisted, “Since I had left the communist party this meant that we were no longer fighting against the Government” (Shamsiah, 121). Her request to return home was denied because of her previous affiliation. The only option left was to surrender in exchange for permission to return. There was a tension between her insistence that she was no longer a communist, officially, and the fixing of her identity by the state. Her choice not to surrender reflected a personal attachment to her identity as a communist although she tried to distance herself from the labelling:

As a fighter who fought for the cause of freedom from British imperialism, we must maintain our vows and determination. That was why we did not surrender to the coloniser. But we found no reason to surrender to the Malaysian government because we have nothing against them.

(Shamsiah, 121)

Although her identity as communist cannot be eradicated, the impression associated with the identity has changed overtime. She explained that her return was possible, above all, because of the changing attitude and policy of the government and the

¹⁷³ Shamsiah and her husband were sacked from the communist party for allegedly participating in the military power struggle in Indonesia in the mid-60s. Therefore, she could not return to Malaysia because she was considered an enemy of the communist party as well as the state.

people. She wrote, “Malaysia has now really distanced itself from the pro-west policy and become a country which developed economically and asserts its anti-colonialism” (Shamsiah, 125). Furthermore, she noted that her homecoming was well received by a large section of police and army veterans who had fought in the war against the communists. Shamsiah described her encounter with one of the military captains:

He gave me a silver coin as a token of his amazement at the unwavering spirit and determination of an old Malay woman in deteriorating health (*wanita Melayu yang sudah tua dan uzur*) who spent her years living in exile, and not because she was a communist. (Shamsiah, 131)

Shamsiah’s image as a notorious communist in-exile was scaled down to an “old woman”. Formerly condemned, she became a subject of curiosity. Some army personnel even asked for her advice on invulnerability which she considered as “a very ridiculous” (*karut semata-mata*) claim. At this point, she noted that her image was largely derived from social myth. She wrote, “there were various stories that claimed I had cruelly shot soldiers, killing people here and there, (I was) claimed to be impenetrable by bullet and can disappear into thin air. This was very superstitious!” (Shamsiah, 132)

Shamsiah’s memoir provides a contrast to the enduring status of ‘subaltern’. The permission granted for her return did not eradicate her status as a communist. But the process involved such as her persistent effort at filing applications, publicity generated for and against her return (see 4.3.1) and the end of the Cold War demonstrated the various factors involved in the re-making and un-making of identity that cannot simply be reduced to hegemony. This fact was expressed in the introduction of Shamsiah’s memoir where she wrote, “the status of an enemy is not an absolute term but is changing according to situation, time and place” (Shamsiah, 13).

A more complex reading of agency is found in Boestamam’s memoir. His narrative was limited to the colonial period, but his depictions of life-experience in various settings helps to offer multiple pictures of identity-construction. In his memoir, his credential as a radical activist is central to the narrative. It becomes the assertion of

his importance, historically and textually. This can be seen in several places where he pointed out his primary role:

- During the Malay Congress where he “was given the honour” to announce the MNP split from UMNO which he accepted “with pride and responsibility”.
- When he was arrested for sedition, but later chosen to pay fines instead of going to prison. He could not afford to be jailed at that stage because his “energy was still much needed outside to organise API’s struggle into the strongest and impregnable front” (*sekuat-kuat dan sekukuh-kukuhnya*).
- When he was arrested under the Emergency Ordinance in 1 July 1948. His arrest, along with other radical activists, “had terminated all of the left-wing bodies in the country at the time”. (Boestamam, 179 & 249)

These were some of the events depicted by Boestamam that testified to his commitment and calibre as a radical activist. The non-compromise position on anti-colonialism became the distinguishing factor that singled out the radical from the mainstream. The term ‘radical’ thus signifies a commitment towards freedom from oppressive colonial structure and mentality. This notwithstanding, it could be argued that there were glimpses of doubt when the autobiographer was forced to compromise his political position in order to survive the conditions of oppression.

The first of these was during the Japanese occupation (1941-‘45). Prior to the invasion, he was imprisoned in Changi Prison for his involvement in the KMM. “At this time”, he wrote, “I was always hoped, even prayed for Japanese success in occupying Malaya including Singapore at the soonest possible” (Boestamam, 42). It is tempting to dismiss this statement as a reflection of frustration and immaturity in politics (bear in mind that he was still in his teenage years). However, his involvement in the Japanese administration upon his release may raise doubts about whether his anti-colonialism was directed only towards the British. He began to work in a Japanese-sponsored press, *Berita Perak* (Perak News), only to quit later for a “far better paid job”. His post as a Censorship Officer saw his influence grow. He was responsible for making sure that the scripts in Malay opera (*bangsawan*) and newspapers did not contain criticism towards the Japanese regime. He had the

authority to ban any show or press that did not comply with the rule. About his new responsibility, he stated, “My heart must be pleased, if not I would use my authority” (Boestamam, 63). Recent historians have viewed Boestamam and other radical nationalists’ pro-Japanese alliance as inconsistent with their persistent pledge of anti-colonialism. A historian argued:

He (Ibrahim Yaacob)¹⁷⁴ conceded to the Japanese wish to ban the Young Malay Nationalist Party (KMM) and in return, he was offered a good position. He began to abandon his radical position adopted against the British rule. Instead he compromised his position and became a pro-Japanese ally. In this respect, Ibrahim was no different from traditional elites during British colonialism before and after the war. (Ramlah 2004, 41-42)

Boestamam’s memoir can be read as an attempt to deal with the perception of selective compromise. Having described his affiliation with the new regime, he realised that he needed to convince the reader that his action did not diminish his anti-colonial credential. He recalled an incident during military training when in his speech, he exhorted the trainees to “relive our nationalist spirit and not just make ourselves a Japanese imitation” (Boestamam, 78). Furthermore, he also became directly involved in an underground anti-Japanese movement known as the Left-Wing Homeland Movement (KITA). His dual-role as a Japanese administrator and an anti-Japanese activist was rationalised as a “prudent” (*sebijak-bijaknya*) political strategy. Alongside this, he also admitted that not only did he live relatively well, his personal security remained assured since he was not seen as a threat either by the regime or the underground guerrillas.

Another incident where the autobiographer’s commitment was put under test can be seen after API was banned. As result of the ban, Boestamam and his other colleagues found themselves in difficult conditions. The money earned from political campaigns and donations was no longer available. Life became difficult to the extent that Boestamam could no longer pay for his food and he was forced to sell a gold ring given by his mother. In the midst of this difficulty, he described an episode where he

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter 4, footnote 12.

was invited to become a British Agent. Mr C.H. Fenner, a British senior policeman, put the offer to him. The task required him to report the activity of his friends in the left-wing movement. He would be paid \$1000 a week and would be given a car and a house should he agree to work with the administration. Boestamam described his dilemma between earning a “luxurious income” and “betraying his friends-in-struggle” (*kawan-kawan seperjuangan*). Although he found the offer “very tempting” (*sungguh- sungguh menggiurkan*) he did not respond immediately. Instead, he simply asked “for more time to think about it” (Boestamam, 243). He finally made a choice not to accept the offer. But the reason given for the refusal was devoid of political rhetoric of anti- British feeling. Instead, a personal commitment “not to betray my friends-in-struggle” was used to justify his refusal (Boestamam, 244). At certain moments there were external interruptions that inhibited the autobiographer from maintaining his anti-colonial façade. These examples certainly did not diminish the representation of Boestamam as an ardent nationalist. But they provide occasions for glimpses of doubt and uncertainty in a narrative of a political activist.

