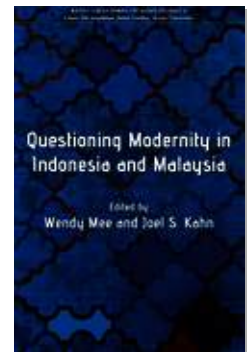# Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

Edited by Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

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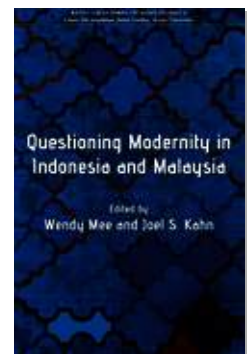
Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Introduction

Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn

This book brings together theoretical debates on the concept of modernity on the one hand, and the study of Indonesian and Malaysian modern social and cultural formations on the other. It represents a contribution to a much broader and ongoing project, namely, the critical engagement with the concept of modernity in the analysis of Asian economic, political and cultural processes. The contributors to this volume are highly sceptical of arguments in favour of Asian exceptionalism, in which a theoretical engagement with the western concept of modernity is rejected outright on the grounds of a radical difference between East and West. Instead, all argue that contemporary economies, polities, societies and cultural formations in Asia are best described as fully modern. And yet they also argue that Indonesian and Malaysian modernities cannot be viewed as merely derivative of a European/Western modernity.

The volume demonstrates the importance of comparative approaches to the study of modernity on the basis of concrete historical, cultural and social formations. The contributors do this from a particular vantage point in peninsular and insular Southeast Asia, namely, from the perspective of Malaysia and Indonesia. The volume does not pretend to be comprehensive in its thematic and geographic scope. It does, however, cover a large range of important "modern" social processes and cultural orientations in Indonesia and Malaysia, including globalisation, transnationalism, nationalism, identity, the state, secularism, capitalism, techno-rationality and religion. The contributors deal with themes such as the constitution of modern forms of transnational/cross border identities; constructions of citizenship in particular national spaces; forms of religious revivalism; capitalist and economic relations; gender; youth culture, and popular ideas of the modern. In so doing, they also reposition some of the central

theoretical assumptions within modern social theory, thereby showing the important contribution that scholarship on Southeast Asia can make to the theorisation of modernity.

There are two reasons which make the case for this bringing together of theoretical debates over a supposedly "Western" concept on the one hand and the study of peninsular and insular Southeast Asia on the other an especially compelling one. Firstly, the impact of processes of cultural and institutional transformation typically labelled "modernising" have been so pervasive in this region over such an extended period of time, that it is not possible to ignore their role in the shaping of the cultures, societies, economies and polities that are the objects of our contemporary social scientific gaze. Yet, secondly, the concept of modernity when applied in the analysis of these non-Western societies is far from unproblematic. The essays in this book make a case for the value of revised understandings of modernity and of modernist theorising. They make the case not just, or even primarily, by appealing to theoretical argument, but by showing in concrete contexts the value of critically questioning our concepts of modernity in the analysis of contemporary Malaysian and Indonesian economic, political, cultural and religious landscapes. In this way, we — both "insiders" and "outsiders" — attempt to rethink our conceptual approach to conducting social research in Indonesia and Malaysia, and in particular, attempt to interrogate the traditions of thought and the conceptual apparatus that as social scientists we draw on in our "analyses" of these cultures, societies, economies and polities that are an integral part of a modernist imaginary.

The scope of this volume — with a focus on Indonesia and Malaysia — is part personal and part sociological. All the contributors have a long-standing interest in the study of Malaysia and Indonesia (with over half having research experience in both). This has confirmed our understanding of the enduring ties of commerce, migration, religion and language that exist between what are today called "Indonesia" and "Malaysia". These ties of geographical, social and cultural proximity are particularly prominent across Peninsula Malaysia, Sumatra, Java and Borneo, and continue to exist in modified forms despite the classification of the peoples of this region into distinct (sometimes overlapping) ethnic, racial and national categories. In addition to substantiating our focus on Indonesia and Malaysia, such ties lead several contributors to critically engage with theories of modernity from the perspective of a particular translocal/transnational space. From this perspective, several essays demonstrate how the study of frontiers, border zones and migration is important not only

to our understanding of modernising processes in Indonesia and Malaysia, but to social theories of modernity in general.

The shape and focus of this volume also grew out of our interest in the scholarship of Joel S. Kahn. This originally brought us together in a collective effort to critically examine the concept of modernity and theories of modernising processes in the study of Indonesia and Malaysia. For this reason, contributors draw on a number of themes from Kahn's critical engagement with the study of culture and modernity over the past three to four decades. Four themes receive particular attention, namely, an insistence that "culture" be viewed as a cultural construction; a recognition of the intercultural/intercivilisational foundations of modernity; an interest in the genealogies of modern forms of exclusion, and related to this, an acknowledgement that the "dark side" of contemporary life (i.e., its oppressive and non-emancipatory expressions) is fully a part of modernity; and finally, a respect for the ethnographic and for the views, opinions and cultural expressions that emerge out of everyday life.

There are many ways one could approach an evaluation of modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia. There is, for example, a well established tradition of political economy studies in Southeast Asia. Critical Marxist/socialist approaches have shown Southeast Asia to be a site of increasing economic differentiation, monetisation, and class inequality. Political institutions such as the nation-state have likewise garnered academic interest, with the nation-states of the region frequently measured in terms of milestones borrowed from a European tradition, such as hegemony, civil society, and liberal democracy. Many of these analyses draw on Gramscian, Foucauldian and feminist concepts to analyse media control; the political and economic reach of political institutions; the constitution of power in terms of identity politics, and the implications of social, political and economic change for gender relations within the household, within the workplace, and within society as a whole.

Many of the contributors to this book have themselves been involved in such analyses and as such recognise the extent to which such studies represent in general terms so many *applications* of already established theories and concepts of modernity. This is not to suggest that such studies have discounted the importance of local context in favour of prioritising imported abstract theoretical models; in fact, the very best of them are committed to investigating the meaning and direction of social change starting from the perspective of the local. Our point is, however, that the great bulk of these studies are not designed mainly or even in part as critical engagements with *theories of modernity* but rather with *the direction*

and consequences of modern social change in Southeast Asia, however that modernity may be conceptualised. In this volume we take a rather different approach by asking what might be gained from starting our analyses from an alternative vantage point, one which seeks at the outset to interrogate the assumptions underpinning our conceptualisation of "modernity", modernisation and the modern.

There are of course important differences among the contributors to this volume. Certainly, there is a range of perspectives amongst contributors to this book on the value of postcolonial and postmodern approaches. There are also differences in relation to the ongoing legacy of colonial rule; and to the strength of the nation-state *vis-à-vis* other local and global processes. Yet while we diverge on any number of issues, we agree on one basic premise: that the concept of modernity must be understood first and foremost as a sociological concept, and that as one of "our" own categories, "modernity" has only an ambiguous and impermanent relationship to the reality we seek to describe. One has only to recall nineteenth-century European conceptualisations of modernity and how they differ from those developed in the late twentieth century to appreciate such impermanence. This is not to suggest that there is no continuity in terms of ideas or interpretations but only the historically contingent nature of our theories, as they respond to institutional, cultural and technological changes over time. On both historical and comparative grounds, we therefore argue the need to analyse and problematise the premises and assumptions that inform our own categories of modernity and the modern.

Defining Modernity

This book is centrally concerned with theories of modernity. Yet none of the contributors provide an overarching "objective" definition of modernity or of the modern condition in general. There are good reasons for this absence. Firstly, the contributors would be hard pressed to agree upon a definition given the range of social processes discussed in this book and the extent to which each essay focuses on a quite specific set of questions. Secondly, it is unlikely that the contributors would be interested in formulating an integrated definition of "modernity" in any case. As we are only too aware, how one conceives of the meaning, direction and constitution of modernity directly influences the conclusions drawn. The effect of not sufficiently recognising this limitation has been the misrecognition of key social and cultural processes in Asian societies as somehow less or

pre-modern and as lacking globalising or universalising dimensions (see Kahn 2001 and 2006).

The terms modern, modernity, modernisation etc. are thrown about rather freely these days. Very generally one might look to a broadly shared tradition that sees modernity as an objectively identifiable socio-historical process of transformation out there in the world, one that began either in the sixteenth (or sometimes the eighteenth) century in Western Europe. Here modernity is used to refer to the result of a:

> process of modernization, by which the social world comes under the domination of asceticism, secularization, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the differentiation of the various spheres of the lifeworld, the bureaucratization of economic, political and military practices, and the growing monetarization of values. Modernity therefore [is seen to arise] with the spread of western imperialism in the sixteenth century; the dominance of capitalism in northern Europe … in the early seventeenth century; the acceptance of scientific procedures …; and preeminently with the institutionalization of Calvinistic practices and beliefs in the dominant classes of northern Europe. We can follow this process further through the separation of the family from the wider kinship group, the separation of the household and the economy, and the creation of the institution of motherhood in the nineteenth century. Although the idea of the citizen can be traced back to Greek times via the independent cities of the Italian states …, the citizen as the abstract carrier of universal rights is a distinctly modern idea. (Turner 1990: 6)

As this indicates, the term is generally used to describe a rather broad range of real world economic, political, and social processes, with the added assumption that these are somehow related and therefore that for a society to be described as fully modern, it must manifest not just some but all of these characteristics.

This widely shared view of the meaning of modernity has, however, proven to be problematic, as two decades or more of feminist, postcolonial, postmodern/poststructural and multicultural criticism has clearly demonstrated. Much of these criticisms will be well known to the readers of this volume, and there is no need to repeat them here. Suffice to point out that the more celebratory or triumphalist accounts of modernity and modernisation at best fail to account for — and at worst simply ignore — the co-existence of modernity's emancipatory ideals with institutions, practices and beliefs which appear to contradict these ideals in the starkest possible terms. Colonialism, patriarchy, racism, genocide, violence

and oppression are as much part of the history of "actually existing" modernities as are democracy, equality and universal human rights. While earlier modernist theorists tried to explain away such evidence of modernity's darker side as a manifestation of premodern "survivals", for most such critics this coexistence is not an accident but rather in some sense an inevitable correlate or consequence of modernity itself. Doing so allows us to see that a key problem of the modernist heritage in which we ourselves are embedded lies in the way that normative discourses on the modern are typically grounded in a vision of a pure or abstract modernity with its origins in the West, a modernity which then becomes indigenised or "contaminated" only when it travels eastwards.

If there is one general conclusion that can be drawn from the contributions to this book it would be that, up to now, the theories of modernity have proven unable to account for the diversity of modern social and cultural forms because (i) they tend to be framed in abstract and normative terms and (ii) they are presumed to be directly based on the Western modernising trajectory. The vision of a pure or abstract modernity grounded in the experiences and theories of the West poses a particular set of problems for our understanding of non-Western modernity. For with a vision of a modernity which is indigenised or "contaminated" only when it travels eastwards — a vision which we contend is implicit in some current theorising about the multiplication of modernity — one does not have to scratch very far beneath the surface to find *a priori* normative assumptions about the superiority of Western, liberal or techno-instrumental modernity. In the past, the perceived superiority of Western cultural, racial or civilisational superiority justified forms of colonial exclusion in ways that are still felt today. Some of these assumptions, we would argue, still lurk in the background, serving to position non-Western societies as not yet or incompletely modern.

The view of modernity as always and inevitably "embedded" or "contaminated", however, constitutes a more radical revision of modernisation theory than that suggested in recent attempts to formulate a theory of "alternative modernities". Those attached to narratives of a pure and historically anterior Western modernity fail to acknowledge that there has never been a pure, uncontaminated, unchanging, uncontested and fully formed "Western modernity" into which the peoples/cultures/societies of Asia were later inserted. In its widest sense this is also a critique of the West's own self-image of itself as modern. That Western modernity could never be reduced to its own self-image has been noted in sociological discussions of scientific rationality. Amongst others, Wynne has noted:

> Scientific 'modernity' has always been imbued with tradition, a point recognised by Kuhn (1962) and Polanyi (1958). What is more, those elements of tradition, in the sense of received authority, dogmatic commitment and 'mechanical solidarity', have been recognised as essential to scientific culture, not temporary and localised betrayals thereof. (Wynne 1996: 47)

We could say, paraphrasing Bruno Latour (1993), that the West has "never been modern" in the sense that the reality of Western modernity has never lived up to the abstract and normative terms of its definition.

Modernity and Culture

There is in this collection of essays a discernable emphasis on cultural forms and orientations as central to the "real" as well as to our theoretical models of modernity. This can be seen in the presence of themes such as identity, religious feelings, moral reasoning and the desire to be modern, to name but a few. At one level, this is a reflection of the extent to which culture, broadly defined, is everywhere deeply imbricated in contemporary forms of politics and consumer capitalism. There is a further reason why our inquiries into modernity very often take as their central object of investigation cultural forms and notions of cultural difference. This is part of an argument for the cultural constitution of modernity (Kahn 1995). This notion that culture and, in particular, ideas of cultural difference are constitutive features of modernity is in no sense straightforward. Such a claim works simultaneously across a number of levels, which may be usefully delineated here.

Firstly, the emphasis placed here on culture in the broad sense stems from the recognition that modernity is best understood not (or at least not only) as an objective description of real world economic, political and social processes but more as an objectifying story that self-designated moderns tell about themselves and their societies. As its poststructural and postmodern critics are wont to point out, modernity (along with postmodernity) are grand narratives, shared stories that narrate a history of progress and emancipation against a backdrop of a premodern (for those with an historicising perspective) or non-modern (for those with a more ethnographic bent) baseline. Among other things, this narrative quality of modernity explains why it is so difficult to establish its temporal and spatial boundaries. Is it solely a western phenomenon? How, how far, to where and when did it travel? What came before modernity, when did it begin, and has it now come to an end? Those who fall under

the sway of modernity's objectifying narratives debate these questions endlessly, as though there were verifiable, once-for-all answers to them. An understanding of modernity's discursive qualities, that it is as much a mode of collective self-understanding as a description of some spatially and temporally-bounded social reality, is a key reason for the strong cultural turn in the essays in this volume.

Secondly, to say that culture is constitutive of modernity is at one level to restate the hermeneutic or interpretative foundations of social action. This refers to the readily understood assertion that there could have been no industrial revolution, no European imperialism, no striving for Independence and no investment in modernisation and economic growth unless there had been actors — both individual and institutional — who put into operation the reflexive and goal-oriented practices necessary to realise (and to constantly re-realise) such processes. For those interested in the comparative study of modernity, the recognition of the interpretive nature of social action brings another dimension: that the institutional forms and cultural orientations of modernity are embedded in particular social constellations, which shape their expression and transformation. This means that all actions, including those designated as "modern" such as instrumental, secular, democratic, etc., are part and parcel of broader normative frameworks, capabilities and value systems. While some may seek to analytically define such orientations, it is impossible to breakdown any practice, orientation, intention into a pure form of rationality, of secularity, of objectivity, etc. We simply cannot extract the modern from the residual, as it were, because while our models of modernity may emphasis particular features as "modern cultural orientations" (such as those that strive for autonomy, rationality, secularity, etc.) there can be no separation of contemporary attitudes and orientations into two distinct and divisible cultural worldviews — one designated modern, the other as pre/non modern. At the very least, to do so runs the risk of (erroneously) equating modernisation with Westernisation (where people's "'modern'" orientations are simply the expression of Western ones). What is required instead are far more nuanced examinations of social action and intentionality which are able to explain the modern salience of religious and other loyalties; or show how cosmopolitan and translocal orientations are *modern* outcomes, in part structured by the routinisation and bureaucratisation of "ethnicity" of the colonial and postcolonial states.

At another level, we need to enquire into the very nature of the modern condition itself to understand why culture is everywhere, and

on everyone's lips. Any analysis of modern cultural orientations reveals a deeply embedded critical and expressivist heritage in Western discourses of modernity. This is a counter-Enlightenment trend, an "overtly anti-utilitarian" current, which has been "mobilised in different places and different times in critiques of techno-instrumental modernism" (Kahn 1995: 12). The term "'expressivist'" comes from Charles Taylor (1975), who has argued that the expressivist conception of humankind developed in reaction to an Enlightenment vision of humans as utilitarian, instrumental, individualistic and self-defining. This Enlightenment view effectively naturalised and objectified both humans and nature. Instead of humanity and nature representing some deeper meaning, or "expressing" a mysterious cosmic order, humans along with nature lost any inherent meaning and purpose. As autonomous subjects, moderns became instead "free" to create their own histories, meanings, relationships. And central to this project of self-creation was the utilisation of the newly discovered "facts" and technological mastery afforded by the increasingly rationalistic and mechanistic approach to science, and economic and political organisation. It was against this Enlightenment view that expressivism marshalled its critical forces. Yet precisely because of this, the expressivist critique cannot be seen as anything less than modern in its foundations. It retained the notion of a self-defining subject as central to its own formulation, even as it looked to inject a renewed sense of "human life and activity as … realisations of a purpose or an idea" (Kahn 1995: 27).

Of particular relevance to our discussion here, is the extent to which this critical current in Western modernist thought draws on notions of cultural difference to make its case. Indeed within the expressivist critique of techno and instrumental rationality, notions of culture and cultural difference have been mobilised again and again as key exhibits of the destructive tendencies of modernity's drive to rational mastery and the pursuit of wealth and power. We can see this in the way non-Western cultures have been appropriated by artists and intellectuals in order to build their case for the destructive forces of modernity. It is there in the earlier anthropological models of "primitives", tribal peoples and later, peasants. In many such representations, non-European ways of life provide both a critique of Western institutions (their lack of community and solidarity, as destructive to the natural balance, as exploitative to workers, etc.) as well as the promise of salvation (as a corrective to rampant consumerism, as guardians of local wisdoms, etc.). Paradoxically, while cultural difference is sometimes framed as radically different to that of both modern and Western culture, it is nevertheless often defended with

reference to modern and Western cultural orientations such as the self-defining, autonomous subject, and notions of self and collective realisation. What this suggests, above all else, is the interiority of the relationship between modernity and notions of cultural difference. That cultural difference is so often the reference point in the critical interrogation of modernity in this book is therefore not surprising — we are the inheritors of this tradition, a tradition in which intellectuals have long played a defining role.

Yet it is fair to say that contemporary academics have — unlike the modernist philosophers and the twentieth century popular cultural practitioners — developed a form of double vision in how they invoke difference or discuss cultural forms. While it is difficult for contemporary intellectuals to think outside of a language of cultural otherness, we are at least aware of the constructedness of this language. Benedict Anderson (1998) has written about the "spectre of comparisons" — a term taken from the Filipino nationalist and novelist José Rizal — to explain a double vision of a different sort, where a former taken-for-granted or matter-of-fact experience is turned on its head by a new sense of perspective. In a similar way, Kahn's (2001) analysis of the constructedness of the cultural construction of modernity provides us with an inverted telescope with which to view modern cultural constructions "simultaneously close up and from afar" (Anderson 1998: 2). One consequence of this is the way this inverted telescope has allowed us to explore new ground in our discussion of culture and cultural alterity in this book, often in ways that challenge received ways of conceiving modern orientations or coding cultural orientations as either modern or non-modern and as either dominating or liberating.

Chapter Overview

The remainder of the volume is organised into three sections, each one dealing with a particular thematic area in the study of modernity. The first, "Transnational and Border-zone Modernities", demonstrates the importance of understanding modern Indonesian and Malaysian societies as constituted in transnational and transcultural spaces. The second section, "Nation-states and Citizenships", considers that most "modern" of institutions, the nation-state, and the central role played by the Malaysian and Indonesian postcolonial states in promulgating exclusionary forms of modern citizenship. In the final section, "Cultural and Moral Orientations",

contributors emphasise the centrality of cultural orientations and subjectivities to the emergence of and experience of Indonesian and Malaysian modernity. These essays provide a contrast to accounts of Southeast Asian cultural orientations which stress their tradition-bound, communalistic and fatalistic qualities, even as they mesh with so-called modern institutional forms such as capitalist relations of production and nation-state building processes.

Transnational and Border-zone Modernities

The essays in this section offer a corrective to the "methodological nationalism" (Beck and Sznaider 2006) that has dominated so much research on Southeast Asian society. The critique offered by the contributors is against a pronounced tendency to equate society with the nation-state, and the subsequent failure to recognise, let alone theorise, the full reality of Southeast Asian societies. In the first essay, Joel Kahn takes as his field of inquiry the transnational "frontier" spaces of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Asia, that is, those urban and rural areas that were culturally heterogeneous, politically marginal yet commercially dynamic. He argues that critical theory approaches to socio-economic modernisation have drawn their concepts and theories from a view of modernity as always and everywhere, a unique combination of processes of economic transformation, and modern state and nation building. The statist orientation implicit in such models, Kahn argues, is unable to theorise these kinds of frontier zones across Asia, where most of the frenetic commercial activity and demographic movement that we normally equate with modernisation took place either before or outside the control of the colonial and later national governments. On this basis, Kahn argues the implausibility of theorising "the distinctive patterns of modernisation in places like insular and peninsular Asia in terms of a 'multiple modernity' model", at least to the extent that this latter presumes an isomorphism between economic and political modernisation. Despite claims to pluralism, Kahn argues that this model locates the originary point of modern political and social structures in a Western imaginary (in this case in a Western political imaginary). In closing, Kahn notes that Western models may be limited in terms of their explanation of even Western modernisation. It is not only in parts of Asia that the yardsticks of modernity are found wanting, since certain modern Western institutions, on closer inspection, have their own share of patrimonialism, primordial loyalty and barter and bazaar forms of economic organisation.

A concern with alternative extra-state political imaginaries is also evident in the essay by Ken Young. Young's example is that of the trans-national community of Malays in Indonesia and Malaysia, who imagined an alternative form of community in the first decades of the twentieth century — that of the *umma* or a global community of Muslim believers of peninsular and insular Southeast Asia. As Young notes, this alternative form of collective identity developed at roughly the same time as forms of nascent secular nationalism, and, as with the emergence of secular nationalism, the consolidation of this social imaginary of Malay Muslim identity was indivisible from broader processes of colonial state-formation and (proto) nation-building. While lacking a clearly bounded territorial foundation, or explicit aspirations to create a nation-state, this social imaginary was nevertheless as anti-colonial and universalistic — that is, as modern — in its social imaginary as secular nationalist organisations. These "other" Malays are, then, an example of a much broader pheno-menon, one which saw the emergence and classification of a diverse range of "racial" and ethnic forms of solidarity across the Indonesian archipelago at this time. And while this particular "vision of unity" may have been "written to the margins in post-colonial histories", Young's discussion demonstrates the need for greater conceptual precision in our use of terminology in order to understand the constitution and sense of identification of these extra-state "imagined communities". Young's own analysis suggests that we draw on a number of related concepts here, particularly those of ethos, world-view and social imaginary.

