

To,
The British Adviser, Kelantan.

A.O.
Inilah surat petiti saya'alaah daripada saya al-Haji Idris bin Salih kampung Lubok Jabu daerah Penggawa Kodok dan saya Osman bin Min dan saya Jusoh bin Awang kampung Binjal Perdik daerah Penggawa Pendik mana'loakani kepada Tu

Inaugural Lecture

Akan hal satu wenger tanah saya-saya bertiga ini tempat-nya di-bukin guru Pendik. Maka tanah itu hak zaman Datok nenek saya lagi berzaman-Zaman saya-sayalah memerintah-nya akan tetpi-nya kadang-kadang staham perintah setaham tidak sebab tanah kubang kerbay apabila susun hujar jadi dalam ayar, bila kurang hujar dapat-leh dibuat padi-nya di-kubang itu, dan telaga ikan pon ada

**INTERROGATING THE STATE
AND CRAFT OF HISTORY:**

THE MALAYSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL JOURNEY
daripada darat itu, dan pada masa compase tanah-tanah itu ada saya saya tanah batu-batu mentera-nya 4 tapangan tanah-tanah itu.
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Adapun telaga ikan itu pon hak orang tua-tua dahulu kala-nya thabi'at orang-orang darat tempat saya diditu telaga itulah tempat ambil ikan tiap-tiap tahun memulung nasi tidaklah seperti orang tepi pantai laut memukat ikan, dan sugu itupun hak tok

nenek saya tanah digunakan buat atap **SHAHARIL TALIB**
kuala atap nipah jika orang kaya-kaya atap bat *Asia-Europe Institute*
lah Tuan deraan-nya. *University of Malaya*

a bergedeh gendeh sangat ini Tuan *Kuala Lumpur*
ust padi dan telaga ikan tempat anak olachu

saya nakas lank dan pokok sugu tempat benedoh rumah anak bini
saya dandah hikatakan hak kerajaan itulah saya-saya bertiga ini
sudah hati sangat diatas tanah dan sugu telaga ikan saya itu Tuan.
Dougan sebab saya pikir Kerajaan Tuan sangat-sangatlah 'adil-nya
dan Tuan buloh menentukan hak rayat-rayat-lah punya hak kerajaan

*Illustrations: (Front Cover): Kelantan (M Series) 115/1924: Haji Idris bin Salleh and 2 others to B.A.K., 8th March 1924.
(Back Cover) Kelantan (M Series) 115/1924: State of Kelantan, Notice No. 39/1919*

Inaugural Lecture

10 December 2004

**INTERROGATING THE STATE
AND CRAFT OF HISTORY:
THE MALAYSIAN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL JOURNEY**

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'God made the land and the sea; the land He divided among men and the sea He gave in common. It is unheard of that anyone should be forbidden to sail the seas. If you seek to do that, you will take the bread from the mouths of my people'. Sultan Ala'uddin, Makassar, 1615.¹

'Everything must be recaptured and relocated in the general framework of history, so that despite the difficulties, the fundamental paradoxes and contradictions, we may respect the unity of history which is also the unity of life'. Fernand Braudel.²

I

It is almost exactly fifty years since the posthumous publication of the great French historian Marc Bloch's *The Historian's Craft*, an inspiring set of meditations on his life's work, and as co-founder of the now legendary journal *Annales*, which gave rise to a major school of historical writing.³ Profoundly influenced by the dark events that shaped his era—world wars and totalitarianism—Bloch's writing has not only stood the test of time but he has become an epitome of the endeavour that historians should uphold, in the face of the equally perplexing events of our own age, and in the spirit of unfettered critical enquiry.

What I propose in this lecture is that we need to revisit and recapture the spirit of Bloch in order to understand and explain the intricate changes of the contemporary world order and Malaysia's place in that order. In part this has to do with a recognition that the methods for writing history that have evolved in Malaysia are simply inadequate for the intellectual tasks that we should be

¹ Cited in John Villiers, 'Makassar: the rise and fall of an East Indonesian Maritime Trading State, 1512-1669', in J. Kathirithamby-Wells and John Villiers (eds) *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity*, Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1990, p. 154.

² Fernand Braudel, *On History*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1982 [originally published as *Ecrits sur l'histoire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1969].

³ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, New York, Vintage Books, 1954. On the significance of the *Annales* school of history see Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: Annales School, 1929-1989*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991.

setting for ourselves. To put it simply, much current historiography—that is the relationship between the materials of the past and how we write and think about it—is in a state of crisis. The best way of characterising the current state of history is that it is hemmed in from all sides by a kind of circumscribed parochialism. Historians of Malaysia themselves have built the high walls and the glass ceilings that have deliberately cut them off from healthy interaction with other Asian historians as well as scholars in analogous fields of enquiry. The result is a sterile scholasticism that knows little of and cares still less for the spirit of interdisciplinary dialogue. As such, it can teach us little about who we are or who we may become. In their current state, historical studies have reached an impasse.

What follows from this stark criticism is a recognition that we can and must take apart that 'narrative' that is history in order to explain how and why it was constructed. History is precious in imagining our nation and our identity. But to interrogate it—to question and scrutinise it—is not to break or destroy. It is also to re-construct. The 'narrative' that is history is the story as told in our textbooks. It is our collective memory. But it is also a construction or a process of production (in the departments of history, in Malaysian universities), that goes through a supply chain (in the form of school and college textbooks), that is consumed (in the national school and universities examinations) and then emerges to be reproduced again. Set in this light, history is therefore both conditioned and conditional. It is crafted, and we need to continue to read and reflect on the historian's craft.

This compulsion to re-examine the very craft of history is meant here in its two senses. In the first place, the craft refers to the artisanal qualities of our profession, of the way we literally identify and mould the corpus of raw materials—the documentary evidence—into some coherent and plausible representation of the past. This has everything to do, of course, with the essential methodologies we employ, both the tried and tested techniques and the innovations which might yield new insights. And it has to do with the fundamental epistemology of what actually constitutes the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity. But my reference to the historian's craft should also conjure up another, equally important, metaphor, that of history as a vessel charting a course through the dangerous waters of ideological predilections and special interests—through what Fernand Braudel called 'the fundamental paradoxes and contradictions'—in order to arrive at some unified and holistic understanding of our past and present. And this is essentially a question of ontology, questioning and understanding about the nature of being created and of creation itself.

These initial thoughts on the limits and opportunities of the historian's craft also prompt some more personal reflections in response to the query: why history? Let me share with you my story, theorising why and how I do my work on history. It started off very simply, with curiosity, about myself and about my family. Where do we come from; why are we the way we are? Intuitively, then, the first seeds of my interest in history seem to reflect the truth of Collingwood's famous dictum that 'history is *for* human self-knowledge'.⁴ More precisely, history enables me to integrate my ideas about time and space: historical time and geographical space. This confluence is necessary because history is not merely about chronology; rather history unfolds in a physical context, a space. And it is this confluence that precisely constitutes our lives: time and space.

Believe it or not, I came to history through geology. I did a full first year course on geology which absolutely fascinated me. What is geology? It is, put simply, the study of rock formation and of the earth. Key in this is time or history. A rock is an aggregate of minerals, each of which has its own physical and chemical properties. Elements that can be classified, over time and through a process, form the rock that emerges, whether it is a metamorphic rock, igneous rock or sedimentary rock. Only by studying the elements and the process through time does one see the pattern that emerges to identify the rock formation. Geology can thus be used to infer past environments of the earth based on the physical characteristics of the rocks and the changes that occurred over time. And that is precisely how I approached the study of history. Of course, my approach—while it was unusual—was not without precedent. For example, the idea of the importance of the physical environment for civilisation was adapted by historians of the *Annales* school to describe the long-term developments that shaped human history. But I was interested equally in the methodological implications of geology for the historian's craft. Here, my initial premise was straightforward: there are elements that over time and through multiple processes of change have been crafted to form our history. My task as an historian is to interrogate this crafting. This means to push questions about what are the elements, to ask where they come from, the processes of change and adaptation, and, above all, to identify who crafted them into this story we call 'our history'.

At another level, studying geology took us as students to field work to obtain data and back to the workbench in the science laboratory where as a team we scrutinised the evidence under the watchful eye of the master craftsman in order to get into the elements and understand the processes that led to their formation

⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History: With Lectures 1926-1928*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994.

in the first place. Collecting data from the field, processing and studying the evidence on a workbench with colleagues left an indelible mark on me on the significance of collective endeavour to make the discovery and difference. I have been fortunate and privileged to professionally work with and learn from other master craftsmen in the various fields that can be applied to historical knowledge such as economics from His Royal Highness Raja Dr Nazrin Shah; anthropology from Dato' Professor Shamsul Amri; geography from Professor Mohammad Raduan Mohd. Ariff; maritime history from Dr Serafin Quezon and Dr Adrian Lopian; the field of Kelantan and Trengganu studies from the Adabi pioneers such as Dato' Syed Mansor, Dato' Hassan Harun, Dato' Pahamin Rejab, Malizan Othman and the late Fahim Hj. Yaacob; and more currently, international relations from Wisma Putra and legal processes and instruments from the Attorney General's Chambers. In all instances a team put the historical record under a microscope and extricated the evidence in an artisan workshop of equals to answer the burning questions of the humanities and social sciences as well the serving the needs of the nation. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of countless young researchers, some of whom went on to complete their masters and others their doctorates, while the rest continued their journey. Above all, it is my immediate family who taught me and learnt with me life's experience, with its values, culture and artistic creativity, that made work so very enriching and meaningful.