The previous discussion highlights the various factors interacting in the making of identity. Identities such as a radical, a communist and a nationalist are products of history and (colonial) power which provided contexts for their articulation and imagination. Therefore, the study of identity in autobiographies provides an account of the politics that produced certain identities in certain context, as well as autobiographers’ attempts to transform identity from a type of imposition into a type of negotiation.

5.4 Gender and Power

When Valerie Kennedy (2000) argues, “Said constantly raises and then disappoints any expectation that he will pay attention to gender”, she was echoing other similar criticisms of the neglected aspect of gender in *Orientalism* (Miller 1990; Ahmad 1991; Yegenoglu 1998). But the book was not completely silent on woman: the symbolic manipulation of woman was emphasised in several places (e.g. p. 118, p. 170, pp. 186 –190). The powerful west asserted a masculine outlook while the weaker orient was expressed in the language associated with femininity, sensuality and degeneracy. The main point that Said perhaps overlooks, or undermines, according to

the critics, is the role of gender in defining, structuring and maintaining power relations. It is this aspect that I try to develop here, which, I argue, can enrich understanding of women and men as subjects of colonial domination as well as enhancing the methodological and moral implication of *Orientalism*. First, a brief note on gender.

The theorisation of gender as a critical category begins with a scholarship that argues against the notion of “separate sphere”. The concept of ‘public’ and ‘private’ sphere is synonymous with 19th century liberal political, legal and economic thought. It was assumed that social organisation is arranged around binary opposition, say, between public and personal interest, rationality and sentiment, state and household, and masculine and feminine. The principle of binarism was used to structure social, political and economic relations, thus it presupposed objective existence (Gal 2004, 261).

Such social arrangement was, by all means, ideological. Joan Scott (1996) argues that references based on binarism, in particular, the male and female distinction, have been used as a way to rationalise power. The struggle for women’s political, social and economic equality in Muslim countries for example, is always frustrated by personal codes of law (*shariah*) that views women as “wards of men and their families” which consequently, seemed to be interpreted that the interests of women were subordinated to those of men and families (Mojab 2001, 140). The application of the binary principle in family codes permeate into every sphere of life, deepening the inequality existed between man and woman. Since gender cannot operate outside a specific socio-political context, Scott suggests that the study of gender must relate to “a range of activities, social organisations and cultural representations” (Scott 1996, 170).

The function of gender in reproducing power relations in the historical context of colonialism will be discussed next. In particular, I will examine the way gender identities are constructed in the memoirs, and relate them to discourse of anti-colonialism.

The representations of colonial society as feudal and conservative (*kolot*) provided a preliminary ground for talking about gender. A term generally used to describe gender

oppression in society is 'patriarchy'. Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a "system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990, 21). The structures of oppression existed at various levels of economy, politics, household and cultural institutions. The sites of oppressions are further divided into private and public spheres. In the former, the strategy of oppression was based on exclusion while the latter was based on segregation. Following Walby, the concept of patriarchy will be used here to denote political and social practices that structure gender relations through segregation and exclusion. Although the practices often derive from cultural inheritance, in reality, they were motivated by power survival.

In Shamsiah's and Khatijah's memoirs, category of gender contained both personal and political meanings. Shamsiah's initial exposure to politics was explained in Chapter 5 "Entering into political foray" (*Mencebur diri dalam perjuangan*). In the aftermath of Japanese occupation, various political groups emerged such as the radical Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) and UMNO. She attended political speeches from both groups which consequently spurred her interest in the national movement (*gerakan kebangsaan*). Although she identified the episode as the beginning of her awareness in politics, she has alluded to other factors that might also have contributed. "Possibly", she wrote, "(because) of the influence of nationalism when I studied in *Madrasatul Tuddimiah* in Sumatera" (Shamsiah, 30). In other places, she attributed her political awareness to her experiences of marriage.

Her parents arranged her first marriage when she was 16. She was married to one of her school friends, Yasin Kina, when they were both students at *Madrasah Aliyah Islamiyah*. No reason was given for the marriage, other than a normal expectation "for a girl to obey her parent and teacher at the time" (Shamsiah, 19). However, the marriage ended three years later when she was eight months pregnant with her second child. The manner of divorce was upsetting. Yasin dispatched a letter to Shamsiah's father and left "with no words spoken". This manner, according to Shamsiah, "was not a proper way for a man who is full of Islamic knowledge that is pure". This bitter experience informed her of "man's oppression (*penindasan*) towards woman", and awakened her to the appalling condition of women as she stated:

I did not know if this was perpetuated by man or was it the fate of woman to have to accept oppression by man? Perhaps because of this deep impact that became the basis for my future struggle. (Shamsiah, 21)

Her second marriage cemented her thinking on male oppression. The encounter with her would-be husband Rusdi began when she received leaflets delivered to her house. The leaflets contained Japanese political propaganda which she simply ignored because she was “still blind in politics” (*buta politik*). Despite that, she was drawn to the writer of the leaflet and sent a letter asking for his name. From then, they became friends and later got married. Shamsiah emphasised the marriage was agreed by her parents and “also with my consent” (Shamsiah, 25). Despite the marriage not being forced upon her, it ended abruptly. After five months, Rusdi informed her and her parents of his intention for divorce. The reason given to Shamsiah was “the marriage has finished” (*jodoh sudah habis*).

These two bitter experiences had alerted Shamsiah to the position of women under the politico-cultural system. However, the influence of her personal experience was often downplayed by her intention to project an extrovert image as a political activist. Thus, her incursion into the left-wing MNP was attributed to the attraction of their struggle for *merdeka* (freedom). She toured around the villages to spread the word of *merdeka* and delivered political speeches. She pointed out that her rhetorical skill drew many people into the party. This skill enabled her to assume the position of chief of the women’s section in the party known as the Women’s Progressive Corp (AWAS). She asserted her authority not only as a female politician, but “the first progressive woman in the land who was bravely fighting against the coloniser” (Shamsiah, 37). She was anxious not to be read as self-righteous and so she provided a reference from a newspaper *Utusan Melayu*. She later remarked, “(based on the report of the press) from that day, my name became famous as the leader of a progressive women’s association. Nobody can deny this fact” (Shamsiah, 39).

In her reflection of her historic role as a ‘progressive’ female leader, the emphasis was on her political ahead of her personal experience. This can be seen in the passage taken from her memoir:

My awareness of the national struggle for the pursuit of Independence (*kemerdekaan*) has also awakened me to the fact of women's oppression. There was no struggle for men's freedom, other than a struggle for the freedom of women. In reality, women have suffered from the oppression of feudalism, capitalism and imperialism. Women were also oppressed by men, by conservative cultural practices (*adat resam kuno*), bound by religious rules, and so forth. I was myself a victim of man's authority when I was divorced for no reason or any wrongdoing. (Shamsiah, 44)

In this passage, Shamsiah explained the meaning of *merdeka* for women's emancipation. Political campaigns for *merdeka* had raised awareness of political and social oppression that existed *because* of colonialism. For that reason, she believed that "national independence was the first step towards woman's emancipation" (Shamsiah, 45). Her argument was built primarily on political knowledge, while her personal experience was presented as secondary. She was conscious not to be read as too personal in her claim. This could be a strategy, as the "Introduction" stated, "to explain the extent of the truth (as reported) in the news and stories" (Shamsiah, 12). Due to this, Shamsiah wanted her memoir to be read as a reliable source that could challenge the conventional version of 'truth'. This is not to claim that her narrative was disguised as impersonal. Rather, when an opportunity arises to present a side of the story that has wider ideological appeal (*viz.* female emancipation), the use of political argument over personal is a more effective strategy to achieve the effect of 'truth'.