As Yekti Maunati's chapter shows, processes of transnational and translocal ethnogenesis are still very much with us in the present and should not be seen as either remnant primordial loyalties or as precursors to "modern" nationalist identities. Maunati's chapter documents the emer-gence of a new ethnic identity, that of the Ulu Padas in the border areas of Indonesia's East Kalimantan and the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah. Maunati argues that this development is best seen as a form of (modern) pan-Dayak organisation. While the Ulu Padas refer to a shared past, she argues there is no reason why such a shared past is neces-sary, let alone a sufficient basis, for such ethnic categorisation. Rather, she demonstrates the need to consider all forms of identity as constructed, and not the self-evident product of "tradition". In the case of the Ulu Padas, this new ethnic identity has emerged out of a concern over envi-ronmental protection and cultural preservation, yet determining the spe-cific cultural and social attributes that will consolidate their identity, is

still under negotiation. The case of the Ulu Padas is one of three examples of pan-Dayakness discussed by Maunati. Maunati argues that pan-Dayakness in all three examples is best understood as a form of networking, rather than as a process of "Dayak" cultural identity formation. Her examples demonstrate the extent to which pan-Dayakness rests on translocal and transnational social networks, in which the process of mutual identification and recognition of self and others as "Dayak" is then made possible.

One intriguing consequence of these different discussions of translocal identity formation in the region is that it compels us to rethink the historical roots of systems of cultural and racial identity and identification in the region more generally. In much of the existing literature on the subject, "ethnicity" and nationalism are opposed on the grounds that the latter is modern while the former is at least based on primordial *ethnie*. And yet as each of these chapters suggests, the formation of *ethnie*, along with political loyalties to particular ethnic groups are not a pre-modern process at all, but one more or less contemporary with the emergence of nationalism and modern nation-states in the region. Before nationalism, it would be difficult to speak of exclusive "identities" — whether to nations or to a so-called ethnic groups (or in the case of so-called ethnic nationalism to both at the same time) — at all. This is why it may for example be anachronistic to speak of translocal solidarities as "transnational", for in many circumstances they preceded nationalism in the modern history of the region.

Nation-states and Citizenships

The above papers note the limitations of analysing Indonesian and Malaysian modernities from within the exclusive framework of the nation-state. This is not to say that modern state and nation building have not been formative processes in these societies as, demonstrably, the study of Indonesian and Malaysian societies would be incomplete without some serious discussion of this preeminent political institution of modernity. Nor is it to accept that the nation-state is an exhausted form of modern governance in the region. One of the challenges in the analysis of postcolonial nation-states is to show how modern states and nation formation took place not "on top of" static, premodern socio-economic forms, but in places which had already experienced significant (modern) socio-economic transformation, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. In many cases, the legacy of earlier colonial forms of administration laid the foundations

of later, postcolonial forms of citizenship. The papers by Goh and Thung critically interrogate the modern state-building processes and their historical antecedents. Their focus is on the nature (and dilemmas) of social exclusion found within the modern nation-state, informed by their Indonesian and Malaysian standpoints.

Goh Beng Lan considers recent high profile conflicts over religious freedom in Malaysia, which highlight the difficulty of constituting progressive forms of politics in this postcolonial and multi-ethnic society. The cases she notes have all involved a legal tussle between the jurisdictions of the civil and syariah courts, with civil society groups either defending or challenging the special constitutional position granted to the syariah court. As Goh notes, the current opposition between "Islamisation" and "Western secularism" allows little space for compromise in such cases or for religious freedom in general. Rather, the terms of national political debate are framed by competing disembedded and universalistic discourses, that of a global Islamism and a "Western" human rights discourse. This predicament, Goh suggests, is not uniquely Malaysian but a predicament of postcolonial nationalism in the post-Cold War era. In Malaysia, such oppositional politics have been fuelled by Islamic revivalism and the government's own anti-Western rhetoric and ambition to construct an alternative Islamic capitalist modernity. For Goh, the search for critical transformative spaces can only be found when "the naturalised assumptions of religion and human emancipation" of both the Islamist and secularist positions are challenged. Her suggestion is to look to Malaysia's own history of alternative imaginings of religious and human co-existence, arguing that Malaysia's political integration has always rested on a combination rather than separation of cultural and civic subjectivities. An iconic representation of such integration, Goh notes, is the National Mosque completed in 1965. This mosque blends features of the traditional Malay house while responding to its tropical location. The result is an open and non-exclusive Islam, one grounded in the climate and domestic landscapes of Malaysia.

Thung Ju-lan's paper discusses the impact of Indonesian nation-state building processes on the political identity of Chinese Indonesians. Here the concern with exclusion and the cultural constructedness of identity (including social science's own theories of identity) come to the fore. Thung suggests that the long-standing distinction between being a "cultural Chinese" as distinct from a "political Chinese" is the outcome of a particular logic that dates from the colonial era. During Dutch colonial rule, the Chinese were designated "Foreign Orientals". This brought them

both special rights and impositions that legally and politically differentiated them from the so-called *Inlander* or indigenous communities. Drawing on Mamdani's (2001) distinction between civil citizenship and ethnic citizenship, Thung argues that following Independence, all citizens were granted civil citizenship, however only some citizens — those considered indigenous or *pribumi* — were also accorded ethnic citizenship. Ethnic citizenship then became the basis for an exclusive right to claims over land, political autonomy, and natural resources. The tragic irony here is that many Chinese Indonesians espouse a cultural identity in the hope that this will reduce the violence many have experienced or live in fear of. As Thung notes, the designation of a distinction between "cultural" and "political" only heightens the sense of Chinese Indonesians' outsider status, and does little to avert the likelihood of violence against Chinese Indonesians. Thung's hope is that intellectuals can play a role in dismantling the tyranny of such distinctions. Along with Mamdani (1998), she argues that the world of the native and the settler is not just a legal-political world, but also an intellectual one.

Cultural and Moral Orientations

Theories of modernity have increasingly moved from analyses of institutional forms of modernity (with an emphasis on the nation-state and capitalism, for example) to incorporate analyses of modernity which emphasise the centrality of cultural orientations and subjectivities in the constitution and experience of modernity. It is fair to say that the failure to recognise the diversity of cultural orientations, including an appreciation of differences in youth and popular cultures as well as cultural and social norms that underpin economic relations, in the constitution of non-Western modernity has been one of the most serious omissions in the study of modernity in general.

Maila Stivens's essay discusses a series of cultural contests around the place of youth in modernising Malaysia. Discussing a number of key "panics" — such as those surrounding loafing or hanging about, black metal music, and high speed motorbike racing — she examines the ways in which young people have become a central site of cultural contestation about Malaysian modernity. Preferring to speak of "sites of social anxiety" rather than the concept of moral panic (which was coined in a European constellation of state and media relations), Stivens argues the demonisation of youth popular cultural forms tends to target those already socially excluded by relations of class. The range of cultural practices that have received high levels of state surveillance also reveal much about a cultural

politics of social inclusion, especially as they relate to young women and Malays. Yet Stivens is cautious here of replicating the essentialisms of the Malaysian Government and the wider public, which tend to ethnically-segment youth culture. While not denying the ethnic relations involved in such cultural forms, she suggests that youth cultures in Malaysia may not be as ethnically differentiated as suggested in public discussions of "social ills". This is in part an outcome of the global dimension of consumerist youth-oriented cultures of "hedonism, fun and energetic performances", which nevertheless take specific forms — and provoke particular types of anxieties — in emerging affluent capitalist societies, such as Malaysia.

Conceptualisation of modern capitalist relations and forces of production have long been central to theories of modernity and modernisation. Here issues of economic growth, stages of economic development, class and technology have been key to definitions of modern economic forms and forces. Oh Myung-Seok's extended critique of the model of small commodity production in this volume injects an understanding of the centrality of local cultural frames of reference and norms of social relations in the analysis of capitalist relations and forces of production. In doing so, he alerts us to the omissions of analyses of capitalist penetration at the periphery which tend to reduce all productive relations to commodity exchange. Oh acknowledges that one of the strengths of the model of small commodity production is that it counters the discourse of "peasantism" implicit in earlier anthropological models and their tendency to view peasant community as harmonious, communal and subsistence-oriented — often as part of an implicit critique of Western modernity (Kahn 1993, 1995). Yet the insistence that modern peasant economic activity as a form of small commodity production be located within a world capitalist system had tended to reduce all aspects of peasant economic activity to commodity exchange. The limitations of the small commodity production model, Oh argues, become apparent when the cultural meaning of land is considered. Drawing on his fieldwork amongst first and second generation Javanese small rubber producers in Johor, Oh suggests that land exchange is not fully commoditised as it incorporates aspects of gift exchange, particularly in contexts of land inheritance. On the basis of his analysis, Oh suggests an alternative way of perceiving peasant economy, one which combines both the perspectives of commodity exchange and gift exchange, as well as acknowledging the importance of localised social relations within peasant community.

Wendy Mee, in a different context, notes how middle class Malaysians draw on technologically-based visions of development in their personal and collective aspirations. What comes through in this study is the extent to which technology is inscribed upon these Malaysians' identities as both middle class/white collar workers and as Malaysians. The issue then for Mee is how to explain the level of technological popularism found in her study. She takes issue with explanations that would ground this support for technology in government hyperbole or Mahathirism, noting that the belief in the progressive value of science and technology is a long-standing one in Malaysia. Arguing that we take seriously the proposition that the public culture of science and technology in Malaysia may differ in important respects from its constitution elsewhere, Mee suggests that the comparative study of technology needs to incorporate two approaches. Firstly, we acknowledge and challenge the Western trajectory implicit in most of our theories of technological modernisation. Secondly, we recognise the extent to which popular cultural technological forms are not merely trivial and derivative, but also innovative, prudent, and practical, as well as influential in the emergence of broad modernist sensibilities.

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Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

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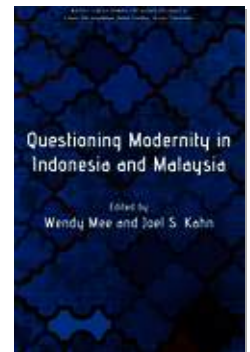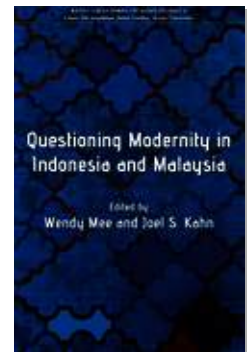# Border-zone Modernities

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Islam and Capitalism in the Frontiers and Borderlands of the Modern Malay World

Joel S. Kahn[1]

Much ink has been spilled over the question of the relationship — or non-relationship — between Islam and capitalism. This paper explores this issue by focusing on the relationships between Islam, capitalism and modernity in urban and rural "frontier" and "borderland" regions of insular and peninsular Asia from the late nineteenth century to the present.

Obviously not the first to raise the possibility that there was some sort of contradiction between the two, Max Weber nonetheless set the parameters for much of the debate that has taken place since his time. In broaching this theme here, I am mindful of the fact that many of the contributions to the subsequent debate have been based on incomplete knowledge or even misunderstandings of Weber's sociological project and are replete with misplaced criticisms delivered with the benefit of hindsight.[2] This is not to say that Weber's critics have not had important things to say. It is rather that in their rush to criticize Weber they have sometimes closed the door on the possibility that there might be such a thing as a distinctly Islamic approach to economic practice and/or that a trajectory of modern economic development inflected by an Islamic civilisational project or imaginary might provide some sort of alternative to the depredations of western or global capitalism. In other words might there have been some kind of successful or exemplary fusions of Islam and capitalism in the Muslim World? Or might such fusions emerge in the future?

It needs to be recognised at the outset that asking, and attempting to answer such questions from our current historical vantage point is unlikely to resolve the general debate over Weber's writings on Islam and capitalism. For one thing, Weber's position on the possibility of an Islamic

capitalism is more nuanced than generally assumed. For example, many assume that establishing the existence of commerce in the Muslim world either now or in the past is on its own sufficient to overturn Weber's thesis. However, despite the fact that he, most now think mistakenly, classified Islam primarily as a religion of conquest, Weber never denied the presence of commerce and entrepreneurship in the Muslim World. Indeed when discussing the non-western world more generally, or indeed the pre-modern western world, he frequently drew particular attention to them, his argument being not about the origins of commerce, markets, trade, etc, but about what he took to be the uniquely western origins of *modern* (rational) *capitalism*.[3] Neither does establishing the role played by so-called structural factors in the underdevelopment of Muslim economies somehow prove that Weber was wrong. Weber's argument was never monocausal, much less "idealist". On the contrary, as his discussion of Islam clearly shows, his was an approach that gave equal weight to the psychological implications of particular belief systems on the one hand and institutional developments on the other. Moreover, as Schluchter demonstrates he was consistent in this approach. It was not a question, as some have suggested, that his position shifted from an "idealist" to a more "materialist" one (Schluchter 1999).

There are also those who claim to have disproved Weber by showing that external influences, such as those deriving from colonial domination and globalisation, rather than the absence of a capitalist ethic, have been the cause of the failures of capitalist development in the Muslim world, at the same time generally denouncing Weber as an orientalist for seeking the causes of Islamic economic backwardness in factors internal to Islam itself. While it must be noted that Weber's knowledge of Islam was less detailed than that of the other world religious traditions with which he dealt, and that his written accounts of Islam are considerably less detailed than those on other religions; the central purpose of all such comparisons for him was, not inappropriately for his time, to find reasons for the uniquely western origins of modern capitalism. Having demonstrated to his satisfaction: (1) that these lay in a particular, one might even say perverse, form of rationalisation that in his view had come to pervade the whole of western society; (2) that the psychological consequences of the Protestant, particularly Calvinist belief in predestination set this process of rationalisation in motion; (3) that this was made possible in part by a specific set of mainly juridical institutions and processes; and (4) that this combination of factors was unique to the West and absent in the other great religious/civilisational traditions, his interest in the non-West

ended as it were. It hardly seems appropriate therefore to attack him from the rigidly externalist perspectives which frame dependency, globalisation and postcolonial theory.[4]

One region where the "Weber thesis" seems to have had some traction is insular and peninsular Southeast Asia, home both to large Muslim populations and with a long history of Muslim commerce. Perhaps not surprisingly, for example, a number of Dutch sociologists and economic historians — B.J.O. Schrieke, J.C. van Leur and J.H. Boeke among others — engaged in debates over the potential for indigenous commercial development in the colony of Netherlands East Indies based in part of their reading of Weber's work. These issues were revisited by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his work on communities of so-called *santri* entrepreneurs on Java and "Outer Island" Indonesia.[5] For various reasons, however, very little attention has been given to the sorts of questions about Islam's economic potential in more recent decades. This essay seeks to return to these issues in the light of the results of my own research on the formation of what I have called the modern Malay World.

In so doing I am not attempting somehow to "prove" the Weber thesis in the Southeast Asian context or, on the contrary, to replace it with the notion of a monolithic "Islamic capitalism". But neither can I accept the reductionist anti-Weber position. For unless one wishes to argue that everything that appears to make the Muslim World of Southeast Asia, and in particular all the varied characteristics of Muslim economic activity and organisation distinctive, both now and in the past, can be entirely accounted for by means of a strict political-economic reductionism, then questions about the way in which Islam is understood in broad civilisational terms,[6] or perhaps the way in which an Islamic civilisational imaginary impacts upon or inflects the economic lives of Muslims, remains an important one.

This is not to suggest that other factors may not be equally responsible for shaping Muslim economic lives in particular times and places; as in the current fashion to argue that universalising projects for Islamic reform that seek to disembed the religion from the cultural contexts within which it is practised, are themselves inevitably inflected by the particular cultural meanings and social arrangements which give rise to them. Religious belief and practice always take place in particular social and cultural contexts. Yet pointing to the context specific dimensions of Muslim practice is one thing. To attribute everything to particular cultural, social, political and economic circumstances, denying the distinctive features of Islam itself on the grounds of a fashionable "anti-essentialism"

makes no sense. As Nafissi has pointed out, to argue that Islam plays a role in shaping the economic lives of Muslims "does not necessarily mean that other, international or national [and, one should add, local], factors are less important or that they do not necessary mediate Islamic traditions … [e]ssentialism and other similar charges should arise [only] when other units of analysis are excluded or portrayed as derivative and inessential". Giving some weight to Islam in our economic analyses would seem especially important since compared "to that of all the other major world religions and ideologies, the fundamental message of Islam appears to be particularly *solid*" (Nafissi 1998: 113). This does not involve ignoring the variation in Islamic economic practice. "Yet neither can we claim", as Adas points out, "that Islam is not a factor, simply because Islamic interpretations and practices change depending on the context and different groups [sic] understanding of Islam. Islam is present as an identity and a culture in all of these example, [although of course] it is remade as well as contested, by individuals and groups, as they encounter and tackle the problems of modern life" (Adas 2006: 121).

Whatever their stance on the relation between Islam and capitalism, most recent commentaries on the theme are based on the rather specific conditions prevailing in the Middle East (and to a lesser extent western Asia; see Tripp 2006). Here there is the strong perception that in the building of modern states in places like Egypt, North Africa, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, top-down economic development won out over democracy and sustainable economic growth, and secularisation over Islamisation, resulting, among other things, in a growing, and often violent conflict between increasingly authoritarian modern/secular regimes on the one hand and grassroots Islamic movements on the other.[7]

Despite a fairly long history of so-called Islamic reform in the region, and an even longer history of Muslim involvement in commerce and trade,[8] there have been relatively few attempts to re-assess the relation between Islam and capitalism in Southeast Asian contexts. This is somewhat surprising given that here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the Muslim world, Islamisation and instances of more or less successful economic development appear to have occurred, often simultaneously. Might parts of Southeast Asia be seen as sites of successful fusions of Islamic civilisational projects on the one hand and capitalism on the other? Or might they become so?

In support of such a conclusion one might point to the simultaneity of fairly intense processes of social, political and cultural Islamisation on the one hand and sustained economic growth on the other in Muslim

majority Malaysia. Despite the fact that Muslim theologians, as well Muslim political elites in Malaysia frequently reject the fusing of Islam with modern or western institutions and practices, Malaysia is nonetheless a country which has experienced long term economic growth, from well before the time of independence. Although much attention has focused on the fairly spectacular growth associated with the development of export-oriented manufacturing from the 1970s, it is often forgotten that the economy of British Malaya was already delivering levels of material well-being — along of course with high levels of poverty — which were high for the region as a whole in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Similarly, the sizeable Muslim community in Singapore today enjoys a level of affluence which is unsurpassed in the region and the Muslim world. This was true of many, although of course not all, Muslim Singaporeans well before Singapore joined the ranks of the region's industrialised "tiger economies", when Singapore became an important commercial as well as religious centre for Muslims in the early nineteenth century. Has Islam had absolutely no effect on the economic successes of Malaysia and Singapore?

Indonesia — a country with the world's largest Muslim population — has not fulfilled an earlier promise that it would soon be joining the ranks of Asia's tiger economies. There are nonetheless many places where capitalism has thrived and wealth been accumulated not just by transnational companies, but by Muslim entrepreneurs. One is entitled to ask political economists and culturalists alike whether Islam has in no way inflected the patterns of economic development, especially in the highly commercialised regions of outer island Indonesia. And one could point to similar situations in other places in Southeast Asia with sizeable Muslim populations.

Against this view of Muslim Southeast Asia as the site of a successful fusion of capitalism and an Islamic civilisational project, there are of course those in the region who see the two as inevitably contradictory. Muslim spokespersons in the region regularly denounce modernity and capitalism as alien systems imposed by the West in the colonial period, while also exerting constant pressure on postcolonial states to roll back the forces of modernisation and westernisation wherever and whenever they may appear. Many Muslim leaders — and Islamic movements more broadly — in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, profess themselves implacably opposed to any kind of accommodation between Islam and modern capitalism. And this radical rejectionist position is

shared with the critics of Islam in both Southeast Asia and beyond who contend that Islam is by definition incompatible with economic modernisation and that Muslims are condemned to economic backwardness and a subsistence-oriented existence.

I cannot hope to resolve this conflict of views here. However, I can propose a different perspective from which to view the debates over the relation between Islam and capitalism in Southeast Asian contexts and perhaps even more broadly in contexts where Islam spread primarily through commerce rather than conquest. This perspective emerges from recognising that a significant obstacle to coming to grips with the nature of the relationship between Islam, capitalism and modernity more broadly in Southeast Asia is the tendency to focus the discussion more or less exclusively on the objects of national and civilisational narratives in the region: timeless, homogeneous national cultures and societies and/or civilisational cores. This latter perspective has been strongly encouraged by much nationalist historiography, which has taken the region's nation-states — and fairly recently discovered "national cultures" — as primary narrative foci. The economic questions are as a result almost always phrased in terms of national economies, and the region's so-called "indigenous" Muslims are almost invariably portrayed as economically backward, subsistence-oriented and commercially-naïve participants.[9]

This is particularly problematic in a region where places which, although in certain key respects marginal to the development projects of colonial and postcolonial states, have nonetheless been important sites of rapid social change, commercialisation and dynamic, heterogeneous growth in the modern period. Apart from destabilising some of the more problematic national(ist) narratives of modernisation in Southeast Asian contexts, thereby framing the problematic of modernity in a new way, there is a second and even more important reason to balance the picture by examining developments in these apparently marginal regions. It was/is in these commercially dynamic "frontier" zones that Muslims — merchants, traders, entrepreneurs, artisans and cash croppers on the one hand; holy men, religious teachers, and missionaries on the other — have played very significant, active and constructive roles since the beginning of the modern era. Without an understanding of the rather specific trajectory of economic transformation, Southeast Asia style, and the role played by Muslims within it, any discussion of the question of the relationship between Islam and economic modernisation in the region is rendered analytically bankrupt. And while the revised understanding that emerges

from such an analysis may not allow us to speak of the emergence of a discretely Islamic model of capitalism in the region as a whole or in any particular part of it, it does provide us with a far better appreciation of the distinctive forms of economic activity in the region in the modern period and of both the economic and religious values and goals of many "ordinary" Southeast Asian Muslims than does an approach exclusively focused on the relationship between Islam, state-building and national development. At the same time, this provides us with a better position from which to assess the different sides of the debate over the possibility of an Islamic capitalism.

Commerce, Migration and Economic "Development" in (Pen)insular Southeast Asia

I will begin with a brief overview of some of the results of research on economic change in a number of rural and urban "frontier" and "borderland" regions of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia from the late nineteenth century to the present. This research focuses on parts of peninsular Malaya, northern Borneo, Kalimantan, Sumatra, southern Thailand, southern Vietnam and the southern Philippines.[10]

At first sight these regions of (pen)insular Southeast Asia seem too disparate to constitute a coherent object of study. They were subject to quite different systems of colonial rule — British, French, Dutch — and are currently scattered across the territorial domains of eight sovereign states — Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Philippines. The regions are spatially dispersed and diverse in terms of natural ecology. They are the homelands of a diversity of "indigenous" peoples and of at least as many recent immigrants or descendants of immigrants from various places in other parts of Southeast Asia, China, South Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The majority of their inhabitants are citizens of the different nation-states whose territories they occupy. Moreover, given the fairly long history of nationalist movements which emerged in the course of anti-colonial struggles in the first part of the twentieth century, a great many of their inhabitants have identified, and continue to identify, as members of separate national "communities". These regions are also sites of tremendous religious diversity.