II

There are significant tasks and approaches we need to consider if we are to break through the historian's self-imposed impasse and create what we might call a 'new historiography' for the new millennium. Here I want to lay out in broad brush strokes what such an undertaking might look like before later asking some pointed the current shortcomings of Malaysian historiography, interrogating the documentary evidence, and offering some answers to the *problematique* of crafting a new historiography.

The first step—returning to Bloch—is to engage in an unfettered critical enquiry into what is wrong with the knowledge structures that have evolved and presented to us such an arid understanding of our histories. Here a number of questions specific to Malaysian history stand out. Why has indigenous history been homogenised? More broadly, why has the people's history been

marginalised? What accounts for the silences and the lacunae in our history? Asking such questions is more than a mere corrective. It is a significant act of engagement that is the starting-point for the creation of new historiographical possibilities.

Second, we need to interrogate the historical record, and especially the existing documents, through a much more sophisticated understanding of both the spatial and temporal logics of the contemporary world order—the confluence of geography and history I mentioned earlier. Here the watchword is that history must be sensitive to the multi-scalar nature of social relations—emerging simultaneously from different scales of action. At the very least, we need to recognise the interpenetration of global, macro-regional, national, network and local scales, while at the same time understanding that these scales are not nested in a neat hierarchy but seem to coexist and interpenetrate in a tangled and bewildering way. Part of our daunting task, then, is to make sense of this appearance of organised chaos and randomness, to demonstrate causality, contingency, contradictions and connections. From this may emerge a new historical cartography.

And third, once we understand how these processes of interaction are generated and how they operate, then we will be in a position to discuss three crucial issues which, if properly dissected, could be the foundations of the new fields of historical enquiry. These are the relationships between globalisation, plurality and inclusion. What precisely is the impact of what is usually described as ‘globalisation’ on the extended network of localities, and the various spatial scales that mediate these processes, or, to put it another way, how global are we historically? What follows from this is the question of how we understand plurality in historical studies. This is important given the tendency of studies to promote a monistic interpretation that deliberately obscures the reality of diversity. It does so by means of a utilitarian conception of a singular historical past. What this means in effect is the privileging of the ‘national’, of the ‘elite’, of the ‘statist’ above any richer or even contradictory conception of the ‘community’, of the ‘people’ or the ‘subaltern’. Any discussion of plurality in history immediately faces very difficult problems. The most obvious problem is one of definition: what is pluralism and what, precisely, is one’s attitude towards the diversity implied by pluralism? This returns to the questions of methodology—of the historian’s craft—that might best capture such plurality. An answer can actually be articulated in the following way: that plurality is the existence or toleration of diversity of ethnic or other socially-defined groups within a society or state. This, it seems to me, is an apt starting point for writing the new historiography.

The third issue follows on logically from the claim for a greater sense of plurality, and this shifts attention to the issue of inclusion and, by extension, of pluralism and relevance in historical studies. It was suggested earlier that a great deal of contemporary history has erected high walls and glass ceilings, a tendency which has singularly neglected critical engagement with other disciplines. One manifestation of this is the kind of self-serving professional gate-keeping that operates in relation to graduate supervision, research thrusts, appointments, publications, research grants and scholarships and which has the (intended) effect of maintaining a restricted and conservative domain for the self-chosen few. So the question that has to be asked is this: how inclusive are we? For the new historiography there must a pluralism that acknowledges the existence or toleration of diversity of theories, interpretations and methodologies in history and analogous social sciences, without ever compromising the standards of rigour that we take as the *sine qua non* of all scholarship. As I will suggest later, I believe that contemporary historical studies could benefit a great deal by learning from and debating with a number of important disciplines. Among the most obvious are economic and social history; new strategic studies with their emphasis on human security; legal studies; international relations and international political economy; and, perhaps most importantly, the range of specialisms developed in demography, genealogy, labour and peasant studies, that might best capture plurality and interdependence.

III

Clearly the reconstruction of a new historiography is a daunting agenda and not all the problems and opportunities that arise from thinking afresh about the historian's craft can be adequately dealt with here. But one way of illustrating the potential for a new historiography is to offer a critique of some examples of historical writing by examining the multi-scalar nature of history while at the same time offering a heterodox reading of the relevant historical documents. In that way, we may be able to offer at least some tentative answers to the burning questions of globalisation and localisation, of plurality and diversity, and of inclusion and interdisciplinarity. This can be done by examining three benchmark episodes of Malaysia's history—the crafting of that history and the synthesis of those particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods. In keeping with the argument that we need a multi-scalar interpretation of the past

and present, I have ordered the episodes to reflect the dynamic from the global and regional scales to the national and local scales of social action.

The first benchmark of our historical interrogation is predicated on the longstanding recognition of the global importance of the Asiatic archipelago. The peoples and states of the pre-colonial Asiatic archipelago had over the centuries nurtured an aquatic civilisation of interdependence. In the words of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles:

I cannot but consider the Malayu nation, as one people, speaking one language, though spread over so wide a space, and preserving their character and customs, in all the maritime states lying between the Sulu seas, and the southern ocean, and bounded longitudinally by Sumatra and the western side of Papua or New Guinea.⁵

In all instances of knowledge construction geopolitics, geostrategic and geoeconomics formed the submerged structure of Southeast Asian history. First colonialism and then emerging global power structures in the aftermath of the Second World War invaded and conquered the epistemological space and created historical knowledge as represented in a series of 'appropriate' facts. 'Useful' knowledge was collected in the colonial period in published reports, statistical returns, official proceedings, census returns, administrative histories and legal codes. Globalisation, governed under the terms of the newly-installed Bretton Woods system, not only secured the financial, legal and military underpinnings of the region in the Cold War world order but also determined new forms of 'useful' knowledge and a range of instrumental knowledge constructs. These were generally organised under the rubric of Malaysian Studies, Thai Studies, Burmese Studies, Vietnamese Studies, Philippine Studies, Indonesian Studies and would go on to cover all the ASEAN ten countries. In this way, the very notion of Southeast Asian history was invented as an object of geostrategic interest. In this regard, two interrelated aspects of conventional historiography stand out. The first is Halford Mackinder's well-known geopolitical approach to history embodied in his 'Heartland Theory'.⁶ The second can be understood as the political manifestation of that theory in the conduct of US foreign policy in the region in the period after 1945.

⁵ Thomas Raffles, 'On the Malayu Nation, with a translation of its Maritime Institutions', *Asiatic Researches*, Calcutta, Vol. 12, 1816, p. 103.

⁶ Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1962 [first published London, Constable, 1919].

Mackinder proposed what would become the most widely discussed concept of geopolitical studies which, ironically, became the purview of International Relations scholars and defence experts but *not* that of the historians. Careful to avoid geographical determinism, Mackinder offered this prospectus for the international struggles of the twentieth century: 'The actual balance of political power at any given time is ... the product, on the one hand, of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, and, on the other hand, of the relative number, virility, equipment and organisation of the competing peoples'.⁷ Though largely ignored by policymakers during the 1920s and 1930s, Mackinder's views began to resonate in the US during the Second World War with the publication of his famous *Foreign Affairs* article 'The Round World and the Winning of the Peace' (1943) which was his last major statement on global affairs.⁸ And his theories and concepts proved readily adaptable to the emerging Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. American strategists during and after the Second World War borrowed aspects of Mackinder's world view in formulating and implementing the policy of 'containment' of Soviet Russia and then China. Anthony J. Pierce, in his introduction to the 1962 edition of *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, could confidently assert that '[i]n America and in England, since 1942, most studies of global strategy or political geography have been based, in whole or in part, upon [Mackinder's] theories'.⁹ It was a message that would come to inform US policymakers in the new context of the Cold War after 1945.

The extent to which Mackinder's 'Heartland theory' and geopolitics in general could be simplified and distorted to serve political and economic ends—and the highly instrumental way in which the history of Southeast Asia came to be appropriated, written and used after 1945—is perhaps best illustrated by reference to the notorious *Pentagon Papers*, usually seen as a source for International Relations scholars but equally important to the process of deconstructing the historical past and reconstructing a new historiography.¹⁰ The *Pentagon Papers*, as is well known, were a government study of US involvement

⁷ Halford J. Mackinder, 'The geographical pivot of history', *Geographical Journal*, XXIII, pp. 421-444 and reprinted in *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. For a good study of Mackinder's methodology and influence see W. H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982.

⁸ Halford J. MacKinder, 'The round world and the winning of the peace', *Foreign Affairs*, 1943, pp. 595-605.

⁹ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, p. xxi.

¹⁰ George Herring, ed., *The Pentagon Papers*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1993 [originally published in New York, Quadrangle Books, 1971]. The whole text of the *Pentagon Papers* is now available online in the Gravel Edition at: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/pentagon/>.

in Southeast Asia. Commissioned by the Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, in June 1967, the 47-volume, top secret study covered the period from the Second World War to May 1968. It was written by a team of analysts who had access to classified documents, and was completed in January 1969. The study revealed a considerable degree of miscalculation, bureaucratic arrogance and deception on the part of US policymakers. In particular, it found that the US government had continually resisted full disclosure of increasing military involvement in Southeast Asia—air strikes over Laos, raids along the coast of North Vietnam, and offensive actions by US marines had taken place long before the American public was informed. In sum, the *Papers* showed how presidents and high-ranking civilian and military leaders had misled the American people about the role of the US in Southeast Asia.