However, the autobiographer's attempt at drawing a boundary between her political involvement and personal experience cannot be reduced to merely rhetorical. It can be interpreted as an expression of cultural and religious authority that appropriated gender dichotomy for social and political order. The ease with which her husbands, Yasin and Rusdi, divorced her illustrated the weakness in the feudal system when it came to women's welfare. But what ultimately was a structural inequality (supported by cultural practice) led Shamsiah to wonder whether it was "the fate of women". At this point, the argument that gender identities construct power comes to light. Scott pointed out that in order to conceive gender as a category of power, the cultural symbols used to signify gender identities must also be studied (Scott 1996, 170).

Shamsiah's consent to marry at her parent's instruction because it was an appropriate response for a "good daughter" illustrates the cultural practice that endorsed her early marriages, and her husbands' right to divorce without prior consultation, as acceptable.

If Shamsiah's memoir seems to repeat the cultural prescription that supports patriarchal practice, Khatijah's narrative provides a potentially different reading of public/private oppression. Sylvia Walby's concept of patriarchy is premised on perpetual oppression that permeates the public and private sphere in gender relations. In Khatijah's memoir, it will be demonstrated that the crossing-in between public and private spheres were not as fluid and automatic as often thought.

Khatijah's narrative placed considerable premium on her personal experience to buttress her political and personal claims for liberation. As part of the expectation that came with her political responsibility, a role of a wife and a mother needs to be inserted. She wrote, "When I was a president for HIMWIM, there were never-ending calls from the elders and my families who urged me to get married. I was advised to marry so that I would be taken care of and my safety would be assured" (Khatijah, 92). Despite knowing her future husband was still in a marriage, she agreed to accept his proposal. Khatijah admitted that in principle she was "in complete opposition to polygamy", but stated that the marriage could provide her with some knowledge of women, "at least I could now understand their hardship, and I could try to help them" (Khatijah, 103). Therefore, she agreed to enter into a polygamous relationship only on a condition that "he must give his permission to go wherever I have to go; I must be given the freedom (of access) in order to uplift and organise the women in Malaya for independence struggle" (Khatijah, 94).

Her optimism towards marriage as 'the' condition for pursuing her political ambition was challenged on several occasions. Despite her pregnancy, her husband rarely visited her in prison nor did he reply to the letters sent to him. The first wife, referred as "elder wife" (*isteri tua*) in the narrative, seemed to exercise more control on her husband than Khatijah ever could. She stopped him from visiting Khatijah or providing her with financial support. Khatijah had also been treated badly by the elder wife's family. She was despised because she was seen as an intruder to the family and

because of her prison history. She was given names like a “servant” (*orang gaji*) and accused as “someone who only knows eating but not working” (Khatijah, 112). It was not clear what choices she had at the time, although the reader was informed of her determination to remain within the marriage. She wrote:

My mother had relentlessly written letters advising for my return. However, since my struggle for liberation (*pembebasan*) had not yet materialised, I always replied to my mother to pray to God to strengthen my struggle (*perjuangan*), because the struggle was not for myself only, but for all of us.
(Khatijah, 112)

Under the domestic repression, the narrative went on to envisage escape from the private sphere. Khatijah determined not to be dictated to by feudal patriarchy as evident in her experience of living in polygamous marriage. This was shown in an instance where she attempted to assert her ‘independence’ from her husband. Despite the fact that her husband was practising medicine and owned a clinic, he had on several times, refused to provide financial support. Khatijah claimed that this was because the elder wife had restrained him from doing so, although at other places in the narrative she seems to imply his own hesitation (see pages 112 and 113). After the bitter experience of living with the elder wife’s family, she decided to move into the husband’s clinic when she was pregnant with a second child. She wrote, “In the morning, I sat at the corner of the patient’s waiting room. At night, my daughter and I slept on a wooden platform, (that is) the place where patients were checked during the day” (Khatijah, 114). Her life at this point became more difficult. Her husband rarely came to the clinic after she moved in. Even when he came, “he would leave immediately after attending his patients”. Left alone and with no money, she decided to start a food stall nearby. She named it *Merdeka* (freedom), which she chose in order to challenge the people’s perception of the word that was treated with fear and suspicion. The new business opened up a different experience as she described:

Because of that (Indonesian cuisine), my business was quite successful, sometimes I earned \$20 to \$25 a day. I was busy from morning until midnight. All of my worries disappear: I have no time to grieve. I closed (the stall) at midnight, put my daughter in the push- trolley and we walked heading to No.

47 Jalan Ibrahim (the clinic). As soon as I reached the bed, I felt so tired and slept soundly. (Khatijah, 115)

As Khatijah's narrative enters the UMNO phase, her public life occupies the narration. Her political career was successful. She changed people's perception of *merdeka* and mobilised women's support into UMNO's fold (see 4.2.3). She also had to confront the inner-party challenge to her position as the chief of the women's section. When the section mooted a proposal for female candidates in the upcoming federal election in 1955, there was a strong objection from the male members. According to Khatijah:

Their reason (for objecting to the proposal) was that women were weak, (they) worked in the kitchen, and the time was not yet come for women to sit in the parliament because they should first be taught how to speak in public. (Khatijah, 148)

Although the proposal was dismissed, Khatijah continued to press for more reform in the party. During the campaign for the federal election of 1955, she demanded seat allocation for women in the State Council. The proposal was again dismissed, but Khatijah noted that this added to the reason why she was seen as a liability. The lack of support for women's progression was attributed to the feudal attitude within UMNO "who cannot accept a woman who would dare to speak to them" (Khatijah, 148). It was the party's feudal culture that she believed to be the source of constraint. After her sacking from UMNO in October 1956, her personal life resurfaced. She wrote, "I forgot to tell (readers) that my husband passed away in May 1956". The mention of her husband at this stage was not merely informative, but it triggered the earlier memory of hardship. After her expulsion she stated, "the financial difficulty was huge because apart from (supporting) my children and the girls, I have to pay the clinic's rent" (Khatijah, 159). Her husband's absence from the narrative was a deliberate strategy. It only arises after Khatijah describes to full extent the highlight of her political career as women's leader of UMNO. To include the news of her husband's demise during the highlight would have been interruptive to the narrative. It was the assertion of her self-importance that de-linked her public success from her personal life.

Khatijah constructed her public sphere as the space for imagining freedom from personal patriarchy. There was no denial that she encountered gender prejudice in her bid for women's political right in UMNO. But oppression in public life was unlike private, where she "felt alone with no one to talk to and no place to go" (Khatijah, 165). The inclusion of subjective interpretation of Khatijah's experience is consistent with the best feminist practice discussed earlier in Chapter 3. This is not to suggest that public patriarchy is tolerable for Khatijah. What important is the recognition that an individual's interpretation of power is political and emotional, objective and subjective. Two memoirs discussed previously demonstrate different ways and strategies of interpreting patriarchy, which exemplify, different ways oppressions were experienced by women. A representation of men's experience under the patriarchal system will be discussed next.