However, they have experienced processes of economic change, a consequence being that they came to share a number of significant economic, demographic, environmental and cultural characteristics, or did so in the relatively recent past for which the label capitalism does not appear

entirely inappropriate.[11] What are these patterns of development in Southeast Asia, and what do they tell us about the relationship between Islam and capitalism in the region?[12]

(a) *Economic development*: either now or at key times in the historical period under consideration (roughly 1870 to the present), rates of economic growth and commercialisation in these places have been higher, often considerably so, than in other parts of Southeast Asia. Typically this growth has been associated with the presence of large-scale western, multinational and/or transnational enterprises in plantation agriculture; various forms of agribusiness including banking, finance and the processing and marketing of agricultural commodities (rice, rubber, oil palm, etc.) in peninsular Malaya, northern Sumatra, southern Vietnam, Mindanao and Thailand; large-scale logging and, more recently, timber processing; large-scale mining in colonial Malaya, Sumatra and Kalimantan and more recently in the Philippines, and in the decades since about 1970, export-oriented manufacturing in places like Singapore, Penang and the Klang Valley in Malaysia, parts of Thailand and the Philippines, eastern Cambodia and southern Vietnam.

It is widely acknowledged that places like Singapore, Penang and the western states of Peninsular Malaya, parts of so-called Outer Island Indonesia (particularly in Sumatra and what is now Indonesian Borneo), the Mekong Delta region in Indochina, and the islands of the Philippines outside Luzon, including Mindanao, have been places of significant economic development since at least the latter part of the nineteenth century when they first became sites of significant, often large-scale, plantation-based cash cropping (sugar, coffee, tobacco, pepper, rice, gambir, fruit and notably rubber), timber extraction and mining (gold, nickel, copper and coal) for regional and world markets. Subsequently, many of these same regions became important sites for the development of food processing and export-oriented manufacturing of textiles, clothing, footwear and in some cases computers and computer components, microchips, and the like. Manufacturing for export began most successfully in Singapore, but spread to Malaysia's Penang state and the Klang Valley, parts of Thailand and the Philippines, Vietnam (mainly the South) and Cambodia in the 1980s and 1990s.

Much of the academic literature on these developments has been highly critical, arguing that they have contributed only in very

limited ways to the domestic/national economies in Southeast Asia, that their environmental effects have often been deleterious if not disastrous, and that so-called indigenous populations have benefited from them much less than outsiders — particularly the western, Japanese, Korean or transnational capitalists who finance the larger-scale enterprises as well as "foreign" economic elites, notably the overseas Chinese, who have been in a better position than "locals" to take advantage of downstream opportunities generated by them.[13]

There is a good deal of truth to many of these criticisms. However, despite the impression given in much of the literature, western or multinational enterprises were/are far from being the only economic actors in these regions. Production, finance and marketing has also involved very significant numbers of smaller-scale Asian firms, ranging from individual cash croppers, traders, artisans, land speculators, and money lenders to small-scale agriculturalists, manufacturers, transport owners and operators to often quite large planters, miners, labour contractors, money lenders and wholesale and retail merchants. Among these have been large numbers of Muslims who, in many areas, actually constituted the majority.

Perhaps the best-documented case is that of peninsular Malaya from the latter decades of the nineteenth century through to the end of the so-called rubber boom.[14] During this period certain regions, first near the western coast, and subsequently the inland regions of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor and Perak, experienced very high rates of immigration in response to new, mostly global, markets for cash crops like pepper, coconuts, coffee, tin, and, especially, rubber. Facilitated in part by land clearing, drainage schemes and new transportation networks promoted by the colonial government in the early years, and the emergence of intermediate commercial centres and towns, planters, miners, merchants and agriculturalists, money lenders, labour contractors, cash croppers, artisans, petty traders and labourers flocked to the port cities of Singapore, Penang and Malacca from all corners of the globe — Europe, America, China, South Asia and the Middle East — and thence to coastal and then inland regions to make their living in and around the sites of booming export cultivation and mining industries.

It is certainly the case that the European planters, followed by the plantation companies and the merchant banks which financed them, earned the biggest profits, and experienced more favours from the colonial government. But all the evidence suggests that they

were not the only ones to thrive, nor the only ones to experience the advantages of *Pax Britannica*. Instead even humble smallholders made, and sometimes also lost, great fortunes, competing successfully with the European estates on a rapidly growing world market for rubber generated by the American car industry. And perhaps the largest numbers of immigrant cash croppers, small-scale merchants and traders, artisans and shopkeepers and even money lenders, labour contractors and land speculators were Malay-speaking, Muslim peoples from a number of places in the surrounding archipelago (particularly Sumatra, the Celebes and the Riau archipelago).

For a number of reasons that need not detain us here, this large population of Malay-speaking Muslim cash croppers, merchants and entrepreneurs has more often than not been overlooked in the histories of the economic development of the Malay peninsula. And clearly in some sense they represent a continuation of a long history of "indigenous" commercial activity in the archipelago, a history which certainly predates the colonial period and in many instances, even the coming of Europeans in the early fifteenth century (see especially Reid, 1988–93). But it is also clear that from the latter decades of the nineteenth century, developments in the global economy resulted in a quantum increase in the size and development of this apparently indigenous, largely Muslim commercial economy.[15]

There is also a good deal of evidence to suggest that this "bazaar economy" was neither distinct or separated from the rest of the commercial economy, and that contrary to appearances it was highly organised by means of commercial networks and chains of credit and debt, often involving wealthier traders, merchants and money lenders of Arab, or mixed Arab and Malay descent.[16] It is also evident that the pattern of development described for peninsular Malaya, and the role played within it by immigrant "Malay" entrepreneurs, cash croppers and merchants, has been repeated numerous times elsewhere in the region, and continues to manifest itself today. There are, for example, many similarities between the situations of peninsular Malaya in the first few decades of the twentieth century described above and the gold and coal mining towns in East Kalimantan in the 1990s.[17] Here the establishment of large, highly capitalised multinational mining enterprises has attracted large numbers of what Indonesians call spontaneous transmigrants from all over the archipelago in search of jobs in the mines, to speculate in land,

to work as labourers and labour contractors, artisans, mechanics, cash croppers, builders, merchants, small scale miners, and in various service industries, including bars and massage parlours. Their numbers eventually exceeded those of the western employees of the mines and of the various indigenous Dayak peoples who were living in the area before the development of the mines. The largest numbers of such immigrants were Muslims from parts of Java (notably Madura), Sumatra (ethnic Minangkabau, Acehnese), Sulawesi (Bugis) and other parts of Kalimantan (Banjar).

This "informal" economy dominated by small- and medium-scale Muslim enterprises, which rises and falls in response to larger scale commercial development and the infrastructural and transport facilities that go with it, is a phenomenon which can be observed all across the frontiers and borderlands of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia, as well as in new urban areas. Commercial activities may include those branded illegal or at least part of an immense informal or black economy that operates within and across (pen)insular Southeast Asia. This includes the cultivation, processing and trade in now illegal narcotics which in some places, such as southern Thailand at least until relatively recently has been very big business indeed, although it may not show up in official statistics. Transborder trade, both "legal" and "illegal" is important for small and large scale entrepreneurs alike throughout the region — apart from narcotics this has also involved textiles, logs, petrol, cigarettes and sex workers, and it still provides employment for a substantial number of Asian enterprises such as those run by Vietnamese traders — many of whom are Muslim Cham — on the border between Vietnam and Cambodia, the Indonesian textile merchants in East Malaysia and the cigarette smugglers of Johor.

These regional economies tend to be at least as, if not more, closely linked to global markets for export commodities or localised markets for foodstuffs and other commodities, than they are to the national economies whose territories they occupy. Similarly large, medium as well as small-scale entrepreneurs in these regions are frequently embedded in transnational business and trading networks (those formed by western banking and financial institutions, but also in Chinese, Indian, Hadrami or other Muslim business networks).

(b) *Demographic change*: a second striking feature of these regions is that most of them were very sparsely populated in the early phases

of their economic development. However, relatively low population densities in the early phases of development were generally followed by high rates of population growth and/or extreme volatility of population levels and high rates of population mobility (immigration, emigration and transmigration). Peninsular Malaya in the nineteenth century is a case in point. With some exceptions (such as pockets of settlement in the so-called "inland valleys" regions), the western districts of the Malay peninsula were almost empty of people, the only concentration of population being in the small number of coastal settlements generally formed at the mouths of rivers. In many ways western Malaya at mid century was a sparsely populated backwater of the Malay world. Only in the last few decades of the nineteenth century did the population of the non-coastal regions of what is now Perak, Selangor and northern Negeri Sembilan — which, with Penang island, now constitute the heartlands of an urbanised and modernised Malaysian economy — begin to grow rapidly, a growth which was due, at least initially, mainly to large-scale immigration of both labourers (to work on mainly European-owned plantations) and larger and smaller scale "Asian" entrepreneurs, cash croppers, and labourers in Chinese-owned tin mines and plantations. The so-called rubber boom of the first few decades of the twentieth century gave significant added impetus to this growth in population — the end of which brought stagnation to some areas or continued expansion to others.

Similar patterns are observable for northern parts of Sumatra with the spread of tobacco, then rubber cultivation in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and more recently with the huge expansion of logging, the multinational mining sector and oil palm plantations in parts of Kalimantan. Much the same is true of the Mekong Delta in the latter part of the nineteenth century and Mindanao and other islands in the southern Philippines.

(c) *Ecological change*: a third feature of most of these regions is that although diverse in their natural ecologies, they all witnessed significant transformations in physical environment brought about by human intervention: large scale infrastructural development, land clearance, monoculture, irrigation and drainage schemes, the building of transportation networks, canals and waterways (notably in the Mekong Delta), and urbanisation of commercial centres, all linked to the spatial pattern of commercial development. These have significantly transformed the physical environments of most of these

regions, resulting at times in very serious levels of environmental degradation.

It is important to note that the urban and rural commercial zones described above generally contain(ed) a great diversity of inhabitants. And while governments, colonial and postcolonial, have attempted to regulate the spatial distribution of inhabitants, encouraging the formation of ethnically-homogeneous, well ordered, "communities", the situation on the ground has always diverged from the bureaucratic ideal. In colonial Malaya, for example, local colonial officials attempted to separate "Malay", "Chinese", "Indian" and European planters. In this they were generally unsuccessful, particularly in their attempts to regulate and control the economic activities and even living arrangements of the large numbers of "foreign" Malays — cash croppers, speculators, money lenders and merchants — attracted by the prospect of short term profit, and generally uninterested in long term settlement of the kind favoured by colonial officials. For example, many immigrant or so-called "foreign" Malays took advantage of favourable regulations governing access to land for rubber cultivation to buy up land on the edges of existing European estates with the clear intention, not of planting rubber themselves, but of selling land to the estates when the latter sought, as they inevitably did in the boom years, to expand the scale of their operations. Similarly in East Kalimantan, indigenous Dayak settlers, usually with the financial backing of entrepreneurial members of the Indonesian armed forces, moved quickly to stake "traditional" claims to land with an eye to the large compensation payments made by the mine owners to holders of "native title".

(d) *New patterns of social and gender relations*: it is very difficult to generalise, but studies seem to suggest that social structures may be relatively "looser", (to borrow the term once applied to the social structure of Thai villages), community membership more fluid and gender relations less rigidly hierarchical than in the older political centres of Southeast Asia. Clearly further research is necessary here, but at a general level it does seem as if these regions are characterised by greater levels of individualism, by fluid and open social relations and by class- rather than status-based systems of social differentiation compared to societies in the older cultural or civilisational heartlands of Southeast Asia in which ties of community dominate and inequalities take the form of socio-symbolic hierarchies. One suspects that the kind of distinction Geertz drew between so-called "inner"

and "outer" Indonesia (Geertz 1963a), itself derived from the work of early Dutch sociologists such as Schrieke, might be extended to distinguish the older, more densely populated and less commercialised regions of Southeast Asia's cultural and civilisational heartlands from these "border" and "frontier" regions.

(e) *Conflict and civility*: it also seems that these regions contain within them the sites of much of the ethno-religious conflict and violence (often a consequence of the very state building projects designed to make them more "manageable"), conflict which often involves a racialised politics of indigeneity, between self-defined "natives" and "settlers". Elsewhere I have pointed to the parallels between these regions and those parts of Africa which Mamdani characterised as more "modernised", by which he means those where "civic" as opposed to "ethnic" forms of governance have prevailed (Mamdani 2001, Kahn 2007). This is not to say that ethno-religious conflict is endemic to these spaces, since they are also sites of a significant amount of everyday, "grounded" cosmopolitan practice involving peoples of diverse cultural, linguistic and religious background.

(f) *Religious modernisation*: this leads to a sixth characteristic that seems to be common across the commercially-dynamic frontiers and borderlands of Southeast Asia in the modern period, and that is the emergence within them of a plurality of universalising cultural projects, civilisational aspirations and evangelical and/or ascetic movements for religious reform. These projects have often involved ideas about populating "virgin lands", at the same time typically placing a positive value on this worldly action and particularly entrepreneurship. These universalistic religio-cultural currents are associated among other things with the rise of concepts of autonomous, modern selfhood and the decline of traditional forms of authority, and can parallel, in significant ways, the general rationalising trends in western Christianity which, for Max Weber, were a precondition for the emergence of (post-Protestant) modernity.

Islamic reformism constitutes one such project. What distinguished the waves of Islamic reform and revival that have swept across the modernising zones of Southeast Asia from at least the latter part of the nineteenth century? Most scholars have labelled the movement "modernist". In general, modernists advocate *ijtihad* or independent, rational investigation of the sources of Islam and individual interpretation based on personal knowledge of the Quran and the Sunna)[18] over *taqlid* ("emulation

of the decisions of the founding *imam*s, hence accepting authority and interpretation of the teacher"). Modernism is characterised by openness to Western knowledge to the extent that it is not adjudged "hostile to Islam".[19] Generally this means openness to western science and technology.

At the same time "modernist" reformers at least in Southeast Asia have a long history of opposition to local culture and traditions to the extent that these are viewed as backward and primitive on the one hand and corrupting of the tenets of (originary) Islam on the other. Muslim modernism is in general hostile to beliefs and practices deemed superstitious, irrational and backward, along with traditional religious authorities, the propitiation of spirits, and long standing practices of visiting shrines devoted to the cultivation of traditional Muslim "saints". This ingrained hostility to traditional culture and forms of religious practice and traditional forms of religious authority finds strong parallels in the attitudes of Protestant reformers both historically in Europe, and now in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

A central plank of the modernist platform in Southeast Asian contexts has always been educational reform, and reformers have been active in the founding of "modern" educational institutions in which religion is taught alongside "western" disciplines like science and history, and in which rote learning by students of mixed age groups is replaced by a system in which students are placed into separate classes according to age and level of achievement.[20] The modernisation of Islam in Southeast Asia therefore entailed not just the spread of more new rationalised forms of religious belief and practice, but also of the development of extensive networks of religious scholars, missionaries, teachers and religious schools, along with entrepreneurs and others willing and eager to finance them, which have extended their reach across much of Muslim Southeast Asia from the early decades of the twentieth century. Such networks were of course not entirely new. However, closer contact with the rest of the Muslim World facilitated by increased mobility of Southeast Asian Muslims between the Middle East, India and Southeast Asia — to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, to study in Arabia and Egypt, as well as to engage in trade between Southeast Asia and the Middle East — together with greater mobility across the region, greatly increased both the intensity of religious networking and the spread of modernist ideals.

The result has often been a split between self-styled modernists on the one hand and "traditionalists" on the other, although the latter may not accept such a label, often preferring to describe themselves in other

ways. This split ran and continues to run deep across the region. In colonial Indonesia and Malaya, self-styled modernists called themselves *Kaum Muda* (Young "Family") in order to distinguish themselves from the advocates of tradition whom they labeled *Kaum Tua* (Old "Family").[21] Geertz's widely read account of religion on Indonesia's most populous island of Java describes the division as one between supposedly more pious *santri* on the one hand and Javanist *priyaii* and *abangan* on the other — although as Ricklefs among others has pointed out, this is based on a misuse of the term *santri* to refer only to pious modernists. Following Ricklefs, the division on Java is better described as one between *santri moden* (modernists) on the one hand and *santri kolot* (traditionalist Muslims) on the other, better reflecting the division among Muslims themselves (see Ricklefs 2007). Similar divisions have emerged among Muslims across the region. Those sympathetic to the cause of purifying Islam tradition among the ethnic Cham of Vietnam and Cambodia, for example, call themselves *Cham Islam* to distinguish themselves from their fellow Cham whose religious practices still contain elements of Hinduism and/or traditional animistic beliefs.[22] These self-styled modernists refer to those they classify as traditionalists as *Cham Bani*.

As the case of the Cham suggests, there appears in most cases to be a strong correlation between a modernist sensibility (*Santri Moden*, *Kaum Muda*, *Cham Islam*) on the one hand and participation in the modern entrepreneurial/commercial economy on the other. Be that as it may, the commercial networks described above provided, and continue to provide, a vehicle for the propagation of new interpretations of Islam, significantly, if not solely, those deemed modernist. In the early twentieth century West Sumatra became an important centre for the teaching and propagation of modernist Islam and new kinds of educational institutions. For example many of the new religious centres which sprang up in peninsular Malaya in the early twentieth century were: (1) established by religious teachers and scholars who had studied in the famous *Sumatera Thawalib* School in Padang Panjang, itself perhaps the most important site for the teaching of "modernist" currents in Islam originating from Egypt and (2) located in places characterised by high levels of commercial activity and the presence of large number of "foreign Malays" (see Kahn 2006). Today, Malaysia has become a magnet for the region's Muslims both because it is the region's wealthiest "Muslim country" and because it is seen as an important centre for Islamic learning. Research in Thai Muslim communities in Bangkok and among Muslim Cham on the

Vietnam–Cambodia border suggest that many aspire to attend the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, while many of the region's working class Muslims seek work in Malaysia, often as undocumented immigrants, on the grounds that it offers a combination of affluence with a social and political order thought to be sympathetic to Muslims.[23]

Many of these networks linking Muslim entrepreneurs and Muslim reformers are loosely-structured, often dependent on ties forged by individuals, like the ethnic *Cham Imam* of a mosque in Ho Chi Minh City who serves as a conduit for the flow of money, trade and religious influences between Saudi Arabia and Vietnam because of networks he established when he was a cloth merchant operating between Southeast Asia and the Middle East. In other cases they are more tightly-organised. One so-called *dakwah* organisation, Jamaat Tabligh, which was founded in India, now has its Asia-Pacific headquarters on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. It recruits members to travel to South Asia and to other parts of Southeast Asia to attend huge "jamborees" where members are addressed by leading Mawlana from South Asia, and to conduct regular missions throughout the region.[24] Recent studies have pointed to a similar situation: an increased hostility to traditional Islamic authority and to all forms of "cultural Islam", a positive valuation placed on commerce, entrepreneurship and the pursuit of wealth, and the emergence of informal, often transnational religious networks linking Muslim businessmen and entrepreneurs and highly-educated scientists and engineers to a new generation of Muslim holy men and religious experts. These days such networks are maintained not just through personal ties forged by geographically mobile elites, but also by the circulation of sermons and religious instruction by means of CDs, mobile phones and the internet (Roy 2004).

In at least some of the literature there is a strong sense that the transnational/deterritorialised nature of such networks in fact contributes to Islamic radicalism. Muslims are detached from more "traditional" forms of Islamic community and more locally-based, "syncretic", "tolerant" or accommodationist forms of belief and practice, thereby becoming, it is argued, less subject to the controlling influence of traditional religious authority and more susceptible to radicalisation and violence. However, while clearly much has changed, the earlier spread of Islamic modernism in places like Southeast Asia was equally disembedding, without necessarily being associated with violence. Clearly such networks of Muslim radicals exist in Southeast Asia today. But networks on their own cannot

explain the radicalisation of Islam in the region, since they have emerged along with all forms of religious modernisation.

On the basis of this, it is plausible to argue that the experience of economic transformation across the rural and urban frontiers and border-lands of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia have been sufficiently simi-lar to make it possible to speak of these regions as constituting a single developmental zone, even in some sense the exemplary sites of a pattern of development and modernisation that is distinctive to Southeast Asia. This is evident not only in the overall ways in which these apparently marginal regions were developed, often quite early on — at times even being contemporary with similar developments in parts of Europe — but in the fact that most of the sites of more recent capitalist industrialisation (for example Singapore, and Penang and the Klang Valley in Malaysia) were also sites of much earlier waves of modern social and economic transformation.

The existence of modernising economic, social, cultural and religious trajectories, not in the cultural/"civilisational" heartlands of Southeast Asia, but on their fringes, margins and frontiers, also supports the view that analysts of Southeast Asian modernity would do well to focus greater attention on these regions. Doing so produces an important alternative to state-centric discourses on development (and underdevelopment). More importantly, it provides a rather different way of framing the question of the relationship between Islam and capitalism in Southeast Asian con-texts. For by focusing on capitalism at the margins it is possible to see clearly that, regardless of whether Islam is seen as an obstacle to capitalist development by outside observers or by modern states in the region, Muslims in any case play, and have long played, key roles in the eco-nomic development of the region.

Are we justified, then, in speaking of Southeast Asia, or at least those regions described above, as the site not just of economic development but of an Islamic capitalism?

Weber or an Islamic Capitalism in Southeast Asia: A Disclaimer

I begin with a disclaimer. The discovery of an active, dynamic commer-cial economy on the margins of Southeast Asia's cultural and civilisational heartlands, and of a very significant Muslim presence within it, surely overturns the impression that Southeast Asian Islam inevitably promotes economic backwardness, marginality, commercial naïveté and a subsis-tence-oriented economic existence — an impression created by nationalist

intellectuals and western scholars alike. However, it cannot on its own be used either to prove Weber's hypothesis or to argue that, contra Weber, Southeast Asia is in fact the site of a successful fusion of Islam and capitalism or that it might become so.

As noted Weber's concern was with factors internal to individual civilisational complexes and whether these factors did or did not encourage the development of modern capitalism. What the above discussion shows is that at least in Southeast Asia, economic development, and modernisation more broadly, cannot be described as the project of any single civilisation. It has on the contrary been intercultural and intercivilisational from the outset. The regions which constitute(d) the centres of Southeast Asian economic development have not been characterised by the exclusive presence of any single cultural or civilisational complex persisting into — or reactivated in — the period of modernity. Instead, they have been multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-civilisational from the beginning of the modern period. Modernisation in these regions has in other words gone hand in hand with high, generally exceptionally high levels of religious, linguistic and cultural diversity. If such regions share any common cultural characteristic, it is the presence within them of difference rather than any common cultural traits within them.[25]

It therefore does not make sense to search for culturally or civilisationally homogeneous capitalisms or modernities in Southeast Asia, since wherever modernisation and development have occurred, they have done so not within but between or across a great number of different cultural/religious/civilisational complexes (see Arnason 1997), and not in cultural or civilisational heartlands but on their fringes or margins. Is Malaysian development, for example, to be understood as the product of a single cultural or civilisational framework? If so, which one: Western/Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Islamic? Each of these has been claimed by groups contesting the creation of Malaya as a national space. And yet it is simply implausible to argue that any cultural/religious/civilisational singularity was constitutive of modernity Malaysia-style, a place which was moreover very much on the margins of the cultural and civilisational heartlands of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia as late as the turn of the twentieth century. Instead of pointing to close links between particular cultures, religions or civilisations on the one hand and distinctive patterns of modernisation on the other, the discussion so far points to a different way of framing the problematic of modernity in Southeast Asia, one, following Schendel, rooted in regional rather than cultural or civilisational spaces (see Schendel 2002).

Muslim Enterprise?