But this deception was for a purpose. For, at the same time, the *Papers* and other sources provide a wealth of empirical evidence that reveal the deep logic of the US rise to globalism through its own version of the Heartland strategy or what the influential American Council of Foreign Relations dubbed the 'Grand Area' or the 'Living Space', and Southeast Asia's part in it. The Council commissioned research to determine the minimal size of the informal empire necessary for the survival of US private capitalism in terms of raw material supplies, domestic employment and export outlets.¹¹ As early as 1940 the US Army and Navy Munitions Board had classified fourteen strategic materials not available from domestic sources. These materials were of paramount importance for the emerging industrial-military complex and, as Jonathan Marshall notes: 'The Far East, especially Southeast Asia and India (whose exports were often shipped through Southeast Asian waters), supplied the most important of these materials'.¹² Colonial Malaya, of course, would be the main supplier of tin and rubber, vital for the manufacture of tanks, among other things. Island Southeast Asia possessed the greatest deposits of raw material wealth, a fact that was understood and exploited by the US in its post-war 'making' of the region.

We can draw two interim conclusions from this episode of our history. The first is an obvious one but no less important for that. The insights of geopolitics and geoeconomics have hardly exercised the imaginations of most historians who have left these sources—both conceptual in the case of Mackinder and his followers and empirical in relation to the *Pentagon Papers*—to traditional International Relations scholars and specialists in strategic studies. At the very

¹¹ See Kees van der Pijl, *The Making of an Atlantic Ruling Class*, London, Verso, 1984, Ch. 1.

¹² Jonathan Marshall, *To Have and Have Not: Southeast Asian Raw Materials and the Origins of the Pacific War*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 10-13.

least it is obvious that historians should be having a fruitful debate with these scholars. But more than this, the outpouring of geopolitical literature (especially in the three decades after the onset of the Cold War) should itself be used as a primary source of evidence and treated with the usual scrutiny to which all primary documentation should be subjected. The very secrecy revealed in the *Pentagon Papers*, for example, points to extent to which the US state was prepared to go in pursuit of its own strategic purpose in the context of the Cold War and the way it was prepared to subsume Southeast Asia to this purpose. The study of key treatises like that of Mackinder is also an important exercise in disclosing the official mind of US foreign policymaking, how it conceptualised space, competition and international struggles—the submerged themes of Southeast Asian studies.

The second interim conclusion is more critical. For these geopoliticians geography meant distance, size, shape, and physical features that were all static. It may be necessary to even consider the geographical dimensions of international relations but it is insufficient in offering a satisfactory set of analytical lenses through which to understand change. The idea of geography as spatial patterns and relations that reflect dynamic physical and human processes has largely been absent. In the Cold War era, for example, the world was seen as being composed of two blocs with no overlapping areas. If historians are able to re-appropriate our epistemological space it will be to understand the geopolitics, geostrategic and geoeconomics of Asia in which Southeast Asia has historically been its emporium. After all, it was in Southeast Asia that all of Asian civilisations met each other in trade and commerce. And it was over this much older set of spatial and temporal patterns that the Cold War version of Heartland theory was inscribed. Southeast Asia was the Asian emporium that was the living space of its peoples, and surely this structural feature of the world economy has to be built into the region's *longue duree* as the Cold War period began to re-configure its logic.

The first example of contemporary historiography has mainly been to do with the global and regional scales of action. Our second episode continues the theme of imperial subjugation but here the appropriate scale of action moves firmly to the level of the state. If the logic of Mackinder's Heartland theory had been driven primarily by geopolitical and geostrategic considerations as they emerged with the Cold War, then another vital historical theme was the project of

modernisation and the governing of global capitalist development in the region after 1945.

Much of our contemporary understanding of history and historical studies in Malaysia is strung along the continuum of the creation of the so-called 'New States'. The process of creating contemporary historical knowledge begins in the twentieth century and is intimately linked with the succession of liberation struggles, the Japanese Occupation, the emergence of New States, the exigencies of the Cold War, the rise of the 'new regionalism' and, more recently, the reconfiguration of globalisation. Twentieth century mega trends and mega issues set the agenda of intellectual and academic life with its international funding, research, conferencing and publication which then flows back to teaching, training and more funding, more research, more conferencing and more publication. The production and reproduction of social knowledge has been the relentless engine of academic life and this has been driven, above all, by the overpowering ontology of the state form. In particular, the unbroken thread of modern historical studies is tied to the idea of the New State and its development plans under the rule of conservative elites, who were seen by powerful global actors as the key social forces for the advance of postindependence nation-building projects and international capitalism.

The 'civilising role' of international capitalism and colonialism continued in disguised forms to produce and reproduce knowledge that was useful for their purposes. There was little effort to understand that the priorities of nationalist leaders were to wage a war against poverty, hunger, illiteracy and ignorance, pestilence and sickness, war and death. The peoples' Tweedledum—the early nationalist freedom fighters of the first half of the twentieth century—was understood by the New States' Tweedledee of the second half of that century through the prism of the 'development plans'. The peoples' history was appropriated and became New State History. In the 1960s and 1970s the dominant titles and themes of Southeast Asian New States included *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*; *The Making of Modern Burma*; *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic*; *The Politics of Reform in Thailand*; *Thailand and the United States*; *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*; *South Vietnam: A Nation Under Stress*; *Political Ideology in Malaysia*; *Malaya: A Political and Economic Appraisal* and *The Philippine Answer to Communism*.¹³ At the regional

¹³ Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*, New York, Greenwood, 1967; Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1962; Lennox A. Mills, *Malaya: A Political and Economic Appraisal*, New York, Greenwood, 1973; Alvin H. Scaff, *Philippine Answer to Communism*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1955; Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress*, New York, Greenwood, 1978; James C. Scott,

level Southeast Asian Studies were pregnant with *In Search of Southeast Asia*; *South-East Asia in Turmoil*; and *Time Out of Hand: Revolution and Reaction in Southeast Asia*.¹⁴ The new nations of Southeast Asia, indeed the entire region of Southeast Asia, were measured, classified, categorised in the period of decolonisation. There was an Asia-Watch on Southeast Asia long before the present-day NGO surfaced. At the beginning of the new millennium it is now possible to understand and appreciate that internationally organised and financed academic combines were involved in generating the intellectual industry for Southeast Asian Studies. Elsewhere it has been uncovered that Southeast Asian Studies was nurtured deep in secrecy by victorious European military powers after World War Two that were withdrawing from the region. The colluding universities and institutions included Johns' Hopkins University, Cornell University, Oxford University, Cambridge University, Hong Kong University, University of Malaya in Singapore, other universities in China, Korea and Japan and the British Foreign Office. The origins of area studies were shrouded with hidden intentions. The Anglo-American axis promoted area studies to ensure that the region remained in place for their eventual return (see Document 1).

Of course, the unearthing of these concealed operations does not explain everything that came to pass in the recent history of the development of Southeast Asian Studies. As we have already suggested, the rapid production and expanded reproduction of historical knowledge of Southeast Asia is intertwined with the twin themes of regional security and the expansion of capital in the 1940s and 1950s. There was an absolute lack of transparency as international funding agencies combined with universities and state institutions to mobilise Southeast Asian Studies to 'Save the Free World' from the perils of Communism and the 'revolutionary fires' that appeared to be engulfing China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia, and even Malaysia.

While the role of US foreign policymaking (together with its now British subsidiary at the Foreign Office) helps to account for the strategic dimensions of this project, then the role of the Bretton Woods institutions—the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)—and other international agencies was crucial for organising world

Political Ideology in Malaysia: Reality and the Beliefs of an Elite, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969; Frank N. Tranger, *Burma: From Kingdom to Republic*, London, Pall Mall Press, 1966; David A. Wilson, *United States and the Future of Thailand*, New York, Praeger, 1970; D.K. Wyatt, *Politics of Reform in Thailand*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970.

¹⁴ David J. Steinberg, *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, New York, Thomson, 1971; Robert Shaplen, *Time Out of Hand: Revolution and Reaction in South East Asia*, London, Deutsch, 1969; Brian Crozier, *South-East Asia in Turmoil*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965.

Document 1: Johns Hopkins University's Secret Proposal to Establish a South East Asian Regional Studies Centre, 1952

SECRET SOUTH-EAST ASIA DEPT.