Boestamam's perception of women can be glanced in the early part of his memoir compilation. In 1940, when Boestamam and other political activists were arrested for their involvement in a political organisation called the Young Malay Union (KMM), also arrested among them were women. These women, known also as the 'night butterflies'¹⁷⁵ (*kupu-kupu malam*) had worked as informers for KMM and provided useful information in regards to security information obtained from their British clients. Boestamam praised the women efforts as "brave" and "heroic". This early impression, it can be argued, provided the basis of his support for the women's political party formed in 1947 known as Women Progressive Corp (AWAS).

The mention of his personal life was quite limited. Boestamam's marriage with Shamsiah Fakeh, who was the head of AWAS, was mentioned only briefly, although a small section of Shamsiah's memoir was spent for this purpose (see thesis section 4.3.2). At other places, their inclusion was made only when they were relevant for asserting his political authority. When he was first arrested, described as "an expensive price to pay for early activism", he recalled his father's support for him:

¹⁷⁵ A metaphor for prostitute.

You are arrested not because of stealing or murdering a person, but because of your being a man (*sifat kelakianmu*). You do not have to be ashamed. What is it there to be ashamed of? This is about being a real man (*anak jantan*).

(Boestamam, 47)

His father upheld Boestamam's arrest as an act of man fighting for his principals expressed within a patriarchal system of meaning: politics is a natural domain for men. This underlying masculinity was adhered to throughout the memoir, as noted by his demarcation between his family life and his political career. Although he did mention the scene of his family's outburst when he was taken away by the policemen as well as the scene of family reunion after his release seven years later (see thesis section 4.4.4), their presence did not constitute the political life which was primary for the autobiographer's narrative. Boestamam was not alone in replicating the dichotomy of private/public rules, as shown before, Shamsiah also subscribed to the belief. But a subject's complicity in perpetuating patriarchal relations does not suggest a false consciousness. Here is another area where feminist method makes an important contribution in rethinking boundaries. The demarcation of social reality into spaces, class, gender and race did not simply entail a top-down imposition. The relation between gender and society is reciprocal in which "politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics" (Scott 1996, 170). To illustrate the reciprocal aspect of a gendered power relation Boestamam's prison narrative will be discussed.

In everyday language, prison is often seen as a site for punishment and/or rehabilitation for those who have transgressed certain norms set by political and legal definitions. When Emergency was declared in Malaya in 1948, individuals and groups engaged in political, social and economic protests were thrown into prisons and detention camps as one of the security measures. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there were mass arrests of radical nationalists to the point that their parent body, the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP), was dissolved as result of the clampdown. At this time, prison became a designated space for people whose political view seemed incompatible with colonial interest.

The construction of prison as the oppressive inside (as opposed to the freedom of outside) underlined the narration of Boestamam's early stage of his life in detention.

The prison was organised by a regime of rules. Every cell had a timetable, rules for taking showers and a coding system that classified prisoners into scales of threat. Boestamam described that amongst the rules he hated most were the shower rules. He wrote, “The first instruction was to line up in two, and enter when the door was open. We reached the water tank, took off our trousers and shirt and had to stand naked while waiting for the water bucket to be passed from one to another”. He felt that the rules were designed “to make us feel that we were like a herd of cows released from its cowshed and being goaded into the field” (Boestamam, 296).

Prison rules were not the only method of oppression. Other manifestations of domination operated on the principle of binarism such as the split between reason and irrationalism and racial difference. Boestamam tried to make contact with a fellow prisoner who was rumoured to possess invulnerability. The prisoner, described as “an old man filled with knowledge of the world and hereafter”, had agreed to use his ‘power’ to help Boestamam and other inmates to escape (Boestamam, 316). When this plan failed, he applied to be deported to Indonesia because according to him, “as long as the British ruled Malaya I would never allow myself to become its subject”. From the British perspective, the removal of those considered a danger to security was an effective method of controlling threat. His application was approved on the basis of his father’s Indonesian origin and preparations were made for his release. However, the move was aborted due to the internal political situation in Indonesia.

He was later resigned to the fact that he would remain in prison as long as the regime dictated. Rather than seeing it as a sign of defeat, Boestamam describes his ordeal as a test of his leadership. At this phase his narrative constructed a space for the imagination of freedom. He saw himself as a political prisoner (*tahanan politik*) to mark himself off from the general category of prisoner. He tried to show that his political or nationalist consciousness could not be dictated at the will of the coloniser. He presented a continuation of his political activism inside the prison. Several activities were organised with other political inmates such as language lessons, setting a ‘mini-government’ that ruled on the basis of democracy and starting a booklet that contained political writings, poems and editorial pieces that was later distributed from one cell to another. He described his prison experience:

... was the most meaningful, valuable, useful and unwasted. I felt as if I was a soldier in a battlefield, a warrior (*pendekar*) in his battle ring (*gelanggang silatnya*), and a political fighter (*pejuang politik*) who did not simply shake his feet in an armchair in an air-conditioned room. (Boestamam, 327)

Note that the shifting experience, from ‘oppressive inside’ to a ‘meaningful inside’, was realised by presenting his struggle as continuous. If prison was designed to sever the social and political ties with the outside, the prisoner’s construction of struggle *continuously* transgresses the inside/outside rules. If I can recall *Orientalism*’s argument here that the segregations of human experience into discrete and fixed units would only served the interest of empire, then the integration of what seemed as disparate experiences or spaces provides the way for the imagination of liberation. Boestamam’s memoir illustrates this liberatory perspective.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that the examination of memoirs provides a complex reading and interpretation of colonial history. The memoirs were the accounts of colonised subjects whose experience was located in particular moments of history and whose narration was derived from specific vantage-points. But this is not the only function of subaltern memoir. The autobiographers presented their narratives with politically motivated agenda, that is, to present their life-writing as a testament for ‘difference’. At several points I have demonstrated the strategy and the evidence used by the subjects’ to assert their autonomy from the conventional. Central to this was the exhibition of identity and ideology of anti-colonialism which entails a commitment to personal and political liberation.

Even when my intention is to demonstrate the case for individual autonomy through their engagement with political and social convention, it is important to remain attuned to historical reality. The narratives of Khatijah, Boestamam and Shamsiah were marginal to the dominant interpretation of independence history. It was due to UMNO’s prominent role during the later period that it could claim its position as *the* independence fighter. The lack of strong opposition to counter its leadership following the mass arrests of opposition activists had contributed to its prominence.

But UMNO was not the lone fighter for national independence. Another significant contributor to independence was the British. This was even attested to by UMNO president Tunku Abdul Rahman. Upon his return from London, Tunku acknowledged that the “success of the *Merdeka* (freedom) Mission is because of the conciliatory attitude on the British side” (*Malaya Merdeka*, 12 February 1956). The spirit of gratitude towards British was repeated during the speech at the proclamation of Independence on 31 of August 1957. Tunku Abdul Rahman recalled the “old friendship” between Malaya and the colonial British. He said:

We remember too the products of our association; justice before the law, the legacy of an efficient public service and the highest standard of living in Asia. We shall therefore always remember with gratitude the assistance which we have received from Great Britain down our long path to nationhood; an assistance which culminated today with the proclamation of Malaya’s Independence. But the long standing friendship between our countries does not cease with independence: rather it takes on a new form.