There are a number of characteristics of Muslim-owned enterprises, particularly in the frontier regions of modern Southeast Asia that suggests the operation of a distinctively Islamic moral/ethical system. My research suggests that the great majority of Muslim enterprises in regions in Sumatra (western), Kalimantan (East and West), peninsular Malaya, Sarawak, Thailand and Vietnam, whether they are engaged in manufacturing, cash cropping or wholesale and retail trading, are relatively small in scale — typically owned and operated by individual entrepreneurs or by relatively small groups working in partnership. In this there seems to be a strong preference for working with fellow Muslims.

This is not to say that there are no large-scale Muslim enterprises in the region. Rather, when entrepreneurial units are larger, they typically consist of a number, sometimes quite a large number, of small scale or individualised work groups which are typically partially financed by wealthier entrepreneurs. In other words, while entrepreneurial units may be large, instances of what Weber called the "factory system" are rare. Larger enterprises are instead typically made up of a number of smaller-scale sub-units with the sense that such units are at least partially autonomous, linked to an entrepreneur or landowner who may supply them with some or all of their means of production, land and/or finance in return. Work is not carried out in exchange for a wage but for a share of the product or proceeds or through some kind of profit sharing. At the same time the use of unpaid family labour is typically frowned upon and when it occurs, it is sometimes seen as a sign of poverty, desperation, commercial failure and/or lack of a proper entrepreneurial spirit.

It is important to note that whether out of a lack of power to enforce them or moral objections — probably a combination of the two — monopolies are very rare in those sectors of the economy in which Muslim businesses operate. There seems to be no sense that excluding others from engaging in the same business as oneself would improve one's own prospects. While competition among small scale entrepreneurs may be fierce, the sense that one more person can always be worked in or accommodated generally prevails.[26] Certainly the effect of all this is that no matter how impoverished, a budding cash cropper, street peddler, manufacturer of anything ranging from flower pots made from recycled plastic bottles to toys, decorations or implements produced from old metal cans, can find a way to make a living, however meagre. The Muslim economy of Southeast Asia seems to take the free market principle to an extreme that

no western capitalist would tolerate. The same might be said of the commercial ethic which prevails among Muslim entrepreneurs. Typically, and partly as a consequence of their autonomy and smallness of scale, these Muslim entrepreneurs are very quick to respond to new commercial opportunities, their commercial goals often being extremely short term as they are willing to move on as soon as the chance for profitable activity disappears. This often makes them highly mobile geographically, disinclined to settle down and become involved in anything requiring long term residence in any one place — something which British colonial officials during the Malayan rubber boom frequently bemoaned as they sought to populate the inland parts of peninsular Malaya with a loyal "yeoman" peasantry with strong ties to place.

Much the same underlies the tendency to avoid fixed pricing. Although it is often infuriating for westerners, the prevalence of bargaining over fixed pricing allows for maximum flexibility and, at least when the bargainer is knowledgeable and skilled, optimal pricing as far as the consumer is concerned.

In all this — the disinclination to work for a wage, the preference for small-scale even individualised entrepreneurial activity (even when such units are at best semi-autonomous), the strong ideology of self-reliance, the attempt to avoid using unpaid family labour, the absence of significant barriers to market entry — there is a strong ideology of autonomy, equality, a desire to avoid being exploited or exploiting others, which many see as being at least compatible with Islamic notions of self-reliance, morality and justice. This is not to mention the fact that a large number of Muslim entrepreneurs follow the Muslim injunction to give money to the poor in the form of *zakat* (tithe), and the quite widespread presence of *wakaf* or Islamic trusts set up by better off Muslim entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs within this system rarely borrow money from banks. Instead funds are raised, when necessary, by borrowing money from moneylenders or successful kinsmen/women, by setting up as a semi-autonomous cash cropper, small-scale merchant or artisan/manufacturer with an advance from a wealthier entrepreneur (and paying them back with a share of the product or proceeds) or, as was most often the case in West Sumatra, by pawning land. Whether or not this is because they would be unlikely to receive credit from financial institutions within the formal economy, most explain their preference for such alternative modes of finance as stemming from the Islamic prohibition on interest. A consequence of this is that risk — and risks are high — tends to be shared

across the economy rather than falling disproportionately on the weakest as is the case in a more orthodox capitalist economy.

Despite the small scale of units of production and distribution, the Muslim economy of Southeast Asia is in no sense atomised or characterised by autarchy. Not only are individual enterprises frequently linked together under the umbrella of a larger enterprise, but most are also tied into widely dispersed networks of Muslim merchants, cash croppers and manufacturers, which may transcend national boundaries, as we have noted. Together with the mutual imbrication of these economic/business networks and networks of religious teachers, scholars and missionaries — each supporting the other — the Muslim economy of Southeast Asia can be regarded, and is often regarded by its participants — as constituting a deterritorialised Muslim *umma* that is not just regional but global in scope. There is, to borrow Weber's term, an elective affinity between the beliefs and practices of a deterritorialised Islam and the translocal economic networks that prevail among Southeast Asia's Muslim entrepreneurs.

Although there are clearly a number of determinants at work here, it is possible to see how this nexus between economy and religion has served to constitute distinctively Islamic forms of moral economy in the region; forms that in a number of ways might also be said to constitute exemplary alternatives to the ethic of "western" capitalism. Far from being commercially-backward and inefficient, at least in certain places and times, this Muslim "bazaar" economy is incredibly efficient. The British realised for example that small scale "peasant" rubber cultivators in Malaya were far more efficient than the mainly western-owned plantations. This, however, is only a single example of how a large number of relatively small scale, flexible Muslim enterprises easily outperforms larger scale, supposedly more rational capitalist or state run enterprises in Southeast Asia. Urban transport in Indonesia is an excellent example. In the absence of the government restrictions which have become so prevalent in Indonesian cities today, the incredible range and numbers of trishaws, motorcycle taxis, taxis, minibuses and the like meant that one could travel almost anywhere at any time for a very reasonable fare. Similarly with the proliferation of small-scale food outlets which provide working class Southeast Asians with an incredible variety of extremely reasonably priced prepared foods.

Apart from their efficiency, these Muslim enterprises are also less environmentally destructive than the large scale, generally foreign-owned capitalist enterprises in the region. Although colonial and postcolonial

governments have always blamed indigenous entrepreneurs for the destruction of environments, for example with the almost universal hostility expressed towards swidden cultivators, these small-scale Muslim enterprises are far less environmentally destructive than are large scale loggers, miners and planters.

Finally, as already noted, the Islamic commercial economy in Southeast Asia is far more egalitarian, more inflected by religio-moral considerations of fairness and justice, and far less exclusionary than are supposedly more rational capitalist enterprises in the region. The Muslim economy provides employment for a far greater proportion of Southeast Asia's poor than do capital-intensive mining, manufacturing and plantations. In these and numerous other ways, "Islamic capitalism", at least in Southeast Asia, constitutes a distinctive form of modern economic organisation while at the same time providing a possible basis for an exemplary alternative to (western) capitalism.

Of course it would be misleading to speak of the Muslim economy of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia as though it constituted some pure, distinctive economic system autonomous from the general economic environment within which it functions. While Muslim entrepreneurs have good reasons for preferring to deal with fellow Muslims, they must and do interact peacefully with non-Muslim economic actors in all areas of their economic practice. Southeast Asia is no more a Muslim economy than it is an overseas Chinese, western, neo-liberal one. It is instead a fusion of all of these — indeed it is its intercultural/intercivilisational character that defines it. Nonetheless, despite the arguments of both political-economic reductionists on the one hand and culturalists on the other, Muslims play key roles in the Southeast Asian commercial economy, and Islam plays an important role in shaping patterns of economic practice.

It would, therefore, be a mistake to speak of a Southeast Asian version of Islamic capitalism, the main reason being that although an Islamic ethic is clearly at work in shaping the economic practices of Muslim entrepreneurs, for a number of important reasons an Islamic institutional framework is absent. There are a number of reasons for this; the absence of an Islamic legal framework, together with state institutions explicitly dedicated to the facilitation of Muslim ways of doing business, are the most obvious. This is clearly true of places like Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines. However, it is also true of Muslim majority Indonesia and Malaysia where economic life is regulated almost entirely by a judicial and legal framework based on that of the West. The state,

particularly in Malaysia, is certainly not averse to the implementation of Islamic law. But generally it is Muslim family, or even criminal law, that is stake. The reason so little of the state's attention is directed towards improving the economic conditions for Muslim enterprise is that Muslim entrepreneurs are politically marginal. Indonesia and Malaysia, where the states have been particularly vocal about the need to provide special support for so-called indigenous commerce, development policies have tended to have exactly the opposite effect. And this is in part because Muslim entrepreneurs have very little impact on the decision-making processes from which such policies arise. If these are indeed "bourgeois states", it is not the Muslim bourgeoisie whose interests they have served.

The political marginalisation of Muslim entrepreneurs in turn stems from the fact that the regions where they have been most active are those which, in at least one key respect, do not fit the ideal type of modern societies as developed particularly in liberal versions of the western modernist narrative. I refer here to prevalence of patronage, clientalism and the personalisation of unequal power relations. Since these regions at least in the early phase of modernisation were generally not subjected to the regular exercise of rational bureaucratic control, intervention by the state has often taken place through non-state or parastatal agents, a case in point being the extra-constitutional use of military forces and militia in Indonesia. This accounts for the sense that these regions are characterised by varying degrees of political marginality *vis-à-vis* the centres of modern governmental/bureaucratic power. From the perspective of the regional states, this has made them sites of intensive political projects aimed at "civilising" their peoples and bringing them under more direct state control.

This also explains why these regions are generally seen by states and their agents as marginal or peripheral. For reasons which should be clear, they have frequently constituted — and in some cases still do — a source of anxiety for governments as to their "manageability" or governability. And their marginality to the civilising efforts of modern states accounts for the tendency to represent such spaces — even when as is sometimes the case, they may be found in urban areas geographically close to the centres of state power — as wild, dangerous, frontier-like and crime-ridden.

More importantly, these regions are politically marginal in the sense that their interests, or at least the interests of local elites (particularly economic and religious elites) are under-represented in political centres. Because these regions are nonetheless sites of rapid commercial development — indeed as we have suggested they are or have often been the

main centres of economic modernisation in Southeast Asia — the result is a disjuncture between economic and political power that seems to prevail across most of modern Southeast Asia. Such a disjuncture means that Muslim entrepreneurs in particular have little impact on state policy across the region, which means in turn that states are able to ignore their interests in favour of those of multi- and transnational enterprises, often in tandem with local political elites in an arrangement which in Malaysia and the Philippines is sometimes called "crony capitalism". Global companies in turn contribute large sums to state coffers in the form of rent paid in exchange for access to resources (see Zhang 2003), providing further incentive for states to favour their interests over those of indigenous entrepreneurs.

For much the same reason, central governments, even in Muslim-majority Indonesia and Malaysia, have long treated so-called "foreign", particularly Chinese business more favourably, at the same time being quite happy to allow, if not actively stir up, anti-Chinese sentiment to spread among the general populace. This allows the state to benefit in a variety of ways from Chinese economic success, while, as with Muslim businessmen, marginalising them politically.

For these reasons, and despite the rhetoric, state policies across the region have favoured top down development, an open door policy to global capitalism and a legal-political framework conducive to doing business in the western way, at the same time silencing the political voices of Asian entrepreneurs, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, and continuously enacting policies which discriminate against them. There is little doubt that this general pattern is an important factor in the failure of Muslim-owned business to thrive and expand in the way that capitalist enterprises did in the West. While such "external" factors are not sufficient to explain the specificities of Muslim economic organisation in the region, it would be equally implausible to argue that they have had no impact on the economic practice of the regions' Muslim entrepreneurs.[27] In sum, while distinctively Islamic enterprises are a very significant part of the Southeast Asian economic landscape, this has not been reflected in the general patterns of modern state and nation building in the region.

Conclusion

Juxtaposing the abstract narrative of modernisation with the processes of economic modernisation that have occurred in insular and peninsular Southeast Asia from the end of the nineteenth century gives rise to a

series of disjunctures. The idea that these disjunctures are best read as evidence for a primitivity or backwardness that lies at the heart of Islam is clearly an inappropriate response to them. However, to argue that Islam has played no role in shaping the economic forms that developed in these politically-marginal regions is equally problematic. I have attempted instead to demonstrate the ways in which the economic lives of Muslims in Southeast Asia have been shaped by a complex range of factors, one of which (but only one among many) is a set of strongly felt moral and religious injunctions derived from, or based on, the revealed sources of Islam. To be sure, Muslim Southeast Asia is not the site of an "alternative modernity". However, neither can the role played by Islam, along with other civilisational imaginaries, in shaping the trajectory of modern economic transformation in insular and peninsular Southeast Asia be merely denied by appealing to so-called structural factors themselves emanating from the West. While such a conclusion may contradict some of Weber's assertions about "eastern" religion and the "spirit" of modern capitalism, it may also be thought of as remaining true to Weber's own insistence on the need to pay closer attention to the relationship between civilisation and religious imaginaries on the one hand and the modernisation of economic life on the other in both the East and the West.

Notes

1. The author would like to acknowledge the Australian Research Council for funding much of the research in Southeast Asia on which this chapter is based. Special thanks to Cathy Henenberg and Francesco Formosa for research assistance.
2. This applies to some of the more influential critiques of Weber, for example the Marxist-influenced works of Rodinson and Turner along with those of numerous postcolonial theorists who have counted Weber among the orientalists. See Turner (1974), Rodinson (1978) and Said (1995). For a particularly well-argued critique of Turner and Rodinson, see Schluchter (1999). For important, though somewhat different, critiques of the post-colonial attacks on Weber, see Nafissi (1998) and Arnason (2003).
3. Which he defined as an economic system dominated by enterprises which are profit-oriented, factory-based, independent of households and engage in double-entry bookkeeping (Schluchter 1999: 65–6).
4. Nafissi (1998) is particularly insightful on this point.
5. See van Leur (1967) and Schrieke (1955–7), as well as some of the early work of Clifford Geertz (1963b). Another American anthropologist to take up certain parts of the Weber thesis in Southeast Asian contexts was James

Peacock (1978). See also the review article by Clammer (1985), although this is written with a strong political economy bias and almost completely neglects the centrality of psychology and economic ethics to Weber's project.

6. This raises the question of what we mean exactly when we speak of "Islam" in such contexts. As Asad among others points out, to speak of Islam as a religion in the somewhat narrow, "western" sense is misleading (see Asad 1993). Accordingly, following Arnason, I am using "Islam" to refer to more than a religion, but to a civilisation, or perhaps better a "civilisational imaginary" or even a plurality of such imaginaries. To cite Arnason again: "Islam is — or aspires to be — a total way of life, incompatible with any principled division of sacred and secular spheres … [making it] appropriate to refer to this all encompassing project as a civilisation, rather than to subsume it under a misleadingly narrow Western concept of religion" (Arnason 2003: 24).

7. For an important comparative study of Islam and modern "Kemalist" states in western Asia, see Houston (2008).

8. See especially the important work of Anthony Reid (1993), although for a countervailing view which makes commerce less central to Southeast Asian history see the work of Victor Lieberman (1990).

9. Governments throughout the region, nationalist intellectuals, and many western academics, have tended to portray all so-called indigenous groups (labelled *pribumi* in Indonesia, *bumiputera* in Singapore and Malaysia), including or especially Muslims, as commercially-backward (ethnic Thais in Thailand and Catholic Filipinos view their southern Muslim populations as in a sense doubly backward, a consequence both of their supposedly isolated, rural existence and their adherence to a religion that also promotes economic disadvantage).

10. I wish to acknowledge the Australian Research Council for funding the research on "Translocal Identities in the Modern Malay World" (with Christopher Houston and Wendy Mee), on which some of this discussion is based.

11. In an important article, William Schendel has demonstrated what at least those of us working in so-called "marginal" regions of Southeast Asia have long felt, namely that not only is Southeast Asia a somewhat artificial area of study because the "geographical boundaries of the region remain highly problematic", but that to the extent that it has been said to have some sort of internal coherence, this has been achieved only by privileging a limited number of cultural or civilisational heartlands within it. What follows is in part an attempt to answer Schendel's call for more debate in Southeast Asian studies "about the effects of privileging 'heartlands', the precise demarcation of the area, the delimitation of its further reaches, [and] the need to encompass and explore the margins" (2002: 660), although focusing on

a regionally-specific pattern of modernisation is perhaps not exactly what Schendel had in mind.

12. To make it easier for our readers, we provide only a broad overview here. For more detailed information on patterns of economic, demographic, and political change and social and gender relations for the region as a whole see: De Jonge and Kaptein (2002), Elson (1997), Federspeil (2007), Duncan (2004), Keyes and Tanabe (2002), Landé (1999), Lieberman (1990), Lombard (1995), Owen (1971), Reid (1993, 1997), Rosaldo (2003), Venardos (2008), Wijeyewardene (1990); for Indonesia, Singapore and Malaya, see Kahn (2006), Hoffstaedter (2008), Retsikas (2007), Titosudarmo (2005); for Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos see Manning and Wickaramasekara (2000), Bayly (2000), Biggs (2008), Brocheux (1995), Cooke and Li (2004), Cupet (1998), Dang, Goldstein and McNally (1997), Edwards (2006), Enright (1995), Gran (1975), Haines (2006), Jayakody and Vu (2008), Kerkvliet (2001), Khong (2002), Lafont (1989), le Coq, Trebuil and Dufumier (2004), Ledgerwood (1989), Ovesen, Trankell and Ojendal (1996), Pholsena (2006), Rambo (1973, 2005), Reid (2000), Siamwalla (1972), Tan (2006), Taylor (2001, 2006, 2007a, b) and Woodside (2006); for the Philippines, particularly Mindanao, see Abinales (1997, 2000), Arce (1983), Bouis and Haddad (1990), Cagoco-Guiam (2005), Clarence-Smith (2004), Doeppers and Xenos (1998), Eder and Youngblood (1994), Fulton (2007), Gomez (2005), Hayase (2007), Hedman and Sidel (2000), Hutchcroft (2000), Isidro and Saber (1968), Kamlian (1999), Kiefer (1972), Larousse (2001), McCoy and de Jesus (1982), Marohomsalic (2001), Mora (2005), Rodil (1993, 1994), Saleeby (1976), Tadem (1980), Turner and Turner (1992) and Warren (1981, 2002, 2003); for Thailand, particularly the South, see Albritton (1997), Arong (1989), Askew (2006), Bajunid (1980), Brown (1988), Chavivun (1980), Cornish (1997), Cushman (1991, 1993), Dorairajoo (2002), Eberhardt (1988), Fraser (1962, 1984), Ichiro (2005), Horstmann (2004, 2006), Idris (1995), Ingram (1971), McVey (2000), Marks (1997), Montesano and Jory (2008), Phuwadol (1986), Polioudakis (1989), Sa-Idi, Kuson Nakachart Srisompob Jitpiromsri, Sunandpattira Nilchang and King (1996), Syukri (1985), Thak (2007), Trebuil (1996), Turton (2000), Unger (1998), Vandergeest (2008), and Winichakul (2000).

13. For studies which contain critical discussions of the effects of agrarian transformation, plantation agriculture, mining and/or industrialisation in these regions, see the following: Aspinall (2002), Brocheux (1995), Brown (1997), Cooke and Li (2004), Cornish (1997), Dang, Goldstein and McNally (1997), Gomez (2005), Gomez and Jomo (1997), Gran (1975), Higgott and Robison (1985), Jomo (1998, 1993, 2001), le Coq, Trebuil and Dufumier (2004), McCoy and de Jesus (1982), McVey (2000), Nevins and Peluso (2008), Owen (1971), Pelzer (1978), Phuwadol (1986), Robison (1986), Robinson (1986), Stoler (1985), Unger (1998), Taylor (2001).

14. What follows is a brief overview of some of the main findings presented in Kahn (2006).

15. The issue of their indigeneity is a tricky one. According to Malay nationalist narratives from at least the 1920s, they, or their descendants, are part of the Malay population, regarded as indigenous, economically marginal and commercially naive, village-dwelling, thereby distinguishing them from "alien" Chinese and Indians (see Kahn 2006). However the evidence clearly shows that a large proportion of these "Malay" cash croppers, merchants, traders etc. were in fact just as foreign as the Chinese, Europeans and Indians more often subsumed under that label, having been born not on the Peninsula but in a number of different places in what was then the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia).

16. For studies of the longstanding connections, economic and otherwise, between Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and the role played within it of so-called Hadrami Arabs, see for example Lombard (1995), Reid (1993), De Jonge and Kaptein (2002).

17. This research was carried out in the 1990s in the coastal town of Sangatta, the site of a large multinational coal mining enterprise and Kelian, where a joint Australian-Indonesian consortium was mining for gold.

18. It is sometimes suggested, then, that Islamic reformism is opposed to all forms of religious authority, it being up to the individual believer to decide on his/her own the meaning of the original texts. However, as is perhaps the case with all self-consciously "rationalist" ideologies, reformism certainly does not do away with textual authority, since it is generally recognised that linguistic and religious expertise is required before one can produce *ijtihad*; hence the important role of religious education/certification in the production of modernist authority. Nonetheless, as Eickelman points out, the new importance of the printing industry (embraced by modernists from early on), and hence the "textualisation" of Islam associated with Islamic reformism does make it, for the first time, possible for people to have direct access to Islamic arguments without any intervening religious authority — making it at least potentially possible for the reader to exercise "authoritative immediacy" (see Eickelman 2000). For a somewhat different, far more critical (more Foucauldian) view of the changes in Islam wrought by print capitalism see Schulze (1987).

19. Laffan (2003: 121–2). See also Taufik Abdullah (1971), and Al-Azmeh (1993).

20. See Abdullah (1971) for a detailed discussion of modernist educational reform in West Sumatra from, the 1920s. For more recent studies of changes in Islamic education associated with religious modernisation, see Hefner (1998).

21. Abdullah's (1971) and Roff's (1967) remain the definitive accounts of the *Kaum Muda: Kaum Tua* conflict in colonial Indonesia and Malaya respectively.

22. Cham informants in Ho Chi Minh City and the Cambodian border region of Chau Doc frequently made reference to this division, suggesting at the same time that the *Cham Islam* generally included those engaged in commerce or with higher than normal levels of educational achievement. See also Nakamura (1999), Taylor (2001). For a longer term perspective on the Cham, commerce, Islam, modernism and their relations to a broader "Malay World", see Bayly (2000), Cabaton (1906, 1907), Labussière (1880), Manguin (2001), Ner (1941) and Reid (2000).

23. Similarly, many Thai and Vietnamese Muslims are eager to take advantage of generous scholarships offered by Universities in the Gulf, and a good deal of money from Saudi Arabia flows to charities, schools and mosque building programs throughout the region.

24. For a recent in-depth study of Jamaat Tabligh in Malaysia and Indonesia see Bustaman-Ahmad (2010). For an account of a jamboree organised by JT in southern Thailand, see Hostmann (2006).

25. It would be a mistake to speak as though these regions were patchworks of timeless and separate "cultures". Economic, political and social interaction across cultures, a key feature of social relations in these regions, has resulted over time both in processes of ethnogenesis and, of cultural hybridisation, a clear example being the always evolving patterns of linguistic usage and linguistic hybridisation which facilitate communication across older linguistic divides. The proliferation of different versions of non-standardised Malay as a means of communication across a variety of linguistic divides is a case in point.