18/2/52

Johns Hopkins University proposal to establish
a South East Asian Regional
Studies Centre

284/1/102

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CLOSED UNTIL 1955

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S.E. ASIA

1952

CO 1022/350

Source: CO1022 Colonial Of.ce: South East Asia Department:
Original Correspondence, 1950-1956, Vol. 350
(Microfilm copy, University of Malaya Library)

capital for unfettered access to the region's resources. Governing the international economy was an idea made possible by the anarchy of the inter-war period and the shift in the US from isolation to global hegemony. In effect the Bretton Woods regime helped to constitutionalise a particular model of 'free market' development. As Richard Peet puts it: 'Such cooperation would be based on a world market, in which capital and goods might move freely, regulated by global institutions operating in the general interests of greater stability and

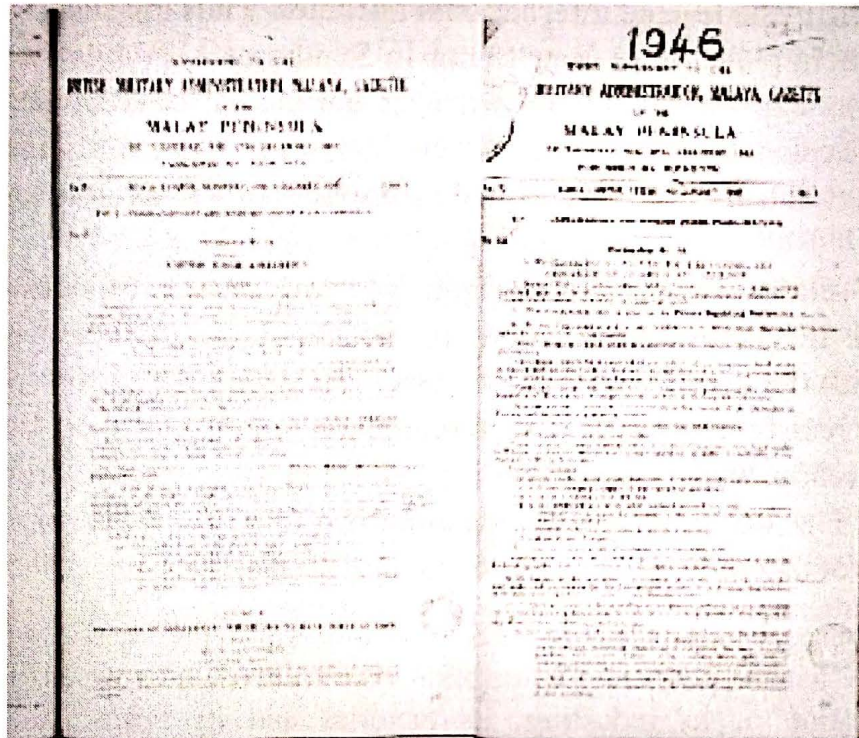
predictability'.¹⁵ Here the watchword was modernisation that relied fundamentally on market mechanisms, with private ownership and minimal barriers to the flow of private capital. The modernisation project for this country specifically was motivated by two important, and apparently paradoxical, agendas: the first was to develop Malaya economically but to do so by tying the country's fortunes explicitly to the rules of the political-economic game determined more and more by Washington; the second was to create a united Malayan nation through national integration under a compliant leadership. The paradox is that nationalist claims actually were subsumed to global imperatives.

A great deal has been written about the latter process but historians have tended to neglect the significance of the former. 'Development' and economic transformation were to be realised through planned change framed within the various Bretton Woods Agreements. These were all ideas inspired by the Marshall Plan, the aid programme suggested by US Secretary of State George C. Marshall in 1947 to reconstruct Europe and Japan after the Second World War. A similar model was adopted in the decade or so after 1945 throughout the New States of the region. Under the British Military Administration, for example, Malaya proclaimed the Bretton Woods Agreements of 1945 (and later in 1957) through Ordinances with the force of law (see Documents 2 and 3). These became the pillars on which the 'New State' would be constructed. The signed documents were legally deposited at the Archives of the US and its gold and cash entry for membership were deposited at the US Treasury. The IBRD instructed Malaya to establish its Central Bank as an agency of the IBRD and organised its Armed Forces as terms and conditions for the internationally organised flow of capital into its Development Plans. International capital, technology and aid also had a military imperative. The tentacles of the World Bank even reached far into the newly emerging academic community. One of the earliest of the University of Malaya's Vice-Chancellors, Sir Sydney Caine, had already served as Head of the British Treasury Delegation to Washington in the late 1940s and had been Chief of the World Bank Mission to Ceylon before taking up his UM appointment in 1952. He would, of course, be appointed in time as Director of the London School of Economics.

The Bretton Woods Agreements effectively marked the end of the colonial order—in some instances a decade before formal independence was declared—and opened markets, raw materials and labour to the penetration of international capital, technology and commodities in the former colonial territories. Multilateral capital investments and relations replaced former bilateral capital

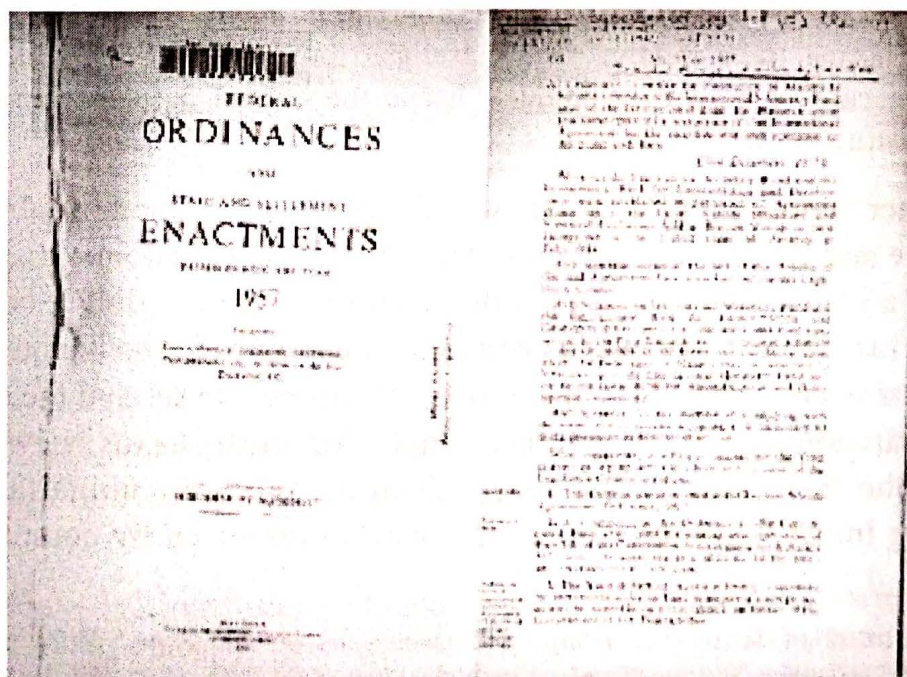
¹⁵ Richard Peet, *Unholy Trinity: The IMF, World Bank and WTO*, London, Zed Books, 2003, p. 27.

**Document 2: Proclamation No. 29 and Proclamation No. 32:
Bretton Woods Agreements, 27 December 1945**



Source: British Military Administration Gazette of the Malay Peninsula, Department of Publicity and Printing (National Archives of Malaysia)

**Document 3: Federal Ordinance No. 75 of 1957:
Bretton Woods Agreements, 30 December 1957**



Source: Federal Ordinances and State and Settlement Enactments, 1957, Government Printer, 1959 (National Archives of Malaysia)

investments and relations. As the real genesis of contemporary globalisation, finance capital was embedded into the circuits of capital through the structures of the IBRD, IMF and related international agencies. Thus the succession of five-year development plans of all New States in Southeast Asia must be understood not so much as expressions of the wave of nationalist developmentalism (the conventional explanation) but rather in the context of the emerging New World Order based on subsuming the nationalist impulse to the exigencies of finance capital.

Bilateral relations were transformed into multilateral relations at Bretton Woods. While the various delegations to the negotiating process were getting acquainted with the details of its provisions—including the British who were in no position to resist the plans given the impoverished state of their finances—the Americans already had a very clear idea of what they wanted from this New World Order. The US position was announced publicly on the very first day of the Bretton Woods conference in the following terms:

The purpose of the Conference is ... wholly within the American tradition, and completely outside political consideration. The United States wants, after this war, full utilization of its industries, its factories and its farms; full and steady employment for its citizens, particularly its ex-servicemen; and full prosperity and peace. It can have them only in a world with a vigorous trade. But it can have such trade only if currencies are stable, if money keeps its value, and if people can buy and sell with the certainty that the money they receive on the due date will have the value contracted for – thence the first proposal, the Stabilization Fund. With value secured and held stable, it is next desirable to promote world-wide reconstruction, revive normal trade, and make funds available for sound enterprises, all of which will in turn call for American products hence the second proposal for the Bank for Reconstruction and Development.¹⁶

In other words, Bretton Woods was the occasion for the formalisation of US dominance and British collaboration into a new world economic dispensation, in particular a hegemonic monetary order centred on the US dollar, complete with enforcing institutions. There is a great deal of evidence in the historical record of both collusion and coercion in the making of this new order and the constellation of post-war power it reflected. The Anglo-American nexus viewed the New States of the 'Free World', including Malaysia, in highly utilitarian ways. The underlying thrust was the creation of a world dominated by competition, trade

¹⁶ US Department of State, *Proceedings and Documents on the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, July 1-22, 1944*, Vol. II, Washington, US Government Printing Office, 1948, p. 1148 cited in Peet, *Unholy Trinity*, p. 47.

and markets in the classical economic sense and the New States came to be valued only in terms of the total value of their final goods and services (Gross Domestic Product, or GDP) and the total of incomes earned in producing that output (Gross Domestic Income, or GDI). In so doing, the Americans, in league with their British counterparts and their financial institutions, were able to monitor the variables in the National Income Accounts of the New States to serve their own agenda. This was not visible at that time but today these sources are vital for the reconstruction of the economic history of an important period.¹⁷

In the crucial decade from 1944 to 1955—from Bretton Woods to Bandung—the new American global empire and the vestigial European empires in the region understood perfectly that Southeast Asia was their industrial heartland that had to be won and maintained. They set about systematically to constitutionalise, institutionalise and rationalise an economic order that would govern the ‘developmental’ economies of the New States in ways that would lock them into a peripheral position in that order. A key element of this strategy was the discursive power of ideas and knowledge. In the economic realm, this meant advocating the discourse of classical, liberal economics. Geopolitically, ideas of the ‘proper’ function of the colonial and then post-colonial state were extended in an age of the Cold War to ensure political compliance in the name of the ‘containment’ of Communism. In the intersection of these discourses there emerged a strange kind of cross-breed New State, at once fiercely wedded to nationalism and the project of ‘Third Worldism’ while, at the very same time, locked into geostrategic and geoeconomic historical processes that cemented their political and economic dependency. The old webs of relationships that had historically created, distributed and reproduced the wealth of Asia for generations were once again ruptured for the next half century of the region’s history.