(Tunku Abdul Rahman 2007, 192)

From his speech, it could be interpreted that British colonialism in Malaya was a beneficent rule, as UMNO would like to believe. Not only has colonialism provided Malaya with allegedly “the highest standard of living in Asia”, but also supported and assisted the country’s path to freedom. This shows that discourse of Malayan independence did not contain an anti-colonialist sentiment or ideology. Rather the British were accommodated on an equal plane with UMNO fighters. As the statement suggests, the British and UMNO relationship was perceived as a mutual working association rather than in a master-servant framework.

However, upon closer examination, the statement can also be read as an effective political and material interest disguised as “long standing friendship”. Caldwell (1977) argues that Malayan independence for the most part was “stage-managed”. He stated that the British had “carefully steered things to a point at which it seemed imminently safe to delegate to the well-trained and well-constrained puppets cultivated for many years the responsibilities of ‘independence’”. It was not difficult to see some logic in such opinion. As Caldwell noted, “at independence, 75% of all

rubber plantations were in European hands, along with 61% of all tin production, and 75% of all services and trade” (1977, 251). This proves that far from being benign, British concession for independence was not without its political and economic advantage. It could also be added that it was not only British interest that was well-served in the “stage-managed” independence. UMNO in particular, could not assert its political authority in the past and present had not the British provided the easy access necessary for an unhindered freedom. Tunku’s claim that independence was “genuine” has become a regular reminder that it was UMNO that had legitimately fought for the country’s freedom which the nation should be grateful for.

Notwithstanding the political interest, it is this version of ‘peaceful’ independence that predominates the representation of national history. The fact that UMNO is the current dominant force in Malaysian politics, society and economy has rendered their interpretation of history as the authoritative and legitimate one over others.

CONCLUSION

Cultural Resistance in Precarious Times

In the BBC 1 programme, the *Big Question*, broadcast on 8 March 2009, the show asked, “Should we still be proud of the British Empire?” There were mixed reactions from the panellists and the audience. While there was almost unanimous criticism of the morality and principle of colonialism in general, there was also a fairly rationalised argument in favour of the conduct of the Empire. One of the learned audience members drew attention to the British track record in former colonies like Malaysia and Singapore which, he argued, had contributed significantly to the current prosperity and development.

This episode highlights the continuing engagement with the history of colonialism, either in Britain or in the former colonies. Certainly, the topic of colonialism is still relevant now because issues like land, ethnic minorities or underdevelopment, which had their origins in the colonial era, still continue to beleaguer former colonies like Palestine, Sudan and Zimbabwe. These problems were perceived to be related to Britain since, due to its historical status as the imperial nation, it must be held morally accountable for the conditions and the consequences of its colonising mission. The situations in the former colonies and in the former imperial centre provide the context in which colonialism is talked about in order to make sense of the present. But the ‘present’ is no longer understood as a disparate and self-contained occurrence in a specific territory. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler argued that the post 9-11 tragedy has globalised the vulnerability of lives in western and non-western nations. Responding to the murderous attack on American soil, the Bush administration launched its assaults, militarily, politically and ideologically, on the foreign lands. According to Butler, violent reprisal by the administration:

... has effectively responded to the violence done against it by consolidating its reputation as a militaristic power with no respect for lives outside of the First World. That we now respond with more violence is taken as “further proof” that the United States has violent and anti-sovereign designs on the region.

(Butler 2004, 17)

Butler's criticism of American policy has to be positioned in the post 9-11 political discourse. The mainstream viewed the violence as pathological or self-generated evil, and hence the perpetrators must be condemned. In the margins, there was an urge for restraint since American foreign policy has, to considerable extent, helped to create the instability that has long been endured by people in foreign territories. The two separate positions on the tragedy according to Butler should not be treated as distinct but should be "held in juxtaposition, reconciled within a broader analysis". That is, to hold the perpetrators accountable as well as recognising that the perpetrators were formed "from several possible historical sources, one of which is, crucially, US imperialism" (Butler 2004, 15).

I want to link the issue of the relationship between the condition of global violence and imperialism, both historical and current, by returning to Said's *Orientalism*. Discourse of orientalism, is "a kind of *willed human work*" that is, formed by the "alliance between cultural work, political tendencies, the state and the specific realities of domination" (Said 1978, 15). In Said's formulation, forms of knowledge and representation are produced in a situation mixed with political interest. To say that certain knowledge is intertwined with politics means to recognise that knowledge is always partial, always reductive and always is a means of control. Butler expresses a similar view in what she described as the "philosophical and representational implications of war". The cry of nationalism, the exclusion of views that might allude to America's share of blame, and the moral justification for war are the evidence for "politics and power" in the public discourse that "work in part through regulating what can appear, what can be heard" (Butler 2004, 147). Given the normative power of discourse such as orientalism or perhaps, George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union address, is there any hope for an alternative that could reinsert humanistic ideals and lessen the condition of violence and oppression?

In Chapter 2, my discussion of *Orientalism* was aimed at developing a critique of state-narrative and also, at extending the possibility for a democratic and integrative model of resistance that can be applied to a Malaysian context. Resistance to hegemonic prescription of culture does not only suggest an opposite alternative. More importantly, resistance involves an understanding at how history, cultural assumptions and authority are formed and perpetuated. This is exactly what *Orientalism* is about.

In his 1993 interview, Said stated that a challenge to power and dominance required knowing how authority operated. He further stated that:

I mean how – given the domination of one or another powerful system, whether economic, social or political – one can break through. That is the most interesting thing, I think, about human behaviour- that and the way people try to build on it, that oppositional quality. So that is what I found about Orientalism – that you could study it and oppose it. (Said 2004, 169)

The discussion, debate and criticism of *Orientalism* has raised the profile of the problems associated with studying the ‘others’ and expanded the canon to include the histories and the narratives of the marginalised subjects. It could be suggested that the book has provided the entry, or the necessary first step, into opening up the possibility for ethical and non-hegemonic discourse of knowledge and culture. In this regard, a challenge to the establishment does not refer to a regime change. Instead, it refers to the interrogation of such knowledge that assumed authoritative stature through suppression and eradication of difference.

There are three things I have carried out in this thesis. Firstly, I have located and discussed the formation of state power and control in contemporary politics, economy and society in the historical context of colonialism. I have argued that British colonialism in Malaya was not benign and peaceful as often presented by the state discourse of history. The colonial manipulation of cultural symbols such as race and disposition (e.g. “lazy natives”) and the alliance made with the local elites had been responsible for the underdevelopment and racial polarisation that had characterised society during the colonial period and into the first ten years of independence. Notwithstanding the ills accompanied by and resulting from British colonialism, it is crucial to acknowledge the difference between “conditions” and “causes” for the current state authoritarianism. Again, I quote from Judith Butler that “conditions do not act in the way that individual agents do, but no agent acts without them” (Butler 2004, 11). Therefore, in my criticism of British colonialism, I acknowledge that the agency responsible for domination and subordination is produced and formed within the interplay of history, politics and culture. In this regard, colonialism and also, elements within feudal culture, had produced a pre-condition sufficient for state

authoritarianism. I also argue that the agents (including the state) which share responsibility for enabling and perpetuating injudicious control and coercion should be held to some extent accountable for the political and social predicaments that have occurred in contemporary Malaysia. In amplification of this, in the section entitled “Peaceful Independence”, I have illustrated the way public history and representation is vested by state power interests, which I argue, can be questioned and challenged.