26. Something Geertz noted for Javanese cultivators (Geertz 1963a).

27. This prevents us from using the case of Islam in Southeast Asia to defend the Weber hypothesis, since it is not possible to say for example, that the relative underdevelopment of Muslim enterprises is caused by the absence of an Islamic ethic favourable to capitalist development or not. But neither does it permit us to reject Weber on the grounds that the real reasons for such economic backwardness lie in colonialism, global capitalism and the like, as suggested by Clammer among others (Clammer 1985).

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Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

Edited by Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

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Malay Social Imaginaries: Nationalist and Other Collective Identities in Indonesia

Kenneth Young

By the late twentieth century, the conditions that sustain nationalism in Western societies — most notably in Europe — have changed. These institutional and socio-economic changes have led, in most parts of the Western world, to a fragmentation of the prevailing narratives of social identity; a plurality of overlapping claims to collective identity that work against the type of unchallengeable unitary vision that nationalism exercised a century ago. Consequently many scholarly approaches are wary of analyses that give too much emphasis to nationalism as a unifying and motivating force in society. This leaves them ill-prepared to appreciate the degree to which, in many parts of Asia, nationalism retains much of its vitality. In a number of countries — China, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia[1] come to mind, among others — the vigorous propagation of nationalist sentiment continues in the mass media, and through the major institutions of state and society.

Indeed, nationalism could be seen as indispensible to national identity and social cohesion (Fitzgerald 1995) in particular Asian countries; so much so that there is a parallel risk of overestimating its influence. It has profound effects on the popular imagination, so it is too easy to accept the representations of the nationalist project as a state of affairs already achieved, and thereby miss its vulnerabilities and its unfinished, aspirational qualities. How do we get the balance right in assessing the influence of nationalism, and are we so impressed by its pervasive presence that we miss the full significance of a number of other enduring forms of collective identity? In the discussion that follows, I will consider several aspects of the trajectory of nationalism in Indonesia. In doing so, I want to expose some of the limitations of the analytical vocabulary we employ in

trying to answer questions of this kind. That leads me to argue for the utility of the concept of "social imaginary" (Taylor 2004; Castoriadis 1998) over various other alternatives ("world-view", etc.) which I will examine shortly.

Nationalism articulates the claims of a people to exclusive sovereignty in a territory with which they have strong historical, cultural and other ties. The nationalist discourse of identity elaborates the special qualities that constitute this group as a "people", and the reasons why they are able to claim the territory is theirs. Other forms of identity exist alongside, and sometimes even in opposition to, the historical, cultural and normative claims of the nationalists. These alternative identities may not, however, make the same kind of very specific and exclusive territorial claims. Since they do not seek state power, they are not so obviously opposed to the nationalist project. In many cases, theirs is an identity embedded in social practices, in collaborative networks and in a common lived experience. These are mutual connections and understandings that have little need of elaborate narratives of peoplehood or claims to territorial sovereignty.

Joel Kahn (2006) has drawn attention to a large group of people who share an identity of this kind. He calls them "Other Malays". They are found mainly in Indonesia and Malaysia, but are scattered throughout widely dispersed parts of insular and mainland Southeast Asia. Within Indonesia, the way of life of the Other Malays belongs most typically to communities found in "Outer Indonesia", [2] setting up an implicit contrast with the situation in "Inner Indonesia" (Java, Madura and Bali). In his account, they are said to participate in an "imagined community"[3] that is based on their way of life, extended social networks, and their shared cultural and religious orientation. He contrasts the shared identity of the Other Malays with Malaysian nationalism in particular, pointing to the way the Malay nationalist project came to rely on the idea of the Malay *bangsa*, or "race-nation", as a foundation of its political and territorial claims. I will explore and question the singularity of the imagined community of the Other Malays, suggesting there are also other collective identities of this kind that exist alongside, or in spite of, the integrating and exclusionary projects of nation-states in the region. In doing so, I conclude that accounting for the durability of the identity of the Other Malays shows the need for more appropriate analytical categories than "imagined community".

In Indonesia emerging nationalist movements had to confront a number of challenges in articulating the distinctive claims of national

identity. Nationalist movements had to resolve a number of difficult issues, such as the challenge of framing plausible claims of shared ethnicity, or justifying the arbitrariness involved in fixing the spatial boundaries of national territories, as well as conflicts arising from attempts to build political hegemony, and to create the normative foundations of political legitimacy linked to the concomitant expectation that these national loyalties would always take precedence over all other ties. The success of nationalist intellectuals in meeting these challenges leaves us today with a mental map of peoples and societies very much shaped within nationalist narratives. Yet to fully appreciate the significance of identities like that of the Other Malays, it is necessary to step back from the "givenness" of nationalist histories, and to view the formation of imagined communities (or social imaginaries, etc.) among Malay peoples free from teleological assumptions about the inevitable crystallisation of the modern nation-states that exist in the region. Therefore I am concerned with identities that have formed in the wider Malay world,[4] rather than those that are restricted within familiar national borders.

This chapter will consider several central markers of national identity employed in the construction of Indonesia. It is worth noting that the markers employed in the construction of Indonesian national identity are markedly different to those invoked in Malaysia. Unlike Malaysia the idea of a unitary Malay "race-nation" (*bangsa*) was implausible in Indonesia, although cognate uses of "*bangsa*" — *kebangsaan* (nationality) and *suku-bangsa* (ethno-linguistic group) — were essential. A full discussion of the nature of these debates in what became Malaysia is not possible within the scope of this chapter, nor is it possible to pursue the examination of the relationship between the identity of the Other Malays and the forms of Malay/Malaysian nationalism. Here discussion is limited to the Indonesian side and it is left to others to continue to reflect on the relationship between Malay social imaginaries and Malaysian nationalism.[5] In this chapter, I broadly accept Kahn's case about the durability of the "imagined community" of the Other Malays, yet I will suggest that this major and important instance of collective identity existing alongside Indonesian nationalism is not the only one.

The following discussion reflects on the distinctiveness of the imagined community (or social imaginary) of the Other Malays through an examination of its differences to official nationalisms, in the context of the significant differences that exist between Indonesian and Malaysian nationalisms, and within Indonesia itself, between the amorphous and permeable cultural boundaries separating Inner and Outer Indonesia. The

various forms of collective identity to be discussed are not anachronistic traditional "cultural residues". They have been fashioned as integral elements of the development of modernity in Asia. The contrast with nationalism is in part a contrast between the highly elaborated narratives of identity central to the political and socio-cultural projects of nationalist movements, and the less formally articulated norms and identities shared by other groups because they are embedded in extended interpersonal networks, social practices and common lived experiences. As well as suggesting that our estimation of the influence of nationalism needs to be balanced by consideration of the lasting strength of these other less overtly political identities, this chapter will argue for the need to continue to search for improved analytical terms to those we usually rely on when we seek to discriminate among the varieties of modern collective identities. Specifically, we will consider the use of "imagined community", "ethos", "world-view" and "social imaginary". Among these terms, "social imaginary" is the least familiar and, at first glance, the least obvious; yet I will argue there are good reasons to use it.

All of these concepts are valuable in advancing our understanding of modern Asian societies, yet all of them also lead us to confront problems of analysis, and more significantly to address some relatively neglected phenomena in the real world of modernity. Both theory and evidence oblige us to test the adequacy of our conventional categories. Looking at the way these categories are used to characterise Asian nationalism inevitably leads to implicit or directly stated issues about the trajectories of modernity in Asia. I concur with Kahn's arguments (Kahn 2001, 2006) that refute certain orthodox accounts which see modernity arising predominantly through mechanisms of socio-cultural diffusion. The histories of regional modernities are intertwined, they are aspects of a single process. To take but one example, there is little dispute that particular processes of state formation contribute to the historical emergence of the "modern constellation",[6] but the ways in which we characterise the modern state, its institutional forms, its rationality and legitimating rationales, and crucially its relations with a variety of "civil societies", have generally become more problematic (Arnason 1987, 2000; Eisenstadt 2000).

Categories of Collective Identity

All of these categories — ethos, world-view, imagined community and social imaginary — have been adapted by leading scholars to characterise varieties of collective identity in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, and with

some success. As we shall see, however, these same authors are also invariably lead to reflect on the troubling limitations of these terms. Starting with an example of how Clifford Geertz wrestled with these issues, let us consider each in turn.

When Clifford Geertz sought in the late 1950s to explain the cultural potency of the *wayang kulit* among the Javanese, he was not thinking primarily of nationalism, but he was trying to understand a cognate and central unifying feature of Javanese culture. In addition, he was attempting to explore the efficacy of religious symbols in general in various cross-cultural settings, and not only Java. He needed to show that these symbols unified social understandings of what is and what ought to be; the moral and the aesthetic on the one hand and the realms of fact and instrumental rationality on the other. To do this, Geertz formulated a distinction between "ethos" and "world-view". In anthropology, he asserted (1975: 126–7):

> … the moral (and aesthetic) aspects of a given culture, the evaluative elements, have commonly been summed up in the term "ethos", while the cognitive, existential aspects have been designated by the term "world view". A people's ethos is the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their world view is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society.

Almost invariably these manifestations of shared identity have the character of relating "an ontology and a cosmology to an aesthetics and a morality" (Geertz 1975: 127), so that "the ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied in the actual state of affairs which the world view describes, and the world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression" (Geertz 1975: 127).

Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined community" captures some of the qualities that Geertz was looking for when he wrote about ethos and world-view. Imagined communities depend on particular means of mass communication which permit the formation of shared normative commitments, a common (if vicarious) experience of the world, and an acceptance of a factual account of the way the world is organised and how it came to be that way. Even though the factual account of

other societies and peoples, and that of the group's own shared history, frequently depend on "forgetting", on distortions, on inaccuracies and outright mythologising, what counts in the end is the unchallenged acceptance of both the group's self-description and its values.

The frequency with which Anderson's idea is invoked in discussions of nationalism is testament to its utility in understanding nationalism. National consciousness, however, is not the only manifestation of an imagined community, and Kahn quite reasonably speaks of the shared identity of Other Malays in this way. The case he makes not only draws attention to the existence of proto-nationalist imagined communities, but also to the presence of yet other significant imagined communities which may have no clearly bounded territorial foundations, nor necessarily any strong political aspirations for creating or controlling modern states. This underlines the need for greater precision in our terminology so that we are better able to distinguish among "imagined communities". I will argue that there may be other non-national and trans-national communities whose experience and orientation to the world in general and to the states-system in particular indicate that the degree of hegemony actually exercised by many post-colonial states falls well short of the ambitions of nationalists. If this is correct, then it has far-reaching significance which cannot be adequately pursued here. But it does at the very least raise the need to be able to distinguish among a range of extended (not face-to-face) communities of this kind. That, too, is too ambitious in a short chapter. What I hope to show is that, while the Other Malays may not be singular, and may indeed be just one of a number of extra-state imagined communities (or social imaginaries) that exist in Southeast Asia, Kahn's account does identify certain characteristics (notably the role of modernist Islam) that give this group a particular coherence as well as a capacity to endure in changing historical circumstances. These qualities set the Other Malays apart, and perhaps warrant the use of another category, that of the social imaginary.[7]

"Social imaginary" is a concept employed by Charles Taylor (2004) and Cornelius Castoriadis (1998).[8] I will rely here on Taylor's usage. Taylor explains that the social imaginary "… is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (2004: 23). To the extent that it operates to include or exclude, it does so primarily at the level of social practices and everyday behaviour, underpinned by a dense network of shared understandings that give social action meaning and purpose. Either one knows how to behave,

or one does not. But correct behaviour is not primarily a matter of conformity to a theory or doctrine. "Humans operated with a social imaginary well before they ever got into the business of theorising about themselves" (Taylor 2004: 26). As Taylor (2004: 23) explains:

> By social imaginary I mean something much broader and deeper that the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.

Social imaginaries are embedded in social practices, but they are not identified by these practices devoid of context. These are social practices that possess a known efficacy and propriety because of a shared background understanding that gives them both practical and moral validity. But says Taylor, "what I'm calling the social imaginary extends beyond the immediate background understanding that makes sense of our particular practices … because just as the practice without the understanding wouldn't make sense for us … so this understanding supposes, if it is to make sense, a wider grasp of our whole predicament: how we stand to each other, how we got to where we are, how we relate to other groups, and so on" (2004: 25). Taylor explains that this wider, less clearly bounded background incorporates a sense of moral order (2004: 28). Thus, the social imaginary includes the double aspect that Geertz was seeking, both a normative and a descriptive understanding of the social order.

Taylor gives extended examples of how social imaginaries work, how they change and come into existence. But he takes pains to stress that he is not talking about theories or doctrines, but the ways in which ordinary people think of their social surroundings, "… and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories and legends" (Taylor 2004: 23). So the sense of shared identity that exists among people who share a social imaginary is essentially one that requires little doctrinal elaboration since the social actors recognise in each other inherent predispositions to act and make judgements in acceptable ways. These values and ways of behaving do not depend on theoretical guidance. They share understandings which "… define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention" (Taylor 2004: 29). Cohesive social groups like the Other Malays do not need comprehensive narratives of their historical

unity as a people, nor of their unique and exclusive ties to their homelands. Such narratives, however, are essential to sustain the imagined communities of nationalists. Let us now turn to consideration of the growth of nationalism in Indonesia.

Indonesian Identities: Nationalism and Islam

The secular nationalist movement that formed in the Netherlands Indies in the early twentieth century was unlikely to find the foundations of national identity in the concept of *bangsa* which only acquired its modern sense of "race-nation" in Malaysia in the 1930s. Still, other modulations of the same root-word (*bangsa*) with its strong connotations of ethnicity and, implicitly, territory, were signifiers of the emerging national identity. *Kebangsaan* (nationality, nationalism) obviously was a central concept. Its territorial associations were just as strong, but its assertion of ethnic singularity was not. Indonesia (or the Netherlands Indies) was — as the British author Furnivall (1967) famously pronounced — a plural society. That internal diversity was found first and foremost in approximately three hundred ethno-linguistic groups scattered across the archipelago. These groups are known as *suku-bangsa*. On its own, "*suku*" means something like "clan" or "lineage". The Indonesian nationalist movement therefore needed to discover the foundations of unity among the numerous ethnolinguistic groups of the archipelago. A number of the larger *suku-bangsa* have distinctive culturally-based identities. They have resided in their home territories for centuries, so that it is conceivable that, in very different historical circumstances, we could imagine proto-nations of Balinese, Acehnese, Bataks, Minangkabau, Javanese, and so on.

For the moment I want to open up the consideration of a number of issues to do with Indonesian nationalism. This discussion accords closely with a number of propositions advanced by Kahn in *Other Malays*. Firstly, why did Indonesian pluralism take the form it did? As Kahn argues for the Malay case, we see in Indonesia, too, that state-formation, nation-building and ethnogenesis are strongly inter-related processes. How did the classification of the diverse ethnic groups of the Indonesian archipelago come to be articulated as outcomes of processes of disembedding, re-embedding and re-territorialisation in both colonial and nationalist practice and narratives, while the territory of modern Indonesia was integrated at the same time within the framework of a modern centralised state? These socio-cultural and political transformations were advanced

continuously in colonial times and under postcolonial independent governments. What were the conditions of possibility for the emergence and consolidation of secular nationalist discourses in Indonesia? Indonesian secular nationalists were not in a position to point to the existence of any simple "race-nation". Their formulations rather looked to non-ethnic general principles that were capable of unifying all the diverse peoples of the archipelago. Sukarno, the pre-eminent nationalist leader, did exactly this. So too did other prominent nationalist leaders, notably the first prime minister Sutan Sjahrir, who sharply condemned violence against Europeans, Chinese, Eurasians, Ambonese and Menadonese in the chaotic final months of the Japanese occupation in 1945 (Feith and Castles 1970). I will look further at the content of these nationalist positions.

The most common unifying feature of the *suku-bangsa* of Indonesia is linguistic since, even though their local languages may be mutually unintelligible they nevertheless belong to the same language family, and commerce throughout the archipelago has long utilised the Malay of the Riau archipelago as a *lingua franca*. It became the foundation of the national language, *Bahasa Indonesia*. Otherwise the ethnic, religious, territorial, economic and cultural differences among the *suku-bangsa* of Indonesia are considerable. Yet, in addition to these differences, there also developed, from the early period of colonial incursion, the perception that Indonesians of Chinese descent remained outsiders, even when they were born locally and only spoke the local Malay tongues. The situation of Indonesians of Chinese descent is complicated, and it is addressed more adequately in several of the other contributions to this volume. It has improved to an important extent since the end of Suharto's New Order.[9] In the past, the "Chinese" have suffered significant forms of discrimination. That had origins to a significant extent in colonial practices which made legal, administrative, economic, and other distinctions between three divisions of the population: European, "native" (*inlander*) and "foreign orientals". The last group were largely Chinese, but also included Arabs and Indians. Those distinctions carry through into the postcolonial era in the widely used but problematic distinction between "non-*pribumi*" and *pribumi*. Essentially the *pribumi* were those the Dutch used to refer to as the natives or indigenes. In what follows I will concentrate on the situation of *pribumi* Indonesians. I intend firstly, to concentrate on the *pribumi* and secondly to shift the geographic focus from Outer Indonesia where Kahn locates the prevalent ethos of the Other Malays, to Inner Indonesia, specifically to Java.

Let us return briefly to the narrative of peoplehood advanced by the leaders of the Indonesian nationalist movement, most notably by Sukarno, Indonesia's President from 1945 to 1966. In Sukarno's vision of Indonesia, all its peoples were unified in a nation that took as its motto the Sanskrit *bhinneka tunggal ika* — "unity in diversity". Rather than lay claim to the homeland of a single race-nation, Sukarno perceived within this great diversity of peoples a unity based on five unifying principles, the *pancasila*. These were (generally phrased): (1) Belief in God; (2) nationalism; (3) humanitarianism; (4) social justice; and (5) democracy. We can glimpse the rhetorical ardour with which Sukarno sought to propagate the five principles in the extemporaneous speech he gave to the Investigating Committee for the Preparation of Independence on 1 June 1945, just months before the Japanese surrender. The speech has become known by the title "the birth of the Panca Sila". I will cite a very brief extract from that speech, and follow it with a quote from a contrasting source in the Malay Muslim world of late colonialism. Sukarno declared in 1945 (Feith and Castles 1970: 42):

> Briefly, the Indonesian nation is not merely a group of individuals who, having *le désir d'être ensemble*,[10] live in a small area like Minangkabau or Madura or Jogja or the Sunda region or the Bugis region, but the Indonesian nation is the totality of all the human beings who, according to geopolitics ordained by God Almighty, live throughout the unity of the entire Indonesian archipelago from the northern tip of Sumatra to Irian. All of them, throughout the islands!

The five principles of the *pancasila* were subsequently written into the preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Before giving the second quotation, I note the interesting fact that (Ricklefs 1981: 197) "the same committee also decided that the new state should include not only Indonesia but Malaya and the British territories in Borneo (Kalimantan) as well". However, on 8 August Sukarno and Hatta were flown to Hanoi to meet the Japanese commander of the Southern Area. The Field Marshall vetoed the inclusion of the British territories.

Let us turn to the second and contrasting quotation then, one that is cited in *Other Malays* (Kahn 2006: 21),[11] a statement that was published originally in a journal called *Seruan Azhar*. This journal, the author, Mahmud Junus, wrote: "… is for our homeland, because we recognise Indonesia *and the Peninsula* as one community, one people, with one *adat*, one way of life, and what is more, virtually one religion" [my emphasis].

This article appeared in October 1927. The author, Mahmud Junus, was an Islamic intellectual, a member of an association of Southeast Asian Muslims, the majority of whom at this time were Minangkabau. They were studying at Cairo's Al-Azhar university. There they were strongly influenced by modernist Islam and Arab nationalist anti-imperialism.

To the Arabs in Arabia and Egypt, Southeast Asian Muslims resident in the Middle East were seen as a distinct *watan* — a non-ethnic, transnational ecumene. They were, in spite of their diverse origins, known as the *watan Jawa*. Southeast Asian intellectuals who identified with this community were almost certainly aware that the *watan* was conceived of as "an alternative to the emerging nationalist imaginaries forming in both the Indies and Malaya at this time" (Kahn 2006: 94; see also Kahn 2006: 93–4, 98). Thus, there was, in the last decades of the colonial era, another social imaginary crystallising around anti-colonial modernist Islam, one that did not cease to bind its adherents following the later victories of secular nationalism. As Kahn (2006: 94) observes:

> This was no pre-modern or subaltern identity that was suppressed and ultimately replaced by modern nationalism. While *watan* may be a concept with a long history in Islamic scholarship, its use by 'Abduh and, presumably, by the students who popularised its usage in the Malay world was a new one because it was framed explicitly as an alternative to modern nationalism.

This particular sense of shared Malay Muslim identity flourished largely outside the framework of ideas and political aspirations developing among Indonesian intellectuals such as Sukarno, Hatta and Sjahrir, who were building secular nationalist organisations in Indonesia and the Netherlands. Its universal appeal nevertheless draws on a strategic grasp of the broader anti-colonial struggles found throughout the global community of Muslim believers (the *umma*) as well as from the religious reforms of modernist Islam. Stressing non-ethnic shared identity, it appealed to Muslims throughout Southeast Asia, though its appeal had greatest purchase within the greater "Malay world". Its unifying, but less territorially-focused, vision of unity has since been written to the margins in post-colonial histories, but its doctrines resonated in the milieu of the open frontier and the borderlands where the mobile commercially-oriented ways of life, operated through *networks* that (Kahn 2006: 174):

> … created Malay spaces, the term understood here to refer not to a fixed identity but to the properties of interstitial linguistic, social,

cultural, religious and political spaces where local people and immi-grants could meet, interact, intermarry, worship and carry out com-mercial transactions.

Inner and Outer Indonesia

But if this ethos, and way of life, flourished in the frontier, in the lightly-populated expanses of Outer Indonesia, do we therefore conclude that it is found only there? What about the rest of Indonesia? Why should there be such a division, if there is one? There may be a temptation to view Outer Indonesia against Java in terms of longer-term historical contrasts between, on the one hand, the loosely-structured, trade-oriented riverine and coastal domains of the Malay Sultans, and on the other, the hierar-chical, aristocratic quasi-feudal agrarian kingdoms relying on *corvée* and taxes in grain (Chandler *et al.* 1987); a contrast between *ladang*, forest products and trade with *sawah* and craft industries; between the mobile, clan-based and commercial settlements with densely populated, disciplined social hierarchies tied to intensely cultivated land. Such contrasts may be useful, but only up to a point. In the Indonesian case, the intensely "feudal" end of this binary typology inevitably reflects received typologies of the court-centred agrarian kingdoms of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, with their reputed disdain for trade and their elaborate nineteenth-century cultural involution (Geertz 1963; Pemberton 1994). Yet even here such orientations, to the extent that we can continue to perpetuate these typo-logies, are of fairly recent date.[12] As late as the early nineteenth century, the central Javanese courts looked to strongly trade-oriented predecessors from the north coast as models of both cultural refinement and political achievement (Carey 1997). Hence differences of this kind are important, but they do not mark absolute discontinuities. The conditions that were found in Outer Indonesia were and are conducive to the way of life of Other Malays, but there were environments in Inner Indonesia, even on Java, where the social imaginary of the Other Malays may have been viable as well. In what follows I will look at a number of contemporary and historical aspects of Java that support this possibility, as well as some that clearly count against it. There are vital connections between the conditions of existence of the type of social imaginary that Kahn dis-cusses and its formation and durability. But if we can observe that these conditions exist or have existed to some degree elsewhere but with dif-ferent socio-cultural outcomes, then the case Kahn makes is still possible, but becomes more complicated. It is not possible to investigate every

aspect of this argument, particularly the detailed historical, political and ethnographic nuances that must be considered before any substantive conclusions are reached. What I will consider more explicitly, following a selective review of the Javanese context, is the adequacy of the analytical categories we have available to discuss such complex but fascinating aspects of modernity.