As we have seen, the New State—in both its colonial and post-colonial variants—defined its social order and within its territorial boundaries set out to create the colonial knowledge necessary to reproduce and perpetuate itself after its own image. There is no doubt that this monumental effort of data collection

¹⁷The creation and analysis of the historical national accounts of pre-independence Malaya is a major research effort of the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya. See Raja Nazrin, ‘Historical GDP statistics of Malaya, 1900-1939: progress and perspectives’, Paper delivered at XIII International Economic History Congress, Buenos Aires, 22-26 July 2002.

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and interpretation has left historians with an invaluable set of tools which form one indispensable primary source for the reconstruction of the past. The emerging colonial states and their officials and associates collected a series of records reflecting their own forms of positivist thinking and comprehension, embedding and reproducing their own preoccupations and priorities. These colonial and post-colonial acquired facts became knowledge. Such knowledge was institutionalised and served as a state instrument that transformed knowledge into power. In the early stages this knowledge was articulated as travel logs and memoirs, the study of languages, the compilation of dictionaries, the collection of laws and written histories, religion and customs. Culture, language and literature were appropriated for colonial intervention and expansion. In its mature years the colonial state created useful knowledge as published reports, statistical returns, official proceedings, census returns, trigonometrical surveys, administrative histories and legal codes marking the deepening of colonial rule. The colonialists did keep meticulous record especially about the economy and manpower. But it should be obvious that they recorded what was important to them, what was relevant to them. They reconstructed their image of the 'Malay world' in terms of their own understandings of community, territorial space and time. And by the same token we need to also ask about the absences and the lacunae in this record: what was left out and why? What was deemed irrelevant and why? What do we need to know in order to create a more complete picture of the past and present?

For the proto-colonial and colonial pioneers, the first step in acquiring facts was to learn the local language, histories and customs of the peoples that spoke the language. This then became an ongoing intellectual project for more than three centuries as the colonial ideologues set about crafting their versions of history, in a localised version of 'orientalism' that Edward Said so brilliantly uncovered more than 25 years ago.¹⁸ In 1701, for example, Thomas Bowrey published the first Malay and English dictionary entitled *A Dictionary English and Malayo, Malayo and English*.¹⁹ He gathered his knowledge over nineteen years travelling and trading in the Asiatic archipelago. More than a century later, William Marsden published his *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language in two parts Malayan and English and English and Malayan*.²⁰ Here the colonial text is

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin, 1978.

¹⁹ Thomas Bowrey, *A Dictionary English and Malayo, Malayo and English: To which is added some short grammar rules ... Together with a table of time*, London, Samuel Bridge, 1701.

²⁰ William Marsden, *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language, in Two Parts: Malayan and English and English and Malayan*, London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1812.

barely hidden in the preface. The *Dictionary*, Marsden writes, 'is intended for the use of the European who wishes to become master of the idioms and phraseology of the Malayan...'. It is intended for those who wish 'to express himself with sufficient propriety to be intelligible for the ordinary purpose of speech...'.²¹ More than this stated intention, his

...wish has been to facilitate the labours of those who, not regarding the Malayan as merely an oral language, are desirous of studying its literature, and rendering themselves qualified to read and translate, not only letters on commercial and political business, but also compositions of a higher description, both in prose and verse...²²

Marsden had anticipated that some day these intelligent and well-instructed Europeans—with their commercial and political preoccupations—would have discovered and collected the extensive collections of historical annals and codes of law in the Malay language that would aid the murky business of empire. He had little doubt that the British influence would become unbounded throughout the Asiatic world.

It is clear that the study of the Malay language and Malay literature informed—indeed was a precondition for—the process of colonial state formation. The preface to R.J. Wilkinson's *A Malay-English Dictionary (Romanised)*, published initially in 1903 and in then in the 1932 edition, pays tribute to the early British Residents of the Malay States.²³ Referring to Sir Hugh Low, Wilkinson intones that with 'singlemindedness' he pursued his course to 'educate and advise the native Rajas' and this was only made possible by an official possessing 'real knowledge of the language and an understanding of local customs'.²⁴ In the first decade of the twentieth century Wilkinson was requested by Sir Ernest Birch, with the endorsement of the Colonial State, to compile a series of *Papers on Malay Subjects*.²⁵ Language, literature and culture were brought together as a field of study for the further accumulation of colonial knowledge. The resulting field notes were systematically written up on accepted principles of 'scientific', utilitarian knowledge creation and formed part of the ongoing expansion of colonial knowledge. These colonial facts were presented as usable forms in the various journals and textbook publications, and were the

²¹ Marsden, *Dictionary*, p. iii.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ R.J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary (Romanised)*, Singapore, Kelley and Walsh, 1903, p. i.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ R.J. Wilkinson, *Papers on Malay Subjects*, Kuala Lumpur, FMS Government Press, 1908 [reprinted and edited by Peter L. Burns, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1971].

basis of informed knowledge that trained colonial officers in the Malayan Civil Service. In other words, a critical reading of these invaluable texts provide an important insight not only into the process of colonial knowledge formation but also the ideologies that influenced the construction of colonial social identity and political institutions. In so doing, the British not only appropriated cultural knowledge of the Malay world but then domesticated such knowledge in the creation of state/imperial forms and structures to facilitate their hegemony over local culture. History thus served as the handmaiden for cultural hegemony over society, creating the basis for inclusion and exclusion, for processes of indigenous co-optation, each of which has been a major legacy for the post-colonial state.

This argument can best be illustrated with reference to the use made of census reports by the British colonial state which demonstrate the distinction between the community and the needs of the state. These reports weighed heavily on the needs of the New State. A population census was taken every ten years and in the twentieth century began with the 1901 census. These reports categorised and analysed basic facts monitoring the 'civilising process' and assisting in the colonial plan. Census Enactments were undertaken to make the process of data collection legally enforceable; census schedules were executed by supervisors and enumerators. In the 1911 census, for example, a total of 2,451 persons were mobilised during the census period as enumerators for the Federated Malay States:

An idea of the work involved may be gained by the fact that over 300,000 Census schedules were printed more than 1,100,000 slips of cardboard for tabulation were printed and cut, while 3,500 book covers to hold schedules were made, and some 300,000 house members were prepared.²⁶

There is little doubt that the census operations were an important mechanism for the empowerment of the colonial state. Communities were divided into male, female, single, married and widowed, age and occupation. There were numerous other ways in which the community was dissected and the information processed and published in census reports. The accumulation of knowledge through census data again demonstrates the narrowing down of the expansive space of the Asiatic archipelago and the creation of the confined colonial state. In the 1911 and 1921 census, Malays of the peninsula and those of the archipelago such as the Javanese, Banjarese, Boyanese, Mendelin, Krinchi, Jambi, Achinese, Bugis

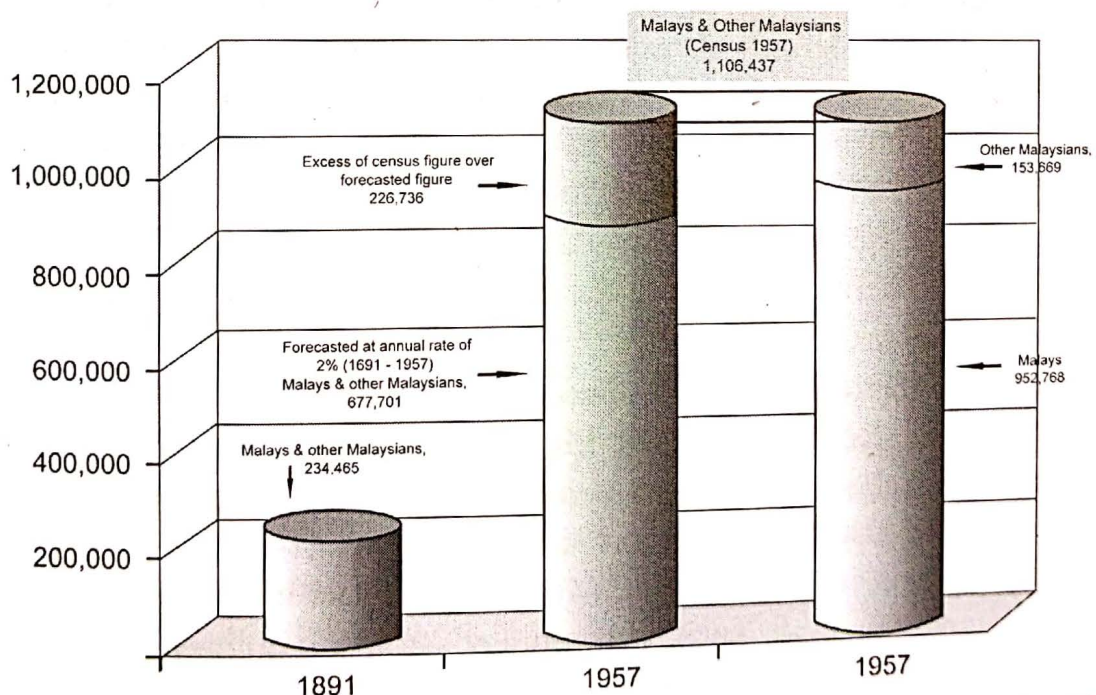
²⁶ A.M. Pountney, *The Census of the Federated Malay States*, London, Darling and Son Ltd., 1911, p. 15.

and the aboriginal communities were identified as Malays in the interpretation of data. In the 1931 census a distinction was made between the Malays of British Malaya and other Malaysians from the archipelago:

The peoples included under the head 'Other Malaysians' in the present report may be ethnographically akin to, but distinct from the Malays and politically alien: Menangkabaus and other Sumatran peoples politically alien but ethnographically indistinguishable from the Malay of British Malaya; and aboriginals ethnographically far removed the Malays but truly 'people of the country' than any other race – in fact the only autochthonous population. The highly controversial question of the origin of the 'Malay race' may be left to the anthropologist...²⁷

In the 1957 census the Superintendent of Census made the decision to draw the distinction between the Malays of Malaya and the others describing themselves as Boyanese, Javanese, Banjarese, Bugis and others as Indonesian.²⁸ The New States of Malaya and Indonesia had emerged and the communities were marginalised (see Table 1).