The second thing I have done was developing a framework of cultural resistance as an analytical tool to examine and present a critique of state authority, as well as to study the practice of resistance in autobiography. There were several revisions made to develop *Orientalism's* thesis in its application to autobiographical resistance. First, this research offers a perspective on cultural resistance that integrates the element of power hegemony into the experience of resisting subjects. It argues that autobiographies have the potential of performing counter-discourse against the colonial and state hegemony. Secondly, this study begins to explore how the concept of gender can improve understanding of power and resistance. The examination of gender in autobiographies demonstrated social practice under a patriarchal relation. The aspect of subjective experience is also integrated in the cultural resistance framework. Experience is analysed from political, social and historical vantage-point. It was not only the experience of the autobiographers under scrutiny: the researcher's experience was also discussed as part of methodological consideration. Finally, chapters 4 and 5 applied this framework of cultural resistance. From the examination of the memoirs, I recognised the limitations of a cultural resistance framework.

Firstly, the framework attempts to accord some agency to the autobiographical subjects by way of presenting her/his voice and perspective. Through my analysis of the memoirs, it appeared that ‘agency’ is available at *some* points of narration and not others. A presentation of agency as consistent ignores the social and political factors that can at times over-determine an individual quest for recognition. Secondly, the model articulates the language of democracy to counterpoint the state's exclusive nationalism. In the memoir, the subjects expressed their intimacy and sympathy with their racial identity, indicating the inter-relation between individual and social roots. But to express sympathy and to pledge political struggle for one's race should not be seen as an adequate condition for denial of the rights of other communities. In this

matter, the memoirs performed a dual task in affirming their commitment for relieving the Malay race from repressive conservative tendencies as well as striving for a free nation-state with equal rights irrespective of race. It is thus important to view ideas like democracy and freedom not as abstract ideas but as formed in specific history and culture. Thirdly, the concept of resistance as a process leading to emancipation was significant for the overall research project. Through the framework, and following Said, I argue that resistance entails denunciation of exclusivist ideology that operates through the suppression of others' histories and narratives. The analysis of the memoirs demonstrated that autobiographical resistance is more complex and nuanced than a straightforward presentation of power and counter-power, narrative and counter-narrative. There are three observations that deserve mention:

- The articulation of 'difference' from political or cultural norms does not necessarily entail severance from the hegemonic cultural and political prescription. The subjects shared some cultural prejudice and were expected to comply with the convention. In spite of that, there were also faith and efforts among the subjects to make the system less oppressive.
- While resistance can bring change to a system, or at least alter the conduct of the oppressor, this may not always be the outcome of resistance.
- Resistance is an ongoing process, and does not begin or end when the subjects were stripped from their party position, lived in exile or subjected to imprisonment. What makes such an act of resisting continuous is the critical expression of the awareness and realisation (in this case) that the colonising power and their indigenous successors are agents of power and self-interest. Such continuing demonstrations will create a political and ethical obligation for other subjects to intervene in the process of domination, through various ways and means of resistance.

It is clear that the practice of resistance in the field of culture involves at some level the transgression of norms defined by power interest. It may also involve an agonistic silence of the resisting agents. I believe that such contradiction does not connote stalemate in a power relation where the hegemon is always in the winning position. Instead, I argue for a rethinking of the relationship between authority, culture and

social subjects that takes into account the importance of timeframes as the delayed impacts of the memoir suggest. Power and authority is not a constant and perennial attribute but is vulnerable to pressure and change. Secondly, it must be considered that every individual is formed within a specific socio-political context, hence, certain behaviour and thought is constrained. In this formulation, the concept of resistance is not treated in abstraction but is situated in a concrete social struggle, with the examples I have considered working across a long- term span.

Contemporary Malaysia has seen rapid economic growth and development, while the expansion of middle-class *bumiputera* has increased pressure for ethnic and religious parity across communal groups. The need for racial and religious tolerance is recognised in a multi-communal Malaysia, and several initiatives have been made through the state and non-government organisations to mediate inter-ethnic differences. The idea for an inter-faith commission arises at several points although the state has resolved to restrict public debate on religion.¹⁷⁶ The current Prime Minister's campaign for *IMalaysia*, however, is a welcome effort.¹⁷⁷ Another area that can contribute to an improvement of democracy is relating to media freedom. Additionally, I have discussed the politics surrounding the publication of subaltern memoirs. In the name of social stability, materials considered to be potentially 'harmful' were previously either banned or limited.¹⁷⁸ But now, the state, at times, does respond positively to the emerging awareness of democracy among the younger generation. For example, a permit was issued for the opposition's party press, *Suara Keadilan* (Voice of Justice), and a news magazine *Aliran Monthly*,¹⁷⁹ which adopted critical stance towards state's policy, has survived the media censorship.

¹⁷⁶ Interfaith Commission (IFC) was proposed in 2005 as a consultative body to monitor, advice and mediate issues related to inter-faith such as place of worship, conversion and propagation of faiths. Recently, Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yasin, re-instated that the government does not see any need for an independent commission and argued that a closed-door dialogue is a preferable method for addressing inter-faith dispute. See *The Star*, 30 January 2010.

¹⁷⁷ *IMalaysia* is a concept introduced by the current Prime Minister Abdul Najib Razak on 27 June 2009. It emphasised the value of tolerance, justice for all races and nation-building.

¹⁷⁸ This rule is specially applied to materials related to Islam. For example, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1989), A.J Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (1987) and Karen Armstrong's *The Battle for God* (2002) and S. Sayyid's *A Fundamental Fear* (2003). Despite her books are banned in Malaysia, Karen Armstrong was an invited speaker for a conference on "Islam and the West" organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, held in Kuala Lumpur on 15-16 June 2007.

¹⁷⁹ *Aliran Monthly* is published by Aliran: an organisation founded in 1977 and is committed in social democratic reform. The articles were mainly written by academics, politician from opposition's parties, social activists and journalists. It adopted critical journalism and offered perspectives relating to social, economic and political affairs.

This closing section illustrates the fact that the practice of resistance may not always produce the desired change immediately or perform as an effective countervailing authority. But it is also important to acknowledge that changing the practice of power and domination does not happen overnight. There are bound to be disappointment and setbacks that will interrupt its completion, and indeed this has happened. I conclude with a paragraph from Noam Chomsky's speech at Loyola University in 1970. The speech was made in the context of scholarship, influenced by French social thought, which stipulated the determining influence of politics and coercion in shaping social order. Chomsky, in defence of humanistic tradition, argues that such a thought is only partly true. There is always an opportunity for human agency and creativity to pose a challenge to the prescriptive order, as he elaborates:

A vision of a future social order is in turn based on a concept of human nature. If in fact man is an indefinitely malleable, completely plastic being, with no innate structures of mind and no intrinsic needs of a cultural or social character, then he is a fit subject for the "shaping of behaviour" by the state authority, the corporate manager, the technocrat and the central committee. Those with some confidence in the human species will hope this is not so and will try to determine the intrinsic human characteristics that provide the framework for intellectual development, the growth of moral consciousness, cultural achievement and participation in a free community.

(Chomsky 2008, 89)

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An archive of Edward Said’s writings in popular press or of other writers’ writings related to Said. In some instances there are direct link to the originating sources.