Today Java is home to more than one hundred million people. Yet this remarkable density of population is relatively recent historically. In the early nineteenth century the population of the island was around three million. True, Java had been settled for millennia, and a number of major agrarian civilisations had existed there, enduring for long periods. Nevertheless up to the nineteenth century the population was relatively sparse, and fertile frontier regions were accessible so that people always had the option to move on. Aristocratic control of the population was generally more pressing for rulers than their control of land, and even here, control of trade was often more significant than either. Where aristocratic control was relatively strong, usually in fertile regions with settled labour-intensive agriculture and extensive irrigation systems, pre-colonial social systems were closer in certain respects to those of late nineteenth-century Bali (Geertz 1980) with blended populations established in complex hierarchical relations of dependence and political affiliation (Kumar 1997; Fernando 1982). There were very complicated land tenure and taxation systems (Carey 1997) with a constant concern to tie producers to the soil. Nevertheless, trade was significant in the economies of the major kingdoms of the last millennium, particularly those centred on the north coast (the *pasisir*) and East Java (Carey 1997). This had been the situation before the colonial government intervened massively and systematically in Javanese villages (Breman 1982). These interventions by the colonial state established the foundations of coercive systems of production that yielded vast quantities of agricultural commodities for the international market. During the Cultivation System (1830–72) these interventions secured colonial control over land, labour and cash crops, grown initially in prime village crop-lands, leading on to large-scale expansion of irrigated land to increase the output of crops like sugar, and to the creation of large-scale plantations of non-irrigated crops in previously uncultivated land (Furnivall 1967; Fasseur 1992).The colonial myth of the "village republic" (*dorpsrepubliek*) was created in these times, along with a radical re-working of authority relations within villages that became a celebrated part of the putatively timeless *adat* of Javanese villages. Thereafter Dutch legal scholars set to work to codify *adat* into a quasi-legal system of

"customary law" (*adatrecht*). Village republics were also "discovered" to exist on Bali, and in the outer islands — for example in the Minangkabau homeland in West Sumatra (Young 1994). The "Java model" became the template for homogenising and standardising village administration and for the incorporation of local communities into state structures. This work continued well into the post-independence period (Legge 1961; Aspinall and Fealy 2003). Space does not permit, but the processes of dis-embedding, re-embedding and localisation can be found here (among other places), along with the contribution to ethnogenesis delivered by the consecration of the timeless wisdom of *adat* law. The changes thus brought about were by no means confined to legal and political institutions but had deep, though contested, impacts in normative and cultural realms (Pemberton 1994).

The nationalist inflection of the understanding of the past and the visions of the cultural inheritance of Java has been institutionalised through nationalist and post-independence narratives of Indonesian nationhood. It is in that context that the accepted definition of the cultural characteristics of the major *suku-bangsa* has been fixed — expressed most notoriously perhaps through "mini-isation" (Pemberton 1994) which undertook the propagation of authorised cultural models exemplified by the New Order's Taman Mini Indonesia near Jakarta. In that process the fluidity of cultures and the mobility of peoples in earlier times have been obscured.

It is not only ordinary folk who were mobile in pre-colonial times. Adrian Vickers (2006) writes of the peregrination of wandering knights, *lelana*, who were the frequent subject of Javanese tales and of the "movable nature of pre-colonial politics" (Vickers 2006: 40; see also Vickers 1993). Vickers observes:

> Such mobility is general throughout Southeast Asia. Ruling classes have always been very mobile, as illustrated by their mixed ethnicities. Usually when princes and princesses move they bring with them bands of followers who form their own separate settlements. Likewise trade has created diverse urban centres, as in the case of Bangkok's formation as a city of Malays, Chinese, Cham, Acehnese, Mons, Portuguese, Vietnamese and others (Vickers, 2006: 40).

So, for the region in general and Java in particular, a typology of a sedentary, fixed hierarchical village societies sharply removed from the mobile, commercially-oriented groups that were found elsewhere is to some extent a discursive artefact of the re-embedding processes that accompanied state formation in the modern era. There were important differences to

be found in the major agrarian kingdoms of Java and elsewhere, and irrigated rice-cultivation undoubtedly did require a greater degree of population stability in certain environmentally-favoured regions. But, in important respects, these societies were also continuous with the smaller more mobile societies that spread out from the main centres of power (which the royal courts claimed as peripheral parts of their realms referred to as the *mancanegara*). While there may be particular reasons why the Javanese are not so strongly associated with trading societies — ranging from the destructive attacks made by Sultan Agung of Mataram on his rivals in the major trading power centres of Java, to Dutch ethnicisation of the commercial division of labour — these are relatively recent historical shifts from a pattern in which trade and commercial activity was favoured by the major kingdoms of Java, particularly those of the *pasisir* (Carey 1997; Ricklefs 1993, 1986). Indeed, for all these political interventions, the *pasisir* regions continue to have a strong commercial orientation. More generally, Javanese Muslim traders exist in towns throughout Java. These traders are highly mobile, and in provincial towns they are generally to be found concentrated in quarters close to the mosque — see, for example Geertz's (1965) account of the *kauman* district in "Modjokuto" (Pare, East Java). On the other hand, Javanese administrative experience and expertise, their aspirations and political skills, frequently lead many of them to seek advantage in complex bureaucratic power structures. It is unsurprising that many Javanese gravitate towards administrative jobs in the state or private sectors (see Maunati, this volume). Yet these tendencies should not be exaggerated; the Javanese continue to participate in trade and commerce, and when particular families do so, their religious orientation can frequently favour modernist Islam.

The Javanese are certainly mobile. In recent history, much of East Java was a frontier region re-settled in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the plantation economy expanded there (Elson 1984). In recent decades, not only have huge numbers moved from villages to cities, but they are to be found as spontaneous migrants throughout the archipelago. Certainly the transmigration program of the New Order period saw the administrative establishment of villages of Javanese migrants in the outer islands, but the strength of spontaneous migration is more than evident in the very large population of Javanese currently working in Malaysia and those who settled there over several preceding generations to successfully become *Bumiputera* Malaysians.

While it is therefore misleading to suggest that the Javanese are not mobile, or that they lack an aptitude for commerce, the distinction with

the Other Malays is perhaps more noticeable in terms of their affiliations with Islam. The modernist tradition in Java is most strongly represented in urban areas. Leaving aside the marked differences exhibited by the religiously syncretic[13] *kejawen* (the rural majority who Geertz [1976] classified as *abangan*), devout Muslims in rural areas, particularly in East Java, are most likely to have close associations with Nahdatul Ulama, which, to oversimplify, has long been a political and doctrinal rival to the modernists. Thus Javanese rural migrants are less likely to assimilate without friction into the religious ethos of the Other Malays. Having recognised this important cultural divergence, one should also keep in mind that the *watan Jawa* in the centres of religious learning in the Middle East was called *Jawa* for a very good reason. The Javanese were numerous in these centres of learning, and the ideas that were circulating there were familiar to them and carried back to Java. Still, this religious difference is perhaps a crucial one, and I will return to this issue later.

Clearly we can identify Javanese who are mobile, who work harmoniously in inter-ethnic settings, and who have entrepreneurial flair and a willingness to pursue commercial opportunities. These and other comparisons could be pursued further, but enough has been said to make the point that the ethos of the Javanese and that of the mobile, commercialised Malays beyond Java may diverge to a lesser extent than one might initially expect. Therefore a simple enumeration of such qualities is unlikely to lead to an understanding of why the social imaginary of the Other Malays was established largely outside of Java.

In referring to the "social imaginary" of the Other Malays I anticipate one way of identifying what sets the Other Malays apart, and that argument will follow soon. Firstly I note that Kahn (2006: 174) makes the point that he is referring less to an elaborated philosophical stance than to "Malay spaces" where networks and social relationships of a particular kind develop, and in that context a certain understanding of the social order is established. In those parts of the archipelago, this social imaginary is embedded in a way of life, the mainstream for a large part of the population. In short, it is primarily a shared outlook grounded in the experience, social practices and shared understandings of everyday life, and I would argue that this is different in important ways to the more explicitly articulated imagined community of nationalism.

The emphasis that Kahn places on the way the pan-Malay imaginary develops and is sustained within dispersed commercial and other networks is also important. But if we recognise how important such associations can be to the formation of both real and imagined communities,

we also become aware of other trans-regional and trans-national networks that could be seen to have a family resemblance to the Malay networks. These other networks are certainly capable of framing intensely shared loyalties. The potent *guangxi* networks that are so useful, most notably in commerce, for Chinese emigrants in the region provide one example (Mackie 1992, 1998; Hefner 1998; McVey 1993a, 1993b; East Asia Analytic Unit 1995). These are poorly characterised in terms of ethnicity or nationality. The bonds that facilitate participation in these networks include clan and kinship ties, common village or county of origin, locally specific dialects, political party affiliation and various other foundations of mutual recognition and trust (*xinyong*). Such bonds are powerful, but very different from nationalism. They rely on strong attachments to particular places, and on both non-kin and ancestral associations between lineage and place, but they are not territorial in the way that nationalism is when it seeks to achieve state power in a designated national homeland.

Other transnational networks could be considered — those of first peoples, for example, networks among the elites of peoples called "Dayak" in eastern Indonesia, *orang asli* in Malaysia and so on. There are a range of examples whose similarities can be readily perceived if less precisely specified.[14] Nations participate in imagined communities, but imagined communities are not restricted to nations.[15] Such arguments might lead to conclusions that the imagined community of the Other Malays may be just one of a number of collective identities that are subsumed without friction within the institutional structures of their nation-states and the broader hegemony of official nationalisms. Yet the weight of the evidence presented by Kahn, and before him the long history of the *watan Jawa* described in Laffan's (2003) research, indicates formations that are much more robust and independent of national hegemonies, and, at times, openly opposed to them.

It is therefore possible to show that the ethos of mobile commercially-oriented groups is not definitively restricted to Outer Indonesia, that here are other trans-regional networks and imagined communities to be found within and beyond Indonesia and Malaysia. Such arguments do not radically unsettle Kahn's case, but they do impel us to identify certain aspects of the Other Malay imaginary that set it apart and suggest why it endures in the contemporary world. I have already argued that Kahn goes to some lengths to connect the Other Malay imaginary with the dispersed networks of relationships and the "Malay spaces" where it is found. Attention to these localised groundings, to the conditions of existence of the

imaginary is vital. They reflect something of the content of the imaginary, but they primarily refer to the conditions in which it flourishes. The content, the actual substance of the imaginary, even if it exists largely in the realm of rarely articulated shared assumptions, matters as well. It is here that the independent anti-imperialist but non-nationalist traditions of modernist Islam, as it was transmitted back to Southeast Asia by the *watan Jawa*, may have contributed core elements to the imaginary which give it longevity and equip it to reach beyond the horizons of nationalist imaginaries. If that is correct, then it deserves, in my view, to be distinguished from the array of more evanescent and less substantial imagined communities. A social imaginary not only creates understandings of how the world is, but also of how it ought to be. That is, it offers normative orientations as well as descriptive ones. And in the case of the Other Malays, it may be that modernist Islam contributes significantly to this double orientation, noting that while they have contested nationalist visions of social unity, these are very much *modern* social imaginaries. The formation and nature of social imaginaries that modernity has spawned has been addressed as a "Western" dilemma, but I will suggest that the conceptual precision that authors like Charles Taylor have attempted to reach may be of some value for our Southeast Asian cases as well.

Modern Social Imaginaries

Charles Taylor has recently endeavoured to set out clearer and more precise ways of dealing with these issues. His book, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004) begins with a limited objective. He does not want to "offer a causal explanation of the modern social imaginary … [but he is content to] clarify somewhat the forms it has taken" (Taylor 2004: 8). This is an objective best suited to his outstanding philosophical talents, but for this subject a purely conceptual approach is not entirely feasible.

As his inquiry proceeds, he is inevitably drawn into examining the historical and social dimensions of early and influential historical transitions to modernity. Through his examination of two exemplary "Western" transitions to modernity, those of the United States and France, Taylor's primary concern is to investigate the rise and entrenchment of ideas and values that are characteristic of modernity. To achieve this he recognises from the outset that he has to address not only the discursive aspects of the transformation, or changes in ideas and values, but the institutional

and political changes as well. Both his historical-social investigations and his philosophical reasoning lead him to recognise the interdependence of practices and normative understandings. That is to say that the historically specific social practices of eighteenth century France and America, and the background understandings that existed in France of the late *ancient régime* and in the thirteen colonies of British America, are dialectically linked in each case. Both their distinct institutions and the understandings were crucial to the changes that occurred. Thus the outcomes of these modern transitions were also bounded by these two distinctly different social-historical contexts, notwithstanding the invocation, in both cases, of universal principles. The historically specific practices characteristic of these two "Western" societies depended on background understandings which "carry an implicit map of social space", but these understandings were formed and reproduced through the practices and the institutions in which they were embedded.

Taylor takes this mutual dependence of practices and background understandings to be characteristic of social imaginaries in general (Taylor 2004: 25). Thus, as in Kahn's reference to "Malay spaces" we may be addressing a cognitive-moral view of the world that relies more on the understandings implicit in institutionalised social settings than on abstract philosophical doctrines. Taylor limits his empirical investigations to the American and French cases, but he is conscious, and rightly concerned, that the exclusion of non-Western cases may lead him into error (Taylor 2004: 195–6). He proceeds in the belief that his examination of these cases will permit important conceptual refinements to be made which can then be addressed to a wider range of transitions to modernity.

In the American and French transitions to modernity the successful formation of modern institutions depended on the parallel, interdependent growth of modern social imaginaries characteristic of each society. In crucial ways, these transformation depended on the acceptance of new ideas, even, in certain instances, the willingness "… to remake [their] political life according to agreed principles" (Taylor 2004: 29). Nevertheless, the meaning and legitimacy of these new political ideas could only come about within the culturally specific forms available in local or regional contexts — in his cases, the cultural-political heritage, practices and institutional forms of America and France (Taylor 2004: 30). In both these cases, and in his broader argument, he emphasises the dialectical interdependence between social practices and institutions and the background understandings that support them. As he says (Taylor 2004: 25), "… if the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that

it is the practice that largely carries the understanding". That relationship holds in general, but the practices and understandings of modernity vary considerably in different contexts. Because of that, Taylor argues, some social, cultural and institutional settings are more favourable to such transitions than others.

Taylor observes that the prevailing sense of the existing and possible social orders that we encounter in any given historical setting rests on a set of background assumptions that are both factual and normative.[16] At this level, says Taylor, we can talk of a network of background understandings that rely upon a certain vision of moral order. This sense "goes beyond some proposed schedule of norms that ought to govern our mutual relations and/or political life" (Taylor 2004: 8–9). In brief, the moral order is concerned not only with what *ought* to be, but equally with what *exists* and therefore with what is *possible*. "Is" and "ought" are thus bound together. But for a changed vision of the moral order to take hold and ultimately to become naturalised in an all-embracing social imaginary, they have either to find — or, as is more often the case, actually already reside in some cognate, adaptable form[17] — patterns of institutional behaviour which can be widely accepted as the embodiment or realisation of these new principles. The practices and institutions that were familiar to the American revolutionaries facilitated their transition, whereas those of France were less well adapted.

The American republicans were able to appeal to backward-looking reinterpretations of practices and institutions that already existed, including the notion of law based on an ancient constitution that secured the "rights of Englishmen". The colonies had elected assemblies, and these bodies, as Locke had asserted, possessed the right of assent to taxation. It was these limited ideas that rationalised the original mobilisation of the American colonists. But there were also fresh ideas even at this early stage, notably the recognition that collective action in defense of rights could legitimately be taken at the present time, and not simply in some vaguely defined foundational era in the past. The colonial elected assemblies gave actions a meaningful form, and once the break with the crown was made, then the electoral processes could readily become the sole source of legitimate power. The American revolution began on the basis of one conservative legitimating rationale only to mutate towards a very different one that no longer spoke of the rights of Englishmen, but of universal human rights and the will of the people as a self-standing foundation of the political order (Taylor 2004: 110–2). What is of most significance here was that "popular sovereignty could be embraced because

it had a clear and uncontested institutional meaning. This was the basis of the new order" (Taylor 2004: 113).

According to Taylor, the contrasting French case took a markedly different path because the shift from dynastic to republican rule "had no agreed meaning in a broadly-based social imaginary… and what made the divisions [even within the republican cause itself] so deadly was the absence of any agreed understanding on the institutional meaning of the sovereignty of the nation" (Taylor 2004: 113). As a consequence the settled institutional form of French republican democracy was not achieved until late in the nineteenth century, and only after a series of sanguinary social conflicts. The transition that took place in America, shrouded by later retrospective re-interpretations, was facilitated by widespread uncontested understandings of the institutional means of achieving the new political order. In France the transition could not be so readily realised (Taylor 2004: 29).

Taylor is using this comparison, among other things, to make a crucial point about the nature of social imaginaries. The ideas and values, the characterisations of how the world is or ought to be, are expressed, and thoroughly embedded, in social institutions and patterns of behaviour, they have become incorporated as part of people's lived experience.[18] They are not an obscure aspect of the enculturation of a narrow elite, they are understandings that are widely familiar in their host society, people are confident of their meaning in practice; in their most hegemonic manifestations they become naturalised in Bourdieu's (1977) sense. The degree to which such ideas may have become naturalised can vary, but what remains important is that while nationalist and other historically significant collective identities reside in the shared imaginings of particular groups, or whole societies, they are not sustained as purely mental constructs. As Kahn (2006: 101) also argues, what is also essential, is that they are embedded in shared meanings grounded in everyday life and in institutionalised patterns of social interaction. And in that sense, they are open to empirical investigation, properly the object of both interpretive and social scientific investigation (Geertz 1975).

Conclusion

Taylor's elucidation of the nature of social imaginaries in the modern world depends entirely on the comparative examination of two core Western cases, France and the United States. His stated aim was to achieve

greater clarity of certain key ideas, notably "social imaginary". To an important extent he achieves this, but his conclusion also notes the limitations of his investigation, and he acknowledges a major qualification to the conclusions he is able to draw. Even in the closely related historical instances he looked at, he could not fail to notice "the different understandings that animate similar institutions and practices even in the West, [so that] it should be all the more obvious how much greater are the differences among the major civilisations" (Taylor 2004: 196). However, the shortcomings may be more fundamental than Taylor's fairminded acknowledgement concedes. The concern about his entire enterprise is that his attempts to identify the nature of modernity's definitive social imaginaries may well have arrived at significantly different conclusions if the comparative frame of reference was systematically cross-cultural from the beginning. In his final remarks Taylor (2004: 196) laments that "with the realisation that these differences matter comes the humbling insight that there is a lot that we don't understand, that we lack even the adequate language to describe these differences".

On the issues of analytical language, one can only agree that it is one of the problems which the present chapter has sought to explore. Western social theory has achieved an exemplary degree of sophistication, and it has bequeathed us an invaluable conceptual repertoire for investigating the social transformations of the modern era. Yet the strategic difficulties these theories have in addressing modernities in Asia and other non-Western regions are symptomatic of fundamental problems that are in no small part a consequence of the failure to recognise that these societies have been integral to the development of modernity for centuries.

Furthermore, if we look at many of the categories commonly invoked as distinguishing features of modernity, and those that identify distinctive aspects of social differentiation in modern societies — the contrast between state and civil society, state and market, the contrast between the public and private domains, the autonomy of the life-world and its colonisation by instrumental rationality are some of the examples that come immediately to mind — their impressive coherence and explanatory range can mask a tendency to rely on theoretical deduction rather than observation, to accord these theories a capacity for general explanation that loses sight of the extent to which their validity actually remains highly context-dependent. Abstraction and generalisation are entirely necessary to theoretical construction, but they have the effect of obscuring the extent to which crucial distinctions are drawn from particular historical and

cultural contexts. If, for example, one examines the emergence of what is called the "public sphere" in recent comparative historical studies (e.g. Collins 1997; Blanning 2002; Blanning 2007) it is not only clear that the notion of the public sphere, its cultural assumptions and its entrenchment in particular evolving institutions, practices and meanings were very particular to certain parts of western Europe. It becomes equally plain that there is no sound reason to accept the notion that these innovations, and other social distinctions abstracted from these regional instances of modernisation, should become immutable hallmarks of modernity in general, and serve as measures whereby other regional transitions can be judged to be more or less mature, complete or authentic. Taylor's discomfort with the logic of convergence implicit in the approach he has taken, lead him to resolve his own difficulties[19] by embracing the possibility of the existence of "multiple modernities".[20] However, both the logical problems inherent in the case for multiple modernities, as well as the evidence from detailed comparative historical studies that take a more systematic international approach to tracing the development of modernity (e.g. Lieberman 1977; Moore 1997; Reid 1993) tend to support the argument that modernity is singular (Kahn 2001, 2006), and that it has from the outset included a variety of regional patterns that diffusionist approaches tend to treat as "incomplete" or even "traditional" because of *a priori* assumptions about the paradigmatic status of Western variants of modernity.

However, these larger debates about modernity lead to complex disputes that cannot be resolved in this essay. The more modest aims of the chapter have been to explore, from the comparative perspective of Indonesian nationalism and cultural contrasts with Java, the propositions Kahn (2006) makes about Malay nationalism and its coexistence with the identity and way of life of the people he calls "Other Malays". In doing so, I remain persuaded that his case is substantially correct, and that the social, cultural and historical phenomena he has drawn to our attention are very significant, particularly the presence of a Malay social imaginary that persists even within the powerful institutional framework of regional nationalisms and nation-states.

The exploration of these issues also brought into sharp relief the limitations of so many of the analytical categories we have at our disposal. I have explained my preference for referring to a "social imaginary" over other categories in this instance, principally because it points to more deep-seated foundations for the endurance of this collective Malay identity. I have just noted how Charles Taylor arrived — no doubt for

quite different reasons — at "the humbling insight that there is a lot that we don't understand, that we lack even the adequate language to describe these differences" (2004: 196). Likewise Clifford Geertz in the course of giving an account of the symbolic potency of Javanese *wayang* theatre, noted in conclusion that the concepts he had employed "… ethos and world-view, are vague and imprecise; they are a kind of prototheory, forerunners, it is to be hoped, of a more adequate analytical framework" (Geertz 1975: 141).