Table 1: Homogenisation of the Asiatic Archipelago, Federated Malay States, 1891 and 1957



Source: Historical National Accounts of Pre-Independence Malaya, Research Project, Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya.

²⁷ C.A. Vlienland, *A Report on the 1931 Census and on Certain Problems of Vital Statistics*, London, The Crown Agents, 1932, p. 38.

²⁸ H. Fell, *1957 Population Census of the Federation of Malaya*, Kuala Lumpur, Department of Statistics, Federation of Malaya, 1958, p. 12.

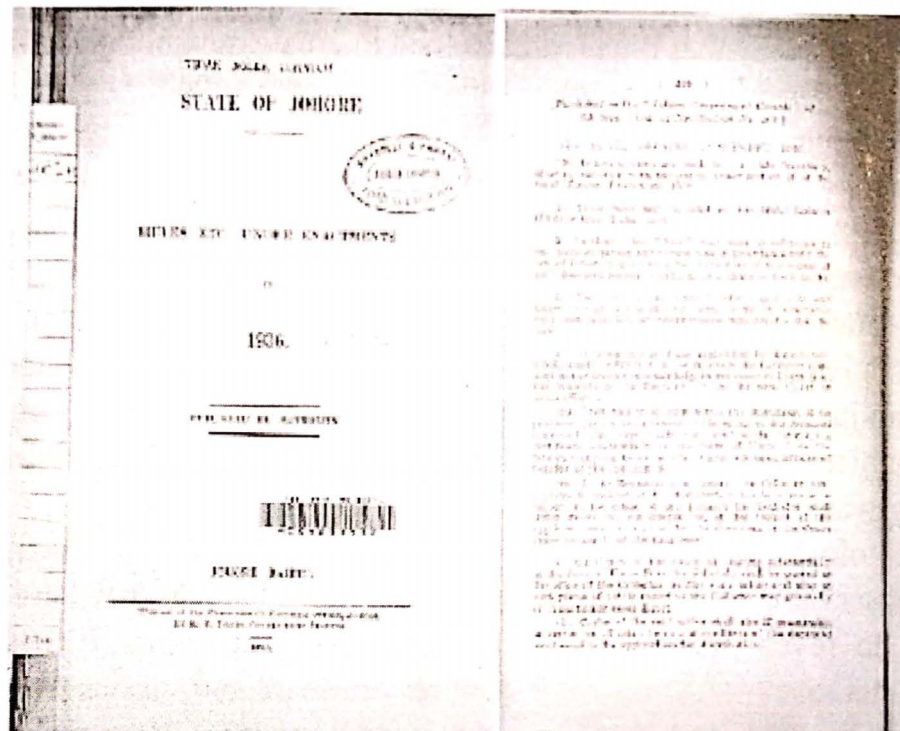
At the local level another form of head count was the land settlement surveys conducted by the Settlement Officers. These settlement surveys identified ownership of agricultural and housing lots, nature and age of cultivation and plotted these useful facts on survey maps. Other useful facts collected for administrative purposes were answers to questions such as who pointed out the boundary stones at the time of settlement; does the owner reside on the land; name of the authorised representative; address for service of Land Office Notices; and general remarks on cultivation. These field details were transferred onto land registers for the collection of land revenues and the enforcement of land legislature. The Chief Settlement Office, Batu Pahat, files in the Johor Archives cover the period 1933-40. It contains 23 boxes packed with files. Each box measures 8 inches and it is not difficult to imagine the amount of useful data collected for colonial knowledge.²⁹

The assets and liabilities of the poorest sectors in the colonial social order were documented through a remarkable Enactment of 1936 named Small Estates Deceased (see Document 4). All inheritors of properties not exceeding \$2,000 in value had to declare on standard forms all movable and immovable properties, not exceeding \$2,000 in total value, of the deceased, accompanied by the Death and Burial Certificates. The data contained in these documents include ethnicity, nature of occupation, length of residence, age, cause of death, value of movable and immovable properties, nature of movable and immovable properties, amount of debts, reasons for borrowing, residence of money-lenders and relationship of heirs to the deceased. In the District of Batu Pahat alone there exist a total of 1,692 file cases in the Johor Archives. One startling conclusion that can be drawn from this statistical evidence is that the longer one lived and eked a living in the countryside the poorer one became.

The annual macro picture of the progress of colonial rule is contained in the published Annual Reports of each Malay State and Straits Settlements. The format for each of these reports was standardised into different sections based on the colonial administrative structure of the Malay States. A standard annual report contains a brief history of the Malay State in its introduction followed by section on financial, land, survey, mining, customs, public works, police and prisons, courts, legislation, education, health, district and European staff. Each of these brief section accounts was compiled from typewritten annual departmental reports at the State level that were forwarded towards the end of the year to the British Resident/Advisor's Office. At the district level each District Office

²⁹ Shaharil Talib, 'Global History at the Local Level, Batu Pahat District, 1900-1941', Working Paper, The Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto, 1990, pp. 285-95.

Document 4: The Small Estates Enactment, Johore, 1936



Source: Government Printing Office, Johore, 1937.
(University of Malaya Law Library)

maintained administrative history records of the District Office, Land Office, Forest Department, Mines Department, Chief Settlement Officer's Office, Collector Land Revenue and other colonial district departments. Collectively these facts were the epistemological space created for colonial rule. The recapturing and relocating of these historical records are fundamental to refining existing academic spaces and creating new ones.³⁰

³⁰ A regional approach is required to breakdown the inbuilt facts of colonial knowledge. See for example Maznah Mohamad, 'The Malay Handloom Weavers: A Study of the growth and decline of traditional manufacture', PhD thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, 1989; Mohammad Raduan Mohd. Ariff, 'Dari Pemungutan Tripang ke penundaan undang: Satu kajian mengenai sejarah perkembangan perusahaan perikanan di Borneo Utara, 1750-1990', PhD thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, 1993; Siti Khajar Md. Shah, 'Sejarah Pertahanan Pulau Singapura dan Wilayahnya, 1819-1927', MA thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, 1995; Hanizah Idris, 'Pembangunan dan Perkembangan Infrastruktur Pelabuhan Singapura, 1819-1941', MA thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, 1995; Ichiro Sugimoto, 'Analisis struktur pentadbiran kewangan British di negeri Johor, 1896-1957', MA thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, 1997 and Jiram anak Jamit, 'Perkembangan pentadbiran kewangan Brunei di bawah system Residen (1906-1959)', MA thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Malaya, 1997.

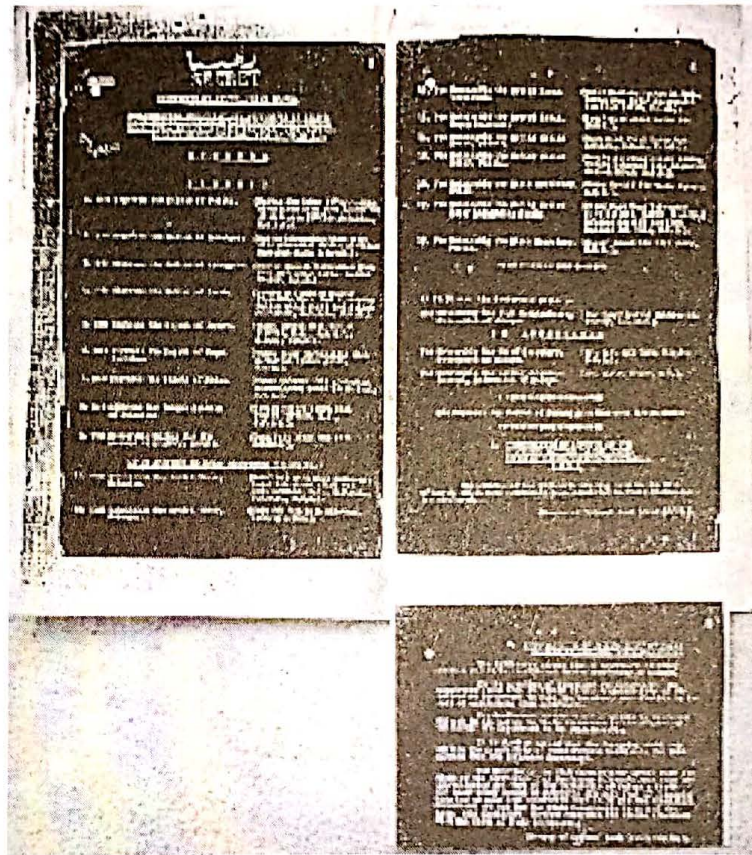
These examples—from census reports, settlement surveys, and annual reports—contain the raw data relevant to the colonial project. One crucial aspect of this was the way that the records helped to create new notions of territoriality since they referred to geographical data that were catalogued for each political unit in a similar way. These records are important not only in the sense that they were used by the British colonial administrators, forming the basis for modern historiography and geography. They are also central as a source ready for reinterpretation and as a vital corrective for a new interpretation of the past and present. Here one thing should be emphasised. The historical record—the administrative artifacts—created by the British scholar-administrators was much more than just the realisation of a utilitarian administrative policy and was much more sophisticated than simply an instrument of colonial oppression, though it certainly was both of these things.