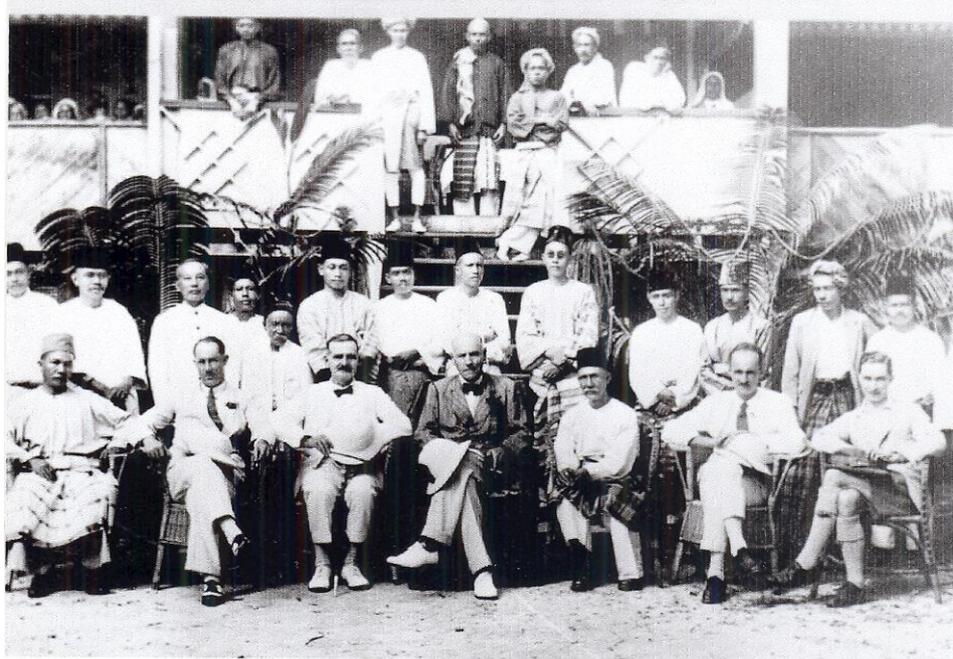
<http://www.islam.gov.my/ajaransesat/pdf/>

Malaysia’s religious department website on deviational Islamic teachings.

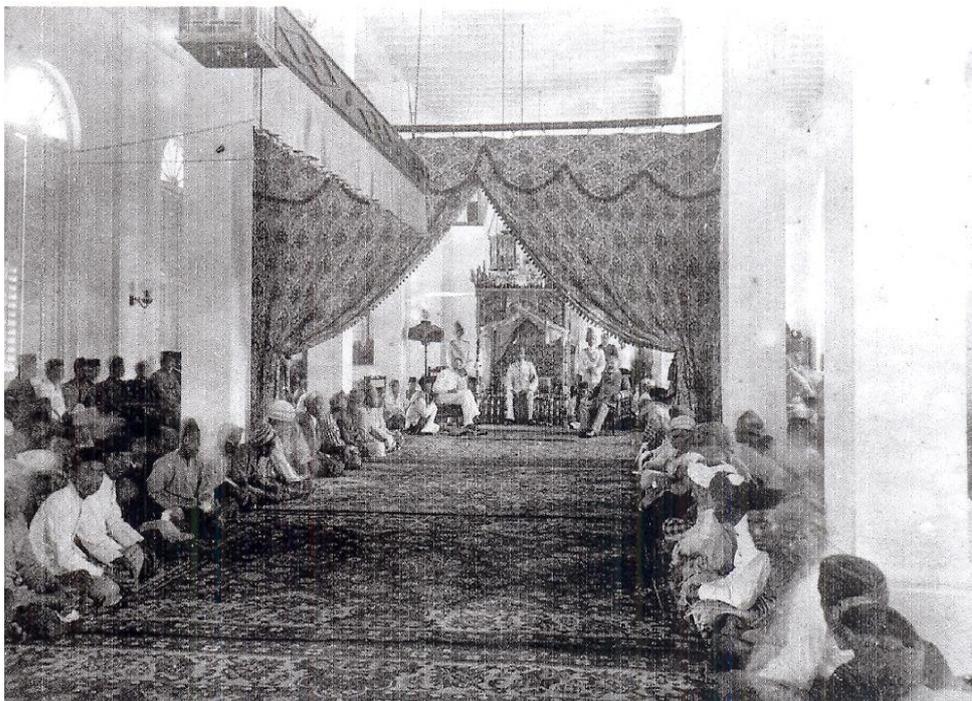
APPENDIX



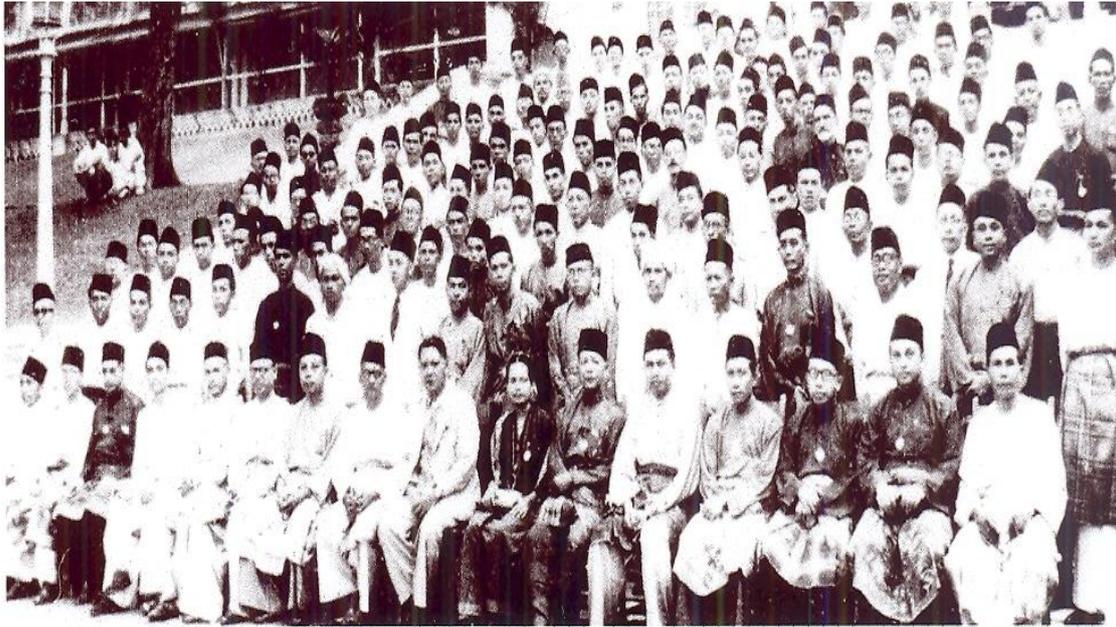
UMNO Lambang Martabat Bangsa (UMNO: the Symbol of Nation's Honour): A presentation of UMNO's history in the National Archive of Malaysia.



British Resident of Pahang, Hugh Clifford (seated fourth from left) with Raja of Pahang, Sultan Ahmad Shah (seated third from right).
Source: National Archive of Malaysia.



Installation of Raja Idris as Regent of Perak in 1886. Scene of *balairong* (reception area) during the ceremony. Seated (left to right): Frank Swettenham (British Resident of Perak in 1889), Raja Idris, and W.H. Treacher (succeeded Swettenham in 1896).
Source: National Archive of Malaysia.