No doubt scholars can and will overcome such purely terminological differences. Our main objective is to advance our understanding of the social phenomena under study by emphasising the soundness of orientations to the world that are embedded in the lived experience of localised societies.[21] Geertz stresses this idea as well and offers a typical anthropologist's plea that we should pay more attention to what we can observe and learn from the peoples and cultures that we study. Geertz is not obsessively concerned with the deficiencies in our vocabulary, but rather celebrates the expansion of the empirical base from which we can seek the elucidation of "… moral, aesthetic, and other theories based … on the observation of such activities [rather than] on logical considerations alone" (Geertz 1975: 141). Taylor, too, notwithstanding a philosopher's natural inclination to restrict his attention to the conceptual level, inevitably is drawn to recognise the importance of specific historical, cultural and political conjunctures. These diverse and impressive efforts to articulate concepts adequate to understanding the range of collective identities formed as part of modernity, all, in their different ways lead to conclusions that draw us back to the critical importance of painstaking observation of the social world as it actually exists — to the practices and lived experience found in societies in the full variety of their different cultural and historical contexts.

Notes

1. In China, the old institutions of the dynastic past are no longer relevant, and the ideological influence of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought is exhausted. As Fitzgerald (1995) argues, the only effective unifying and legitimising discourse is nationalism, and it is intensely promoted by the CCP regime. In Indonesia, national unity is one of the five key principles of the state ideology, *pancasila*, and national loyalty is propagated by the state through all its agencies, especially by the armed forces. Given the experience of the regional rebellions of the 1950s, the long-running Darul Islam

rebellion and more recently the contests over Aceh, Papua and Timor Leste, the demand for uncompromising adherence to nationalist values is not surprising.

2. "Outer Indonesia" is essentially all of Indonesia beyond Java, Madura and Bali.

3. See Anderson (1983). This concept will be examined along with "social imaginary" and other related terms shortly.

4. The geographical extent of the Malay world reaches from peninsula Malaysia through the Indonesian archipelago to include the Philippines. The majority of the peoples living in this area are extremely diverse, but nevertheless share a common linguistic and (very broadly and less clearly) cultural heritage. It is not normally a unity that inspires political or nationalist ambitions, though, as we will see below, Sukarno and others entertained the vision of Greater Indonesia (*Indonesia Raya*) which did contemplate the unity of the Malay world. For scholarly analyses of Malay identity formation which apply a translocal or regional approach see: Houben, Maier and van der Molen (1992), Vickers (2004) and Andaya (2008).

5. Important contributions to this debate are Roff (1970), Milner (1994, 2008) and Barnard (2004).

6. Arnason (1987) finds reference to the "modern constellation" to be more serviceable than the contested conventional ideas of "modernity" (Arnason 1987, 2000; Knöbl 2000). Taylor (2004: 195), for example, advances a clear, conventional definition of modernity, but it is but one of numerous examples which start to unravel as soon as its constituent ideas and historical assumptions are subject to sustained scrutiny. This is no special failing of Taylor's, since "the record of such attempts does not hold out much hope for agreement on contents or criteria" (Arnason 2000: 62). The complex and variable development of the modern world does not lend itself to attempts to discern a unitary system driven by a single transformative factor or process. Rather, Arnason (2000: 64) suggests, our interest

    > … in underlying patterns … leads to an understanding of modernity as a loosely structured constellation rather than a system, and to stronger emphasis on the role of cultural premises and orientations in the formation of different versions within a flexible but not amorphous framework. The cultural factors thus brought into focus can include alternative versions of modern themes as well as selective appropriations of pre-modern civilisational legacies.

7. "Social imaginary" is an attribute of a group, here of the Other Malays. How are they to be described? "Group" or "collectivity" are too bland and general, but the usually repertoire of "ethnic group", "nation" and so on are clearly inappropriate.

8. It is remarkable that Taylor makes no reference either to Cornelius Castoriadis (1991, 1998) or to Norbert Elias (1994), and appears unaware of

their immensely important work in this area. I find Castoriadis' development of the concept of social imaginary to be superior to Taylor's in important ways, but Castoriadis presents other problems (see Knöbl 2000) which would be too great a diversion from the present discussion.

9. There was, in 2006, legislation before the Indonesian parliament that defines citizens as *Indonesia asli* (indigenous or genuine) simply by virtue of their having been born in Indonesia, a determination that deliberately excludes all criteria of race and ethnicity.

10. The phrase *le désir d'être ensemble* (the desire to be together) Sukarno takes from Ernest Renan's essay "What is a nation?", declaring it to be an inadequate idea of what national identity is. In the same passage, Sukarno quite explicitly recognises then rejects the links between regional cultural and ethnic identities with well-defined historically ancient homelands as an adequate foundation for the Indonesian nation (Feith and Castles 1970: 42):

> If you will excuse me, I will take Minangkabau as an example. Among the people of Indonesia who have the greatest *désir d'être ensemble* are those of Minangkabau, numbering approximately two and a half million. These people feel themselves to be one family. But Minangkabau is not a unity, it is only just a small part of a unity. The inhabitants of Jogja also feel *le désir d'être ensemble*, but Jogja is only a small part of a unity. In West Java the people of Pasundan deeply feel *le désir d'être ensemble*, but Pasundan, too, is only just a small part of a unity.

11. Kahn's own source is Roff (1970: 73). See William Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* for more on the Muslim currents of twentieth-century Malay anti-colonial resistance, and also Laffan (2003).

12. The influence of the *pasisir* (the trading regions extended along the north coast of Java) lasted, according to Carey (1997: 733–4) right up to the time of the Java Wars (1825–1830), and the influential view of a largely static Javanese culture was a Dutch colonial myth. Consequently, he remarks (1997: 734), "… so much Dutch colonial literature on the princely territories and in the Geertzian paradigm of Javanese 'involution', owes much to this deeply distorted vision of Javanese society".

13. Many important changes have taken place since Geertz conducted his fieldwork in East Java in the 1950s, observations that furnished empirical foundation of his immensely influential typologies — notably *santri*, *abangan*, *priyayi* — in *The Religion of Java* (1976). Suffice to say that in contemporary Java, these distinctions have been blurred, and their social and political significance has altered greatly (Hefner 1987, 1993, 2000). Even in the earlier period, Geertz's ethnography drew overwhelmingly on his East Javanese observations. There were and are important variations in the religious orientations of Muslims in different sub-regions of Java; the north coast, parts of central Java, etc., without also considering Sundanese, Bantenese or Madurese variants.

14. They might be said to share a "family resemblance" as in Wittgenstein's reference to the Churchill family face.

15. Media of communication provide the essential scaffolding for imagined communities — consider the role of newspapers in Anderson's (1983) account. The Internet furnishes unparalleled possibilities for this; everything from communities of science fiction aficionados to the uses of the web to frame solidarities among alienated second generation Muslim migrants who share commitments to militant Islam against the values of their parents and neighbourhood religious leaders (Roy 2006).

16. This resembles the points made by Geertz (1975) in his essay on ethos and world-view.

17. For example, the English Civil War in the seventeenth century that preceded the establishment of the British constitutional monarchy in 1688 invoked backward-looking ideas of an ancient constitution, "an order based on law holding since time out of mind, in which parliament had its rightful place beside the king" (Taylor 2004: 110). The transition was enabled by backward-looking appeals and the existence of established institutional forms which could adapt to the new dispensation.

18. Taylor makes it clear throughout his discussion that he is addressing deeply embedded social meanings here, and not simply the discursive propagation of ideas. One could take issue over a number of points to do with the role of power (*à la* Foucault) or of organised social forces and the role intellectuals (organic and traditional) in the hegemonic entrenchment of common sense (*à la* Gramsci), as well as the issue of the extent to which theory precedes practice. The important point here however is the one about the social entrenchment of identities, ideas and values, and the way they are embedded in everyday life. Taylor (2004: 29) notes:

> What exactly is involved when a theory penetrates and transforms the social imaginary? For the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before. It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention.

19. Taylor observes (2004: 195):

> If we define modernity in terms of certain institutional changes, such as the spread of the modern bureaucratic state, market economies, science and technology, it is easy to go on nourishing the illusion that modernity is a single process destined to occur everywhere in the same forms, ultimately bringing convergence and uniformity to our world. Whereas my foundational hunch is that we have to speak of "multiple modernities", different ways of erecting and animating the institutional forms that are becoming inescapable, some of which I have enumerated.

20. Again, it must be noted, he writes without apparently being aware of the considerable body of scholarship (e.g., Eisenstadt 2000; Arnason 2000) that had already extensively explored this very prospect.

21. In discussing the sense of community shared by Muslim reformers in the Malay world in the early twentieth century Kahn (2006:104) stresses that their imaginings "… did not exist in a vacuum, but were instead rooted in the social, political and commercial networks that were being formed across insular and peninsular Southeast Asia in this period". Such observations, he says (2006: 104–5), have

> … real methodological implications for the study of the formation of religious, national and ethnic identities especially outside the narrow circles of the intellectual and theological elite. It points in other words to the need to study the instantiation of imagined communities in the lived experience of ordinary people, that is to examine the ways in which identities are experienced and performed at the level of the modern popular.

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Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

Edited by Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

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Networking the Pan-Dayak

Yekti Maunati[1]

It is widely acknowledged that cultural identity is constructed (King 1982; Vickers 1989; Hall 1992; Eriksen 1993; Kipp 1993; Kahn 1993; Kahn 1995; Picard 1997; Wood 1998). As King and Wilder argue:

> Ethnicity is obviously expressed as a product of the past, evoking common origins, social linkages and shared cultural values and traits like language and religion. However, the historical dimension of iden-tity also demonstrates that rather than identities being fixed, constant and immutable, they frequently change and can be acquired (2003: 198).

For this reason, the more recent academic emphasis has been to view identity and identity construction as the result of a dynamic interplay between context (and history) and construct. Eriksen (1993) has demon-strated some of the processes involved in the historical construction of ethnic identity in the case of Indians who migrated to Mauritius and Trinidad. In each case, the subsequent identity was different and thus works against the notion of an "essential" form of Indianness (Eriksen 1993: 84–5).

Another example of how cultural identities need to be viewed as constructions is in the way identities may be strengthened when a group is under threat (Eriksen 1993). Hall (1992) in his discussion of the pro-cesses of globalisation concurs with this argument. He notes the rise of particular or local cultures as a response to processes of globalisation that, paradoxically, are seen to usher in cultural homogenisation. The interest in larger global or national processes has seen a large number of studies directed at "minorities" or otherwise "threatened" or "weak" groups, or in situations of "rapid social change" (Eriksen 1993: 113). King, for

instance, notes that the Kajang tend to identify themselves in opposition
to the Kayan as a "defence mechanism against the politically dominant
and aggressive Kayan" (1982: 35). This, however, does not mean that
dominant groups do not also have problems in "identity processes and
the maintenance of identity" (Eriksen 1993: 113). Globalisation has
widely affected various ethnic groups, including the dominant groups in
some countries. In Indonesia, for instance, the state's attempt to reduce
westernisation can be seen through TV programmes about provincial cul-
tures, which it is hoped will generate pride in those cultures.

Where scholars tend to differ is on the degree to which the con-
struction of cultural identity is linked to particular processes (for example,
economic, political, nation state-building, etc.) and different historical
experiences (such as migration, conflict, civil war, etc.). In reality, such
distinctions are not easily separated as in the example of the Hmong
from Southeast Asia who have created transnational networks in order
to further Hmong socio-economic, political and cultural advancement
(see Culas and Michaud 2004). Various "Dayak" groups have in a similar
vein attempted to establish translocal and transnational Dayak networks
across Kalimantan, Sabah and Sarawak in response to their social, econo-
mic and political marginalisation. This chapter considers three examples
of pan-Dayak translocal and transnational networking, that of an East
Kalimantan pan-Dayak organisation, the establishment a Dayak credit
union in parts of East Kalimantan that developed out of Kalimantan-
wide pan-Dayak networking, and the emergence of a new transnational
Dayak identity, that of the Ulu Padas. As discussed in this chapter, this
new ethnic identity has emerged out of a concern over environmental
protection and cultural preservation articulated on both sides of the
border. Yet determining the specific cultural markers, those that conso-
lidate their identity as Ulu Padas, is still under negotiation, as is the
question of how social and cultural ties will bridge national borders and
the different economic positions amongst the Ulu Padas.

Identity as Constructed

When we talk about ethnicity, we relate it to culture, but the relation
between culture and ethnicity is not fixed. Eller argues that "not all cul-
turally distinct groups are ethnic groups precisely, and (in an odd para-
dox) not all ethnic groups are culturally distinct groups" (1999: 8). It is
in this instance that Eller suggests that ethnicity and culture are not

always in an ideal relationship (1999: 8). Eller defines ethnicity as the symbolic use of any aspect of culture in order to differentiate one group from other groups. For Eller then, "ethnicity is consciousness of difference and the subjective salience of that difference" (1999: 9). Eller further notes that even when ethnicity is associated with, refers to, or evokes "objectives" or shared cultural or historical markers, it is nonetheless a subjective category (1999: 9). Ethnic groups usually do not utilise all aspects of their culture or history as markers of their identities. Besides, some elements of their culture may be found amongst other groups which can make it difficult to distinguish them from others (1999: 9). A case in point is that of Malay identity in Kalimantan. Many so-called Malays share a similar culture to that of Dayak groups because Dayaks who convert to Islam are often thereafter considered Malay (Coomans 1987). Here is one example of how the criteria by which individuals are nominated Dayak or Malay may shift over time (see also Maunati 2000).

The use of certain cultural markers as the basis of group identity is itself subject to change. Eller notes how a group, which earlier chose religion as the marker of identity, may at a later stage choose to emphasise class relations or other cultural elements (1999: 9). An important feature of this discussion of ethnicity is therefore the extent to which the labelling of what constitutes a specific ethnicity is made and remade (Eller 1999: 10). Eller provides an example of the shifting of identity from *black* to *African American* in the United States. For Eller, this shift does not change the membership as much as transforms the marker of ethnicity from that of "skin colour to ancestral origin in the broadest sense" (1999: 10–1). Likewise, King and Wilder argue that to study ethnicity is to deal with the social and cultural processes and aspects that affect similarity and difference, and to understand the construction and transformation of social and cultural identities by groupings of people (2003: 196–7). Central to this construction and transformation of social and cultural identity is the terms on which boundaries between groupings are constructed. Barth (1969) argues that the formation of ethnic groups involves social processes of exclusion and incorporation and the selection of social and cultural aspects which are considered relevant for the construction of identity and boundaries.

The apparently arbitrary way in which cultural markers are selected and the importance of context in determining which elements are selected is further evidence of the constructedness of cultural identities. As Eriksen has argued "… ideologists always select and reinterpret aspects of

culture and history which fit into the legitimation of a particular power constellation" (1993: 118). Similarly, Winzeler (1997) notes how governments often manipulate cultural identity in order to lessen the unity of powerless groups. Once again, which elements are selected is also "negotiable and situational" (Eriksen, 1993: 117) — and composed in relation to others: "Groups and collectivities are always constituted in relation to *others*" (Eriksen 1993: 62).

This negotiable and situational quality of identity markers is clear in the way religious differences have been incorporated into identity formation. Picard points out the way in which Balinese define themselves with reference to a religious identity in opposition to Islam (1997: 186). Dayakness similarly is linked to Christianity and opposed to Islam, the dominant religion in Indonesia. If a Dayak converts to Islam, he is no longer considered Dayak, becoming instead "Malay" (Coomans 1987). In similar vein, Winzeler finds that among the Bidayuh Dayak "usually to become a Muslim is to cease to be a Bidayuh …." (1997: 219). Correspondingly, King points out that when Dayak convert to Islam they become "Malay" (1982: 27). Furthermore, this process of shifting identity/ ethnicity has a long pedigree. As King found, as early as the 1890s European observers noted that many of the approximately 400 "Malays" in the Putus Sibau and Mandai areas were ethnic Taman (Maloh) who had converted to Islam (King 1982: 38). To pinpoint the boundary between the Malay and the Dayak in certain areas of Kalimantan is not surprisingly somewhat problematic due to this means of shifting from Dayak to Malay. Therefore the Dayak are not necessarily distinctively different from neighbouring "ethnic" groups, although they are constructed as such. This intermingling of cultures is perhaps the order of the day rather than the exception. For as Said has argued: "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (Said 1993: xxix).

The markers of cultural identity may originate in a presumed distinctiveness of religion, language, and custom. However, overlapping may occur among different ethnic groups. In the grey areas where markers of identities overlap, the existence of cultural difference is particularly problematic. Such grey areas and difficulties in delimiting distinct ethnic groups often colour the process of identity formation. King (1982) provides an example of the process of delimiting distinct ethnic groups in Borneo, pointing out that it is complicated and needs to be considered in relation to longstanding processes of assimilation that have occurred

between neighbouring ethnic groups (1982: 25). As he found: "… many people who had been classified as 'Maloh' in the past had, over time, become something else, and the forbears of some people categorised as 'Maloh' in 1972–3 had come from other ethnic groupings" (King 1982: 25).

The above discussion of ethnicity and cultural identity is obviously connected to a related set of ideas that on the concept of culture itself. Put simply, culture is less organic and bounded than is often claimed. In the anthropological discussion of cultural difference and the image of a culturally diverse world, Kahn argues that both concepts need to be recognised as cultural constructions. He suggests that:

> There are, in fact, two problems with the image of a culturally diverse world that lead us to its discursive dimensions. The first, on which most attention has focused, arises from the fact that the project of, variously, describing, translating or interpreting 'other cultures' contains a fatal flaw in so far as it can never genuinely succeed in locating these cultures except in relation to, and hence within the culture of, the person doing the interpreting. The argument that the western texts that purport to describe the 'culture' of this or that group of people are cultural artefacts of 'the West' and hence have little to do with otherness at all is by now a relatively standard one — in part a consequence of a poststructuralist revolution in the treatment of anthropological texts, and in part the result of a postcolonial critique of western discourses (1995: 128).

In Kahn's (1995: 129) opinion the voice of the other cannot be separated from the voice of the author and herein lies a second problem: our basic premises and assumptions about cultural alterity and cultural diversity are themselves cultural constructs. As Kahn argues, "this language of differentiation is artificial" (1995: 129). Using the image of a television picture as a metaphor, he writes: "the cultural imaginary takes the dots for something more than technique, as though the dots of colour represented reality itself" (Kahn 1995: 129). In this way, he argues scholars are often guilty of treating as objective fact their artificial (as in constructed) concepts of culture and models of cultural differentiation. For Kahn, this emphasis on the artificiality of our language of cultural difference is important not only as self-critique for anthropologists and others writing on ethnicity and identity, but also because intellectuals have contributed a great deal to the very processes of identity construction that we now seek to analyse. As Kahn (1993) notes, Western scholarship — firstly

Dutch and then later Western-trained scholars — were amongst the first to codify and construct an authorised version of Minangkabau "culture". Similar histories are evident in other parts of Indonesia (Vickers 1989; Picard 1997; Kipp 1993; Maunati 2000).

In the case of Bali, Vickers (1989) illustrates the way in which Dutch colonialists redefined the image of Bali from one of a savage place to that of an island paradise:

> There is much that has been forgotten in the world's image of Bali. Early European writers once saw it as full of menace, an island of theft and murder, symbolised by the wavy dagger of the Malay world, the kris. Although the twentieth-century image of the island as lush paradise drew on the earlier writings about Bali, these were only selectively referred to, when they did not contradict the idea of the island Eden. The overall negative intent of most of the earlier western writings about Bali has been discarded (Vickers 1989:11).

Picard (1997) also views the Dutch as greatly shaping Balinese identity. In particular their orientalist vision of Bali "as a Hindu island surrounded by a sea of Islam" (1997: 186) had two long-term consequences:

> On the one hand, by looking for the singularity of Bali in its Hindu heritage, and by conceiving of Balinese religious identity as formed through opposition to Islam, the Dutch set the framework with which the Balinese were going to define themselves (Picard 1997: 186).

Picard also describes the involvement of early Balinese intellectuals and Indonesian government officials in the construction of an "authorised" view of Balinese identity. He elaborates on the ways in which the New Order Government domesticated ethnic identities in order to accommodate these identities within nation building processes (1997: 197). To achieve this, the New Order Government promoted a homogenous provincial identity in disregard of the ethnic diversity within each province. Consequently, "Bali" now points to three references — one geographic, one ethnic and one administrative (Picard 1997: 198–9).

Picard argues that contemporary Balinese identity is a construction which draws on colonial, Indonesian and tourist images. Picard's project is "to deconstruct the contemporary expression of Balinese identity by retracing the history of its construction" (1997: 184). His aim "relates to ethnic consciousness rather than cultural history" (1997: 184):

> … the allegedly immutable and primordial unity of religion, custom, and art/culture, through which the Balinese presently define their

identity, is the outcome of a process of semantic borrowings and of conceptual reframing in response to the colonization, the Indonesianization, and the touristification of their island (Picard 1997: 185).

As the above discussion makes clear, while Western sources remain important in the shape and formation of identity constructions — whether on the basis of Western-trained scholarship or the influence of ideas promoted by Western missionaries, for example — the power of Western representations is not the only force in the formation of identity in the contemporary world. There are also a number of powerful constructions and representations that derive from the elite groups. In particular state agencies, intellectuals, and ruling and elite groups, have added to the complexity of representation and identity formation. Indeed, anthropologists and other observers have noted the role played by the nation state (Eriksen 1993) and a complex array of "authorities" (Barth 1989) in the representation of ethnic groups across Southeast Asia.

The examples of pan-Dayak identity formation below demonstrate the extent to which processes of cultural identity rely on the reinterpretation of earlier practices, the introduction of new ideas and the shedding of old components. Whether or not the construction of cultural identity is successful is in part dependent on which complex array of authorities supports such reworkings. Such authorities here including central and local government, local Dayak intellectuals and elite members, as well as non-elite, grass-roots leaders at the village level. One of the key features of processes of reinterpretation and innovation is networking. In the case of pan-Dayak formation, it may make better analytical sense to emphasise the aspect of networking in our discussions. For this reason the three examples below highlight the extent to which the concept of pan-Dayak can be understood as networking. Such an approach allows us to observe some of the central features of identity formation noted above, including the negotiation of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion; the definition and representation of claims of group identity and shared grievances of marginalisation; and the exchange of information and strategies to further group-based interests.

Networking of Dayak of Kalimantan, Sarawak and Sabah

The term "Dayak" is most commonly used to refer to "the non-Muslim, non-Malay natives of the island [of Borneo]" (King 1993: 29). There are different explanations as to the etymology of the term. According to Lindblad, the word Dayak is originally from a Kenyah word *daya* which

means upriver or interior (1988: 2). King further speculates that Dayak may come from *aja*, a Malay word for native (1993: 30). He also considers that the word might originally come from the Central Javanese term for "inappropriate or improper" behaviour (King 1993: 30). In the following discussion I use the word "pan-Dayak" to refer to networking taking place between the Dayak in Kalimantan, Sabah and Sarawak. I shall focus on three examples to illustrate the processes of networking, namely, the rise of a pan-Dayak organisation in East Kalimantan; the establishment of a Credit Union in Krayan, East Kalimantan as a result of networking between the Dayak of West Kalimantan and East Kalimantan; and the phenomenon of Ulu Padas identity in an area of Sabah, Sarawak, and East Kalimantan.