The colonial discourses and colonial knowledge reflected the rich and often astute observations on the cultures which they administered. Part of the task, then, is to reveal the processes of transmission of colonial knowledge. But beyond this, one of the most important historiographical lessons from this record is the way in which such discourses and knowledge were adapted and reproduced by indigenous society itself. Imported knowledge was also acquired, internalised and utilised with all kinds of intended and unintended consequences. One of the most interesting areas of the new historiography lies in the study of how the colonial discourse itself was appropriated and indigenised, and then fed into the nationalist discourses as they began to make an impact from the 1930s onwards. As such, colonial history and geography became also the basis for national history and national geography and the portents of a potential new nation and state.

No matter how sophisticated and nuanced the colonial record may appear to be, and no matter the extent to which the colonial forms of knowledge were opened up for reinterpretation, transformation and appropriation in the process of indigenisation, there is also little doubt the colonial project also engaged in social and cultural marginalisation. This was obviously true in relation to the officially sanctioned content of educational curricula. For example, Sanskrit and Arabic languages and scripts that were central to the Malay language and literature were excluded in the curriculum. Religion, history, economics and law were equally marginalised from Malay Studies and the other fields that made up the humanities and social sciences (see Document 5).

The anthropological dimension of these texts—specifically genealogies, customs and religion, whose common heritage carried the families that created

*Document 5: The Sixteenth Meeting of the Conference of Rulers, Malay States,
24 May 1951*



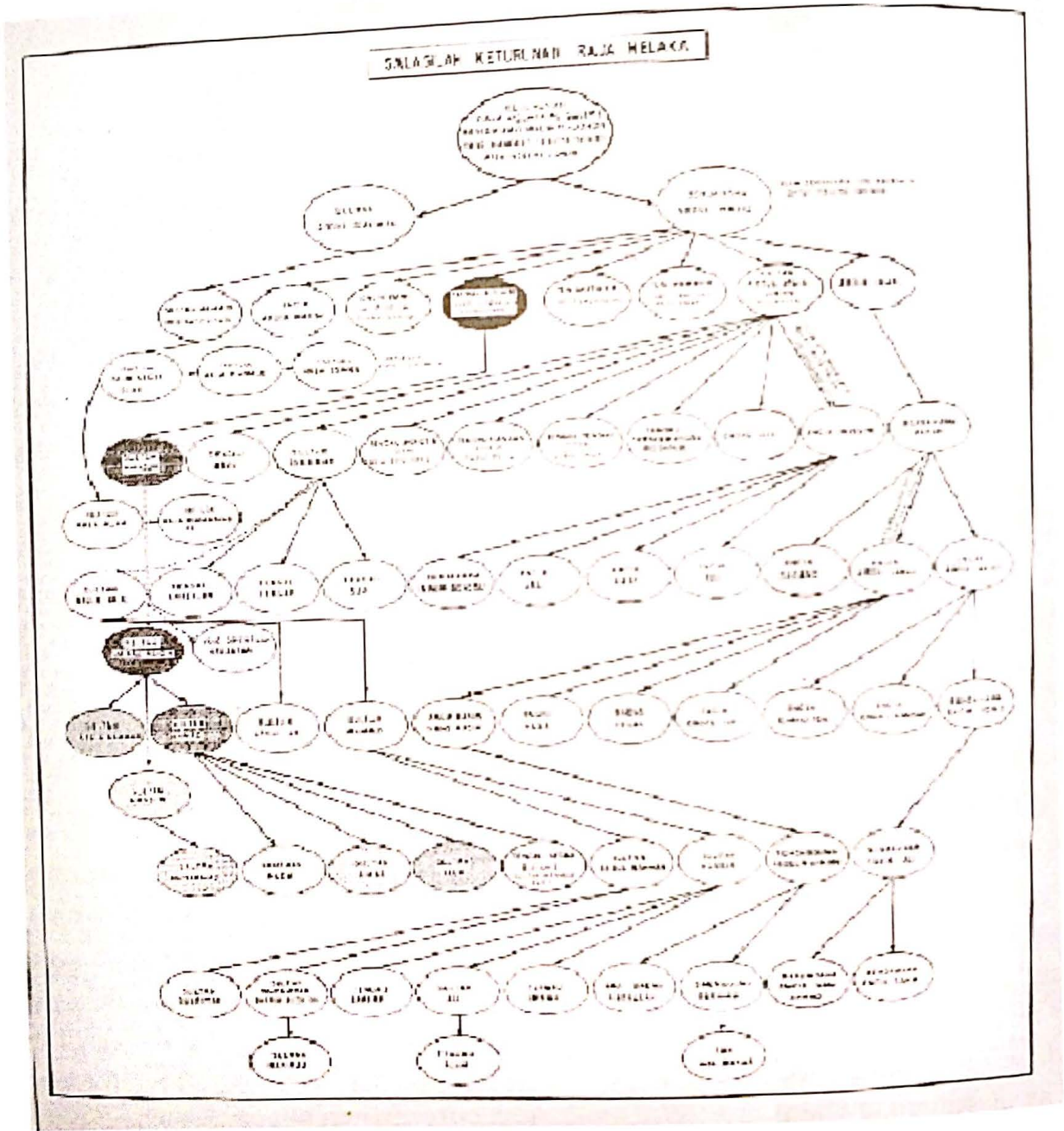
Source: CO537 Colonial Office and Predecessors:
Confidential General and Confidential Original Correspondence, 1759-1955.
(Microfilm copy, University of Malaya Library)

these manuscripts beyond defined colonial boundaries—were also ignored. It took a long time for those who made their name in the field of Malay literature to recognise that the Trengganu Sultanate is the direct male line successor of the Malaccan Empire (see Document 6).³¹ It will take an even longer time to realise that in Kelantan there are the Bugis, Achenese, Minangkabaus, Javanese and others from the Asiatic archipelago who proclaim themselves as Kelantanese.

Today, historians have a unique opportunity to reassess the past not only by utilising the colonial record—this would be the basis, for instance, of a new economic history—but also by making use of hitherto neglected sources that have too easily escaped the scrutiny of those preoccupied only with the ‘national’

³¹ Ali Haji ibn Raja Ahmad, Raja, *Tuhfat al-nafis: naskah Terengganu*, Kuala Terengganu, The House of Tengku Ismail, 1991, with an Introduction by Shaharil Talib, Ismail Hussein and Michiko Nakahara.

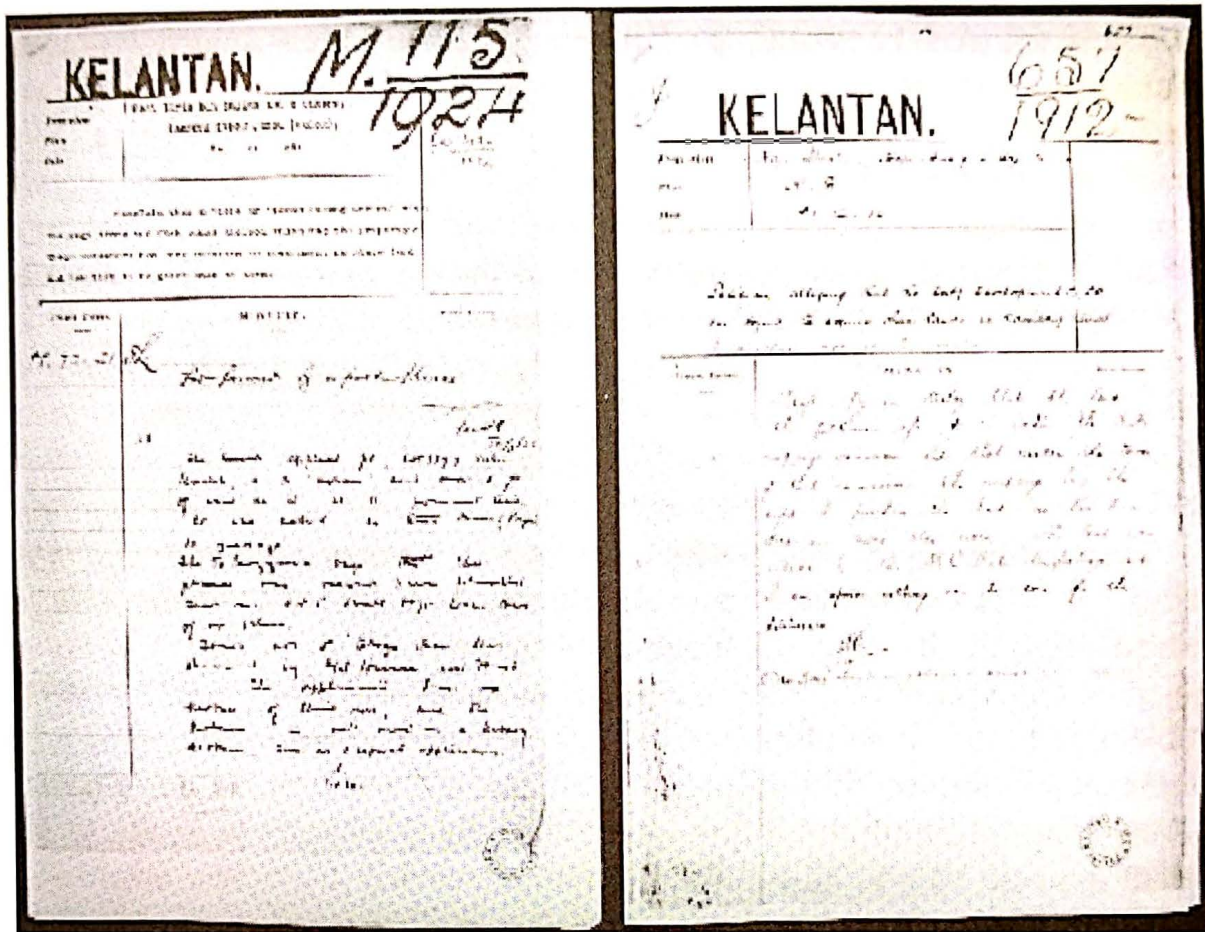
Document 6: Genealogy of the Malacca Rulers