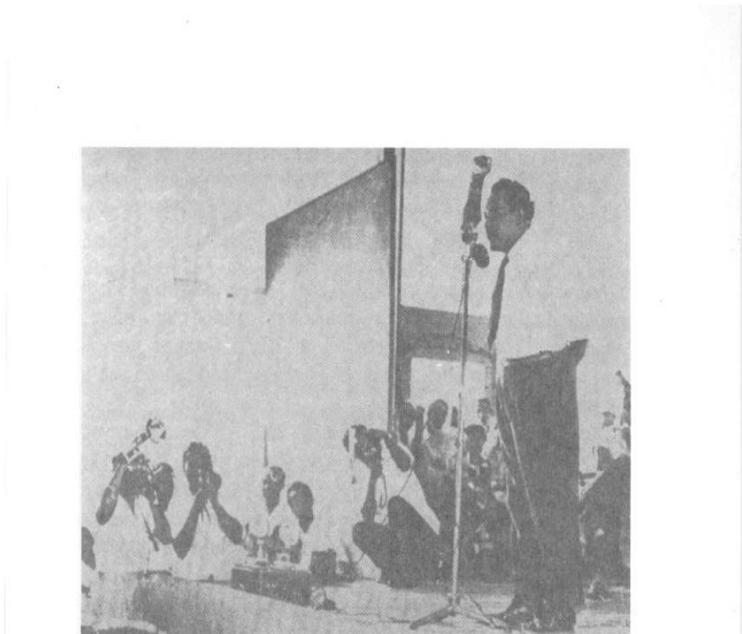
The formation of UMNO on 11 May 1946 at the Royal Palace (*Istana Besar*) of Johor. Sitting eight from left is Onn Jaafar, the founder and the first UMNO President. Sitting ninth from left is the Regent of Johor, Tengku Ismail Mahkota.
Source: National Archive of Malaysia.



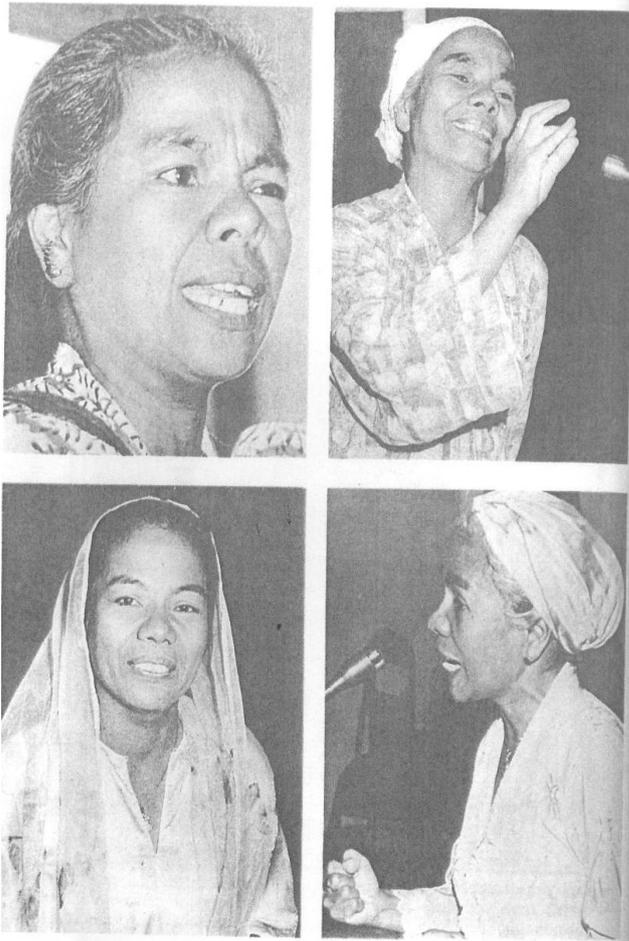
The Chief Minister of Federation of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, signed the Independence Treaty (*Perjanjian Kemerdekaan*) in London on 8 February 1956. On the left is Britain's Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd.
Source: National Archive of Malaysia.



The top brass of the Malay Nationalist Party: Ahmad Boestamam (standing second from right), Ishak Muhammad (seated second from right) and Burhanuddin Helmy (seated first from right). Source: Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar, *Ishak Haji Muhammad Penulis dan Ahli Politik sehingga 1948*, University of Malaya Press, 1977.



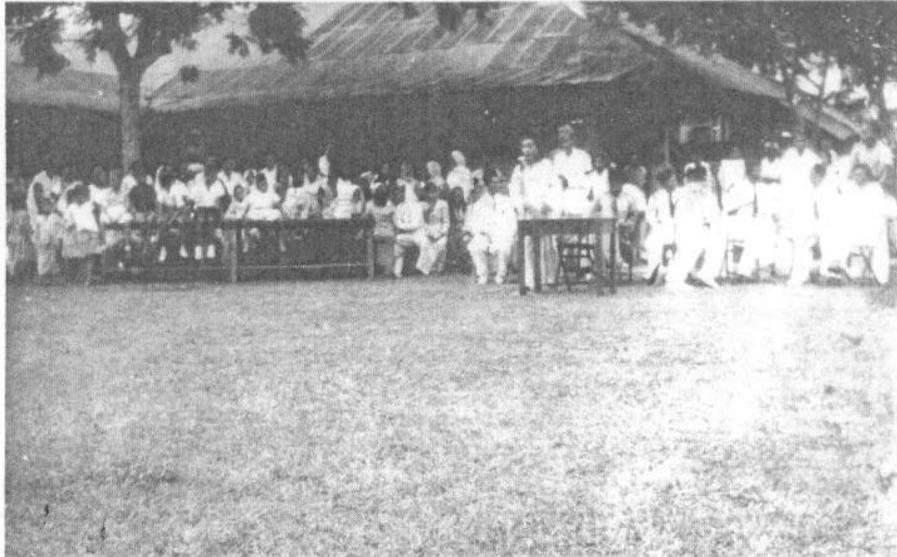
Ahmad Boestamam delivered a speech in a political rally. Source: *Memoir Ahmad Boestamam*.



Khatijah Sidek (1918- 1982) Source: *Memoir Khatijah Sidek*.



Ahmad Boestamam (1920-1983)



GAMBAR 5 Ketua AWAS Shamsiah Fakeh sedang berucap di Sambutan setahun Api di padang T.P.C.A.K.L. pada 17/2/1947. AWAS (Angkatan Wanita Sedar) adalah sayap wanita PKMM.

Shamsiah Fakeh, the head of the radical women association AWAS, delivered a political speech in 1947. Source: *Memoir Shamsiah Fakeh*.



After almost 30 years in exile abroad, the news of Shamsiah's application to return home had received widespread media and public attention. The headline above read: "Government is asked to consider Shamsiah as a war criminal", *Utusan Malaysia*, 8 February 1988.

Handwritten notes in Indonesian script, likely a page from a memoir. The text is dense and appears to be a personal account. There are some markings and a small circular stamp on the page.

Handwritten notes in Indonesian script, continuing the memoir. The text is dense and appears to be a personal account. There are some markings and a small circular stamp on the page.

Shamsiah's notes about her life-story. Scribbled on top left-hand of the pages is *Riwayat (Saya?)* or "My Story". Source: *Memoir Shamsiah Fakeh*.



Wajah Shamsiah
ketika di China,
1960



GAMBAR 29
Wajah Shamsiah
ketika di Malaysia,

Shamsiah Fakeh (1924-2008)