Source: Ali Haji ibn Raja Ahmad, Raja, *Tuhfat al-nafis: naskah Terengganu*, Kuala Terengganu, The House of Tengku Ismail, 1991.

or state level of analysis. Colonial knowledge formation was and remains important. But we also need to be aware of other texts, other sources, that can offer different insights. Here I am thinking of examples such as the humble petition letter, an historian's goldmine (see Documents 7 and 8).

Document 7 and 8: Petition Letters, Kelantan, 1912 and 1924



Source: BAK 657/1912 and BAK (M Series) 115/1924.
(National Archives of Malaysia)

These letters emanated from a section of society that could not readily represent themselves in the formal colonial record. They have largely disappeared from history. Not to be forgotten too were the thousands of anguishing petition letters from Chinese small-holders experiencing hardship and poverty in Batu Pahat District that were silenced from the records by colonial officials who discarded them in wastepaper baskets. But the very act of going to someone to write the letter bears out this marginalisation of a large and diverse segment of Malaysian history. The existence of the petition letters compels the historian to ask who these people were who went to petition writers; what were their petitions about?³² From a methodological point of view, how can we draw together the official census data with the richer, messier reality presented by the

³² Shaharil Talib, 'Voices from the Kelantan Desa 1900-1940', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1983, pp. 177-95.

letters? Surely, here lies one way of not being in thrall to the colonial record seeing it rather as but one discourse of power against which the marginalised often resisted. Another example of the neglected historical source would be historical genealogies which draw attention to the importance of lineage and kinship and act as a counterpoint to the official history of the state. Here genealogies are the raw materials that challenge our methodological abilities to reconstruct the kinship of the marginalised, establishing lineages of resistance and accommodation, when the institutions of the colonial state were intent on reducing people to subjects and to commodities.³³

IV

This lecture began with a bold and critical claim: that too much of what passes for Malaysian historical studies today is inadequate to the task of understanding the interdependent and multi-scalar world we inhabit. It is not an exaggeration to speak of a crisis of confidence and a crisis of method. Part of the problem, as I see it, is that there has been too little critical self-reflection on what the historian does, too little critical examination of the sources at our disposal, and therefore a lack of clarity about where the discipline may be heading. The current impasse follows an era when historians seemed to be clear about what was significant in the past and how to analyse it. This refers to the first post-colonial generation who inherited the rich colonial archive and wanted to refashion it in the euphoria of independence and the nation-building project. Much of value was created in historical studies. But little of this work went beyond an elaboration of themes and topics that would have been familiar to the colonial administrator-scholars. Today we have entered a period when issues of significance, method, theory, and narrative are all in the process of creative reformulation. This is certainly a challenge. This should also be an exciting time to be (or to become) an historian, but the job entails more demands and risks than when core issues and procedures in the discipline were assumed to be settled and obvious. The purpose of this lecture has been to set out what I see as some of historical studies' shortcomings in order to help appreciate history's present prospects, opportunities and uncertainties.

I began by laying out, in very broad terms, what the project of crafting a new historiography for Malaysia at the beginning of the millennium might look like.

³³ Jeffrey Finestone with Shaharil Talib, *The Royal Families of South East Asia*, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia: Shahindera Sdn. Bhd., 2002, 2nd ed.

As such we need to ask provocative question, of which the two most important are probably the following: how much about your own history do you know? How do you know what your own history is? The answer to these questions was undertaken in three cumulative steps. The first was to offer a critique of existing writing—the privilege of every generation of historians, to be sure—in order to ask new questions of old materials as well as to identify new sources of knowledge formation. As the detailed analysis of our historical records demonstrated, what this means in the first instance is a critical engagement with existing records and here we identified the wide range of materials that derive from the colonial archives and the official documents of international institutions as they shaped and moulded the trajectory of national history in the twentieth century. In addition, our study suggested that the ‘official’ record needs to be supplemented by the creative use of previously marginalised records, those contained, *inter alia*, in the petition letters or genealogies.

The second step was to suggest that any creative re-crafting of the sources reveals something integral to the history of the Asiatic archipelago in general and of Malaya/Malaysia in particular: this history has always been made by the interactions of multiple scales of human interaction. Even a cursory understanding of the Southeast Asian world before colonialism points to this essential truth: that this world was infinitely flexible and liquid; that it embodied sophisticated networks of human intercourse; that it contained within it the full potential for human development. As we have seen, the colonial project—with its own priorities in relation to knowledge formation—irrevocably altered this pre-colonial world. Taking a utilitarian and positivist view of both history and geography, the colonial discourse managed to reconceptualise and objectify the liquid world into a new cartography of fixed territorial boundaries that reflected the intensified imperial competition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus what had been a multi-scalar world was reduced, through modern historiography and geography, to the bounded world of the colonial state. This became the spatio-temporal fix that would become the object of the new geopolitical and geoeconomic priorities of the post-war world now dominated by the US rise to globalism. The task of the new historiography is not to ignore this history still less the production and reproduction of knowledge that undergirded its key priorities. Rather, it is to understand the interplay between the brute material realities of the colonial and global imposition and the ways in which ideas, ideology and knowledge played an absolutely central role in its reproduction. History was crafted by the powerful and some of that understanding needs to be recaptured and re-crafted. One way we have suggested

this can be done in through a fruitful dialogue with the methods and sources usually attributed to International Relations which can open up new avenues of enquiry for historians. That much should be self-evident. It is an object lesson in the way that regions and region-ness are constantly created and re-created. In the pre-colonial world, we witness the utter fluidity of the liquid world—literally encompassed by the sea-borne ties of commerce and kinship, and metaphorically represented by the *tanah air*. This was the world that was defended so eloquently by Sultan Ala'uddin of Makassar when he wrote in 1615 that God gave the sea 'in common'. In the colonial world, by contrast, we see the making of the region as a fixed entity bounded, annexed, and territorialised and then connected to the centres of empire through a series of hubs-and-spokes.

And third, only once we have recaptured a critical reading of these transformations can a sense of the multi-scalar past and present be brought back to the centre of the historian's craft, as well as a sense of the plurality of history that demands the inclusion of those conventionally excluded from history. It is a historiography that can successfully cut across cultural and linguistic barriers, what we could call the 'tribal' barriers of the modern nation-state. It is equally the project of writing Malaysian history 'from below', by bringing the 'subaltern' (the peasant or the economically dispossessed) into the territory largely occupied by nationalist history.

The new historiography contains within it many overlapping goals. In dialogue with other social scientists, with their own preoccupation with general models of social explanation and behaviour, the historian must foster the capacities to read abstract and theoretical treatments of history and to apply them to discussion and research. At the same time, historians must encourage a collective, critical process of exploring and evaluating ideas and approaches to historical study. Further, historians need to be in a position to generate a usable body of knowledge through which to approach and appreciate recent historical literature, as well as a wider range of primary sources. This entails once again the artisanal skills of constantly revisiting the archival materials to hone the craft that is history. And this is not to forget the pedagogical objectives of our primary research—the workbench at which new knowledge is created: building students' capabilities to develop research projects, and creating a shared commitment to support one another's efforts in this process. The task of the new historiography, then, is to bring all our skills to a sharper focus and a higher plane. This work, in my experience, involves collaboration rather than competition, critique rather than complacency. This is the challenge to the historian of the twenty-first century. Failure to meet the challenge is to court the danger of homogenisation of our way of life and to once again surrender our collective destiny.

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STATE OF KELANTAN.

Notice No. 39/1919.

Whereas in Kelantan it frequently is the case that a fish pond situated upon the land of one person is the property of another; and whereas this often leads to a dispute between the owner of the land and the owner of the fish pond: it has pleased His Highness the Sultan in Council this day to order as follows:-

Whenever a dispute of this nature arises, it shall be the duty of the Pengarah of the daerah wherein the land is situated to report the matter to the Collector of Land Revenue. The Collector may then decide what is the proper value of the fish pond, and in writing order the owner of the land to pay the amount so decided to the owner of the fish pond; and the owner of the land must deposit the amount within fifteen days from the date of the order at the Land Office, where the owner of the fish pond can receive it.

When the amount so ordered has been deposited in the Land Office, all right and interest in the fish pond will pass from its former owner to the owner of the land.

Either party if dissatisfied with the Collector's valuation of the fish pond may within fifteen days from the date of the order appeal in writing to the High Court, on payment of a fee of 91 as costs.

Passed in Council on 18th November, 1919.