Pan-Dayak Organisation in East Kalimantan

The first example of Dayak identity formation I discuss here is the creation of a pan-Dayak organisation in East Kalimantan in 1993. The perceived need for a group with a single identity to struggle for the social, economic and political empowerment of the Dayak was in large part a response to the marginalisation Dayak peoples had experienced in recent history. The umbrella Dayak Organisation *Solidaritas*[2] was based on several sub-ethnic groups and was established to alleviate the problems faced by Dayak society in East Kalimantan such as their "backwardness" and poverty (see Maunati 2000). The principle aim was to assist the Dayak community to become "modern" in order to participate in the processes of modernisation. The ability to speak on behalf of the Dayak gives this organisation important leverage within Dayak groups. *Solidaritas* gains considerable power because almost always non-Dayak have represented the Dayak. At the beginning this organisation consisted of the several sub-tribes, including Tunjung, Kenyah, Punan, Bahau Sa, Bahau Busang, Benuaq, Bentian, Kayan, Lundayeh, Modang, Krayan and Penihing. Later on other groups like Tidung and Pasir joined this organisation. One reason for the establishment of *Solidaritas* was to overcome the powerlessness of the previous organisation. In the words of one committee member:

> Before the establishment of the Dayak Organisation there was *Gema Dayak*[3] (the Association of Dayak Families of East Kalimantan) which consisted of intellectuals and government officers. This organisation did not work well since members could not negotiate with the government because of their position as government officers. The Dayak

Organisation (*Solidaritas*) was established in order to unify the twelve
sub-tribes of the Dayak. The committee members of the organisation
believe that sub-tribes should not turn away from each other but
should be unified because outsiders and the government treat them all
as Dayak (Maunati 2000: 240).

Indeed, the Dayak Organisation aims to strengthen the Dayak's position
in society; and in particular, address issues of economic marginalisation
through education. The majority of committee members and founders
are members of the Dayak elite, that is, they are well-educated and most
have salaried positions within the government. At least initially, before
branches in the interior were established, most of the founders were based
in the city of Samarinda and well-known to each other through govern-
ment work, education and church networks. Many members of the Dayak
elite have spoken about the importance of creating a unified Dayak so-
ciety, and this view can be seen in the Dayak Organisation's promotion
of a sense of "oneness" amongst the Dayak as a way to create harmony
and unity amongst the Dayak. As part of this, the Dayak Organisation
in Samarinda has established branches in areas of the interior where the
Dayak are concentrated. The establishment of branches was facilitated
by a number of factors. Important here was the fact that many Dayak
from the interior — particularly grassroots leaders such as *kepala adat*
(the head of the customary law) and cultural performers had travelled to
Samarinda to take place in cultural performances there. This has provided
an opportunity for Dayak of the interior and of Samarinda to meet and
foster ties of cooperation. The Dayak Organisation also believes that the
more educated members of the Dayak Organisation and those who have
positions in the government or in the community have a responsibility
to encourage other Dayak to be unified. Strengthening people's sense of
identity as Dayak rather than their identity as Kenyah or Kayan is crucial
for gaining greater political participation. In line with this objective,
Samarinda-based Dayak have also encouraged children from the interior
to further their education by providing accommodation and other assis-
tance. While accommodation is generally provided by relatives, the Dayak
Organisation has been active in organising and suggesting such support
in its meetings in the Samarinda and in the interior.

One of the central aims of Dayak Organisation is to facilitate links
with government. The Dayak Organisation has at times been an impor-
tant link to the government and the government in turn has made sure
that the Dayak Organisation was involved in important events. Both the

Governor and *Golkar* have attempted to woo the organisation and the broader Dayak community before general elections (such as in 1997) by giving financial assistance to Dayak churches.

Having close links to the government was seen as an advantage by the organisation in trying to redress some of the economic problems faced by the Dayak as a direct outcome of local government policies. *Solidaritas* was portrayed as a bridge between the government and the Dayak people. For example, in the event that an investor was interested in establishing a venture in East Kalimantan, the government would then inform the Dayak Organisation as a means of informing the Dayak community as a whole. In practice however the organisation's committees consisted mainly of bureaucrats or government officers. They stood awkwardly, straddling both camps, as government representatives and members of the Dayak community. Their allegiance to the government usually won out. Today, local level branches of the Dayak Organisation have been formed with the Dayak of interior, and thus allowing these Dayak to be represented in the branches' committees and hopefully redressing the power imbalance within the organisation.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the success of the organisation was the degree of fragmentation within the Dayak community. Any possibility of a coherent and unified response to their economic and political marginalisation was consistently undermined by this fragmentation. Tribal affiliation had the greatest potential to split the organisation. Nevertheless, while there have been barriers to Dayak unification, including a lack of coordination, the predominance of individual interests, and sub-tribe competition, the ideal of a politically united Dayak is still very important for the organisation and its members to achieving its goals. Modernising the Dayak through their involvement in "modern" economic activities and giving scholarships for further education, as well as an increasing sense of and pride in Dayakness have become tools to shape a "modern" Dayak identity. Here, elite Dayak have authority to represent the Dayak as "backward" that is in a way quite similar to the New Order representation of the Dayak as needing to be modernised. To the elite Dayak, however, to be a modern Dayak is still to be culturally Dayak.

A Credit Union in Krayan

The second example concerns the establishment of a credit union in Krayan, East Kalimantan. I focus on the case of the credit union because

this is an example of translocal Dayak networking spanning separate provinces of Kalimantan. The credit union came about in part due to a general awareness amongst the Dayak of Kalimantan of their relative backwardness. On the basis of this perception, the Dayak of West Kalimantan initiated a transfer of their knowledge on and experience of credit unions to the Dayak in different provinces of Kalimantan, including the Dayak of East Kalimantan. The assumption underlying this transfer was not limited to a sense of common disadvantage but also to an assumption that Dayak in general are eager to improve their economic position but lack the infrastructure and knowledge to make this possible. Indeed, the success of the credit union initiative has largely demonstrated this. The Lun Dayeh of Krayan, who have long been marginalised both economically and politically, have shown themselves to be active in seeking to improve their lives through an understanding of financial management, amongst other things, when given the opportunity.

Krayan sub-district has no bank due to a lack of infrastructure needed to facilitate the establishment of a bank, including the limited electricity supply which is available only at night. A credit union was therefore seen as an appropriate alternative for the local people, especially the Lun Dayeh. The first Dayak credit union was established in West Kalimantan in order to improve the local Dayak's economic and financial management. This influenced the establishment of other credit unions both in Samarinda and other parts of East Kalimantan. According to the manager of the Krayan Credit Union, their credit union was established on 15 March 2003 and is a branch of the Samarinda Credit Union. The Samarinda Credit Union was established on 4 June 2001 by a group of Dayak who had connections with Dayak in West Kalimantan. These West Kalimantan Dayaks provided their model of a credit union, along with some hands-on support in the form of training, to help initiate the first credit union in East Kalimantan. Networking has been important to the establishment and spread of credit unions in East Kalimantan. For example, Dayak from Samarinda initially went to West Kalimantan for training from Dayak there. This learning was then further shared a few years after the successful establishment of the first credit union in Samarinda, when a credit union was established in Krayan. One of the advisors to the Credit Union in Krayan is a member of the Samarinda Credit Union. In addition, many of the Lun Dayeh in Krayan have also studied in Samarinda and know of the Credit Union there.

There are three prerequisites to becoming a member of the credit union: one must first be a resident of the area where the credit union is

located; one must submit an application form along with three passport photographs and a photocopy of one's identity card; and one must make an initial deposit of Rp 145,000 (approximately USD 17) to cover the following items: Rp 10,000 for *uang pangkal* (first installment), Rp 100,000 for *simpanan pokok* (main saving), Rp 5,000 for *simpanan wajib* (compulsory saving), Rp 10,000 for *iuran solidaritas gedung minimal* (fee for minimal office solidarity), and Rp 20,000 for *dana solkes* (fee for health solidarity). There is no prerequisite that one must be Lun Dayeh or Dayak to become a member. Membership is open anyone who can fulfil the above prerequisites — as is also the case of the West Kalimantan Dayak credit union movement. Nevertheless, there is an association in many people's minds — not least the Dayak who were involved in the establishment of the original credit unions in West Kalimantan — that this is an initiative designed to overcome Dayak disadvantage and backwardness (Ju Lan and Maunati 2004).

Building trust in the institution of the credit union however takes more time, particularly as locals were unfamiliar with the idea of a credit union. In the past, and continuing until now, people kept their money under their mattress or in pillows. According to the manager of the credit union, it was not easy at first to disseminate the notion of saving money in a credit union, and only slowly did people become aware of the benefits of doing so. He said that government officers usually save their money in a bank in either Nunukan or Tarakan, but for farmers the credit union provides an alternative for saving their money, as well as managing their financial matters. To help to disseminate information here, the Krayan Credit Union used advertisements, including cartoon-style ads that were easily understood by farmers and common people. A few local Lun Dayeh are employed by the credit union, which has helped spread information about its services and enhanced the sense that this is a service owned and operated for the benefit of local people, particularly the Lun Dayeh. In addition, there is collaboration between the credit union and the different Christian churches. For example, the churches support the credit union and explain its function and encourage their members to join.

The supply of electricity has been a barrier at times to the running and further development of the credit union. The distribution of electricity is limited to only 30 watts per household from 6 p.m. to 12 a.m. From morning to afternoon, there is no electricity, which has made it difficult to keep computer-based records. This problem has since been ameliorated by the purchase of a generator, with which the credit union powers its own computer.

The success of the Krayan Credit Union initiative is shown in the increasing membership: in 2003, there were 455 members while by May 2006 this number had grown to 1,239 members (Source: Krayan Credit Union 2007). The total assets of the credit union have also steadily risen since its inception. In December 2005, with 1,207 members the credit union had total assets worth Rp 4,183,888,200 (Source: Krayan Credit Union 2007). By July 2007, the total amount of money held by the credit union was Rp. 700,014,750 (equivalent to USD 84,339). This represented an increase from the previous year where the total in June 2006 was Rp 5,039,301,500 (Source: Krayan Credit Union 2007).

The Krayan Credit Union allows members to borrow money up to the limit of their savings. When it was first established, the credit union provided facilities for people to send money to different areas, but today this facility is limited to members only. Apart from the provision of credit, the credit union has run programmes designed to develop the local Dayak community. Once again ideas and experience have been borrowed from the West Kalimantan experience of credit unions. According to interviews, Dayaks from West Kalimantan with experience of community development programmes have trained the Dayak of East Kalimantan on how to run educational programmes, including financial management. So far the Krayan Credit Union has not only attracted a large number of members, but has also assisted the local community in several respects, including the provision of loans to small entrepreneurs, such as one to establish a motorbike workshop, and training on financial management. Many Lun Dayeh people reported that as members of the credit union they have been able to send their children for higher education outside Krayan. Apart from this, members said that they now have a facilitator to save money in a credit union that functions like a bank. Finally, the credit union is also an important local employer. In interviews conducted in 2006, the monthly salary of the manager was around Rp 2,250,000, while staff were paid between Rp 1,895.00 to Rp 1,812,500 monthly. Trainee staff received a monthly salary of around Rp 500,000.

This success of the Krayan Credit Union should not come as a surprise. Earlier research noted the phenomenonal success of the Dayak credit union movement in West Kalimantan Credit Union, where it developed rapidly and has since become an established institution for Dayak people there (See Ju Lan and Maunati 2004). Apart from this, Maunati (2000) also found that a similar economic institution was earlier established in Samarinda, which assisted the Dayak to manage their financial matters by providing a consultation service for Dayak in both the city and interior.

The success of such initiatives cannot be counted purely in economic terms. The success of savings, of new enterprises, of further educating children, etc., strengthen Dayak achievement in what is considered to be the "modern" sectors of business and education, which in turn strengthen feelings of pride and their identity as Dayak.

The Case of Ulu Padas Identity

"Ulu Padas" identity which has emerged recently is indeed similar to the emerging of "Pan-Dayak" identity (see Ju Lan and Maunati 2004), although on a smaller scale. The Ulu Padas area is in the so-called "heart of Borneo", and covers the area of Krayan (East Kalimantan, Indonesia), Ba Kelalan and Bario (Sarawak, Malaysia), and Long Pasia and Long Mio (Sabah, Malaysia). Though it is small in terms of area, it is transnational in character. The people of these areas believe that before they were divided by national and provincial borders, they used to belong to the one group. Today, they are called different names, for example, in Sarawak, the Ulu Padas are called Lun Bawang, while in Krayan and Sabah they are called Lun Dayeh. Informants said that it was only in 1980s that the people of Sarawak started to be called Lun Bawang because they reside in the Bawang valley.

The notion of an Ulu Padas people has been explored through various forums, which have attempted to pursue their common interests and strengthen their sense of shared identity as Ulu Padas. To date, the emerging Ulu Padas identity is still limited to a few elite groups. This local initiative builds on common ancestry (people have family and still marry across the different borders) as well as a sense that they are all Lun Dayeh/Lun Bawang. The choice of the name Ulu Padas is a geographical referent to the territory they inhabit in common. There were initial meetings in Sarawak and East Kalimantan, which were organised by *tokoh masyarakat* (public figures such as subdistrict heads and *kepala adat*) in order to discuss ways to protect their forests and environment. This was also related to their ambitions to pursue organic farming and eco-tourism as sources of employment and economic development. Since there have been a number of further Ulu Padas Forums, including representatives of the Lun Dayeh from Sabah.

Reflections on local wisdom have become a focus of discussion in these forums and a rich source of potential cultural markers, such as the cultivation of organic rice and other crops. The Ulu Padas area is well-known for a particular type of rice, which the Krayan call *beras adan*

(adan rice) and the Lun Bawang in Sarawak call *beras Bario* (Bario rice). People often remarked how delicious this rice was. Visitors are usually offered some local rice to take back as a souvenir. People are very proud of their rice, which also functions as an object of barter for other basic commodities like oil, sugar, and gasoline.

Another important topic discussed in the Ulu Padas Forums concerns the environment. Local people believe that their local wisdom is important for protecting the forest and the surroundings. This part of Borneo is often considered to be the lungs of the world (*paru-paru dunia*), with thick forests, especially on the Indonesian side. This is also the location of the Kayan Mentarang National Park under the control of Department of Forestry and assisted by WWF. Local people are also aware their area has a unique biodiversity. Several rare species of orchids, for example, are found here, which they realise is important to their aim of promoting eco-tourism in the area. From their perspective, the preservation of the local environment must involve local people as it is crucial that the wisdom derived from their ancestors, and still observed by local people, be considered. Not to consider local wisdom, they believe, will jeopardise the future of environmental protection.

The importance and preservation of local wisdom is roundly endorsed by Ulu Padas people. The need to protect the forest was expressed by many informants in the Ulu Padas area, including in Krayan (Indonesia), Ba Kelalan (Sarawak) and Long Pasia (Sabah). Nevertheless, this is not without its share of conflicting interests. For instance, the people of Lun Dayeh wish to preserve the remaining forest left to them after the logging by the Sabah Forest Industry (SFI) near Long Pasia. Currently, the road to Long Pasia is a logging road built for the use of the logging estate. Some people in Krayan want to have a new road connecting Long Bawan (the capital of the Krayan sub-district) to Long Pasia. This would be important for the economic development of Krayan, which needs road access to Long Pasia as an alternative way to get to market. However, the new road has not been completed because of a concern from the Lun Dayeh in Long Pasia. They do not want further road development because of the impact this may have on the protection of the existing forest. It is not the Lun Dayeh of Krayan they most worry about — recognising that the two groups share a similar approach to the protection of the forest. They worry about the further destruction of the forest done by the private contractor who wins the bid to construct this road as the only way a contractor can recoup their costs would be through logging. The Lun Dayeh of Long Pasia also realise that the

presence of a logging entrepreneur, and the offer of money, could tempt local people to break with the local wisdom. This debate is still ongoing. Interviews with the WWF suggested that any road should be funded by the government through the Office of Public Work to avoid exploitation of the forests by a private contractor.

The identification of a shared ethnic group is based on both their identification of a common set of interests — most explicitly in relation to preservation of the forest and the potential of eco-tourism — and on common ethnic traits, including very similar patterns of social organisation. In fact, the two are entwined and not easily separated. An example here is their recognition of a shared history of headhunting in the past. Headhunting was also often discussed by the Lun Dayeh of Krayan as well as Lun Bawang of Sarawak, especially in relation to the keeping of skulls in the past, and was seen as one aspect unifying them. They were also aware of the importance of this to tourism. The most popular image of Borneo is arguably that of headhunting. Bock's publication, *The Head-hunters of Borneo* published in English in 1881, contributed significantly to the production of the "headhunter" image (Saunders 1993: 23), one which "fits so well with the western world's fantasies regarding the savagery of primitive life" (McKinley 1976: 92). The headhunters and the "wild men of Borneo" have been widely written about and remain a main attraction of East Kalimantan and Borneo as a whole, despite regional and ethnic variations (see McKinley 1976; Miller 1946; Freeman 1979; Koepping n.d.). In Long Pasia, for example, the story of head-hunting is traced back to an image of a crocodile made in the soil in the forest near the village. According to the villagers, this image had been made during the era of headhunting. The villagers have also constructed a new image which they located in the garden by the river near the unused airport. This new image was built to attract tourists —"traditional" culture is appropriated to promote and reinforce the nativist and exotic qualities of the area. This garden has not been maintained properly because the airport is no longer used.

Shared history of headhunting and common local wisdom are based on claims made by the people and expressed in the forums that they come from the same sub-ethnic group (see Ardhana *et al.* 2004). For people, the names may be different — they are called Lun Dayeh in East Kalimantan and Lun Bawang in Malaysia — but the people are not. The people said that they have relatives on either side of the border, sometimes as a result of earlier migration when the national boundaries were more fluid, and also now through marriage. There are also long established

employment patterns with Lun Dayeh from East Kalimantan working as farmers across the border in Sarawak. National boundaries have had a complex impact on people's sense of ethnic unity. For example, while the Lun Dayehs in East Kalimantan and Sabah are mostly Christian, they belong to five different affiliations. On the Indonesian side, there are four: *Gereja Kemah Injil Indonesia*, *Gereja Betel Indonesia*, Catholic, and *Gereja Kemah Protestan Indonesia*. There is also considerable stereotyping in terms of national identity, with the Sarawakians on the Malaysian side seeing themselves as better educated and economically better off than their fellow Dayak in Krayan, who are often termed "Indon" and seen as uneducated farmers.

Yet the separation of nations has also paradoxically consolidated the geographical isolation of the Lun Dayeh in Krayan on the Indonesian side of the border — at the extreme periphery of the nation — and facilitated strong economic and social linkages with people in Sabah and Sarawak. For example, to reach the sub-district of Krayan from the closest large centres in East Kalimantan, that of Tarakan and Nunukan, people have to fly. The largest plane currently, a DAS,[3] takes no more than 24 passengers and in 2007 was grounded for several months due to safety reasons. The people of Krayan buy and sell only a very few goods in Nunukan and Tarakan due to the increasing price of air transport. Instead they rely economically on the Lun Bawang in Sarawak. A kind of barter commonly takes place between the Lun Dayeh and the Lun Bawang, particularly in the border area of Ba Kelalan. In this case, the Lun Dayeh sell rice (*padi adan*), while in return, the Ba Kelalan people sell sugar, oil, chicken wings, fish, kitchen utensils, and so forth.

Yet it would be a mistake to see this barter as an even exchange. Another important feature of this bartering is the ability of the Ba Kelalan people to profit from the Lun Dayeh from East Kalimantan, who enter Sarawak through this border. The people of Long Bawan of East Kalimantan must pay RM 5 (approximately USD1.50) to pass the "gate" guarded by the Ba Kelalan people. This angers many Indonesian Krayan who believe that they are of the same ethnic group as the Lun Bawang across the border in Sarawak, including those in the border town of Ba Kelalan. On top of this, Indonesian Lun Dayeh from Krayan are not allowed to travel further to Lawas in Sarawak (because there is no passport control at the border), where the terms of trade would be more favourable to them. They are instead forced to stop in Ba Kelalan and to trade there. Many Lun Dayeh people, including a paramount chief, told me that the Lun Bawang of Sarawak have the ability to control their

government, while in Indonesia the Lun Dayeh are obedient to theirs. Yet the people of Krayan depend upon the Ba Kelalan traders, and so comply.

Conclusion

The sense that the Ulu Padas form a distinct Dayak group has grown in strength on both sides of the border. Even in this relatively small area, in the heart of Borneo, translocal Dayak networks have emerged along with a concern over environmental protection and cultural preservation (such as the maintenance of local wisdom). It is from these concerns that the Ulu Padas hope to further certain objectives, such as economic development through ecotourism. Yet in order to justify their claim to a common ancestry to themselves and to others, the Ulu Padas search for cultural elements that can be seen as definitively their own, and strive to find the terms on which they can pursue their common purpose. This can be seen in the various meetings held amongst the Ulu Padas in both East Kalimantan and East Malaysia, but also in the tension over road construction and border payments demanded by fellow ethnic group members.

From one perspective, the emergence of more particularistic forms of identity amongst the Dayak in Kalimantan and Malaysia — such as the Ulu Padas — seems to go against the broad contemporary trend amongst the Dayak to extend their commonality outwards to form pan-Dayak organisations and self-help groups. This can be seen in the case of the pan-Dayak organisation *Solidaritas* and the credit union movement. Yet when pan-Dayak is understood as networking — albeit one centrally concerned with issues of cultural identity — the emerging transnational ethnogenesis of the Ulu Padas can also be seen as an example of pan-Dayakness, even if on a smaller scale. What all three examples of pan-Dayak ultimately emphasise is less the processes of Dayak cultural identity formation (understood as a cluster of identifiable cultural attributes — however arbitrary and changeable) — than the process of mutual identification and recognition of self and others as Dayak, in a context in which the situational and fluid dynamics of cultural identity are already presumed. The above examples also share three other characteristics — characteristics which have been central to the networking inherent in my conception of the pan-Dayak. First is the central role of elites within this networking in all three organisations. Second is the recognition of a shared economic and political marginalisation at the hands of the state and/or entrepreneurs from other ethnic groups (such as timber entrepreneurs in Sabah). Finally, the three cases of networking share a common

set of objectives, most notably, they aim to firstly garner economic and political power based on a concept of Dayak unity, and from here, secondly, to struggle for improved economic and political opportunities.

Notes

1.	The author would like to acknowledge the support provided by the School of Social Sciences at La Trobe University as a Visiting Researcher which enabled the writing of this chapter. The chapter draws on several studies conducted in East Kalimantan funded by SEASREP (team members: Thung Ju Lan, Peter Kedit and Yekti Maunati) and in Sarawak and Sabah, East Malaysia funded by LIPI (team members: I Ketut Ardhana, Sri Sunarti, Dundin Zaenuddin and Yekti Maunati).
2.	This is a pseudonym of the earlier Dayak Organisation.
3.	Since 2008, Susi Air has operated its new route Nunukan-Long Bawan. DAS has stopped operating there.

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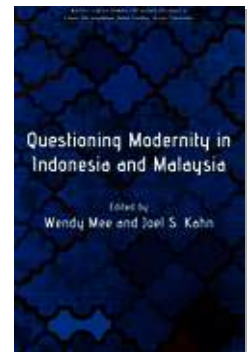
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Dilemma of Progressive Politics in Malaysia: Islamic Orthodoxy versus Human Rights

Goh Beng Lan

This essay reflects on recent conflicts over religious freedom between "Islamic" and "secularist" factions in Malaysia to highlight the difficulty facing progressive politics in a postcolonial and multi-ethnic society in today's world. I suggest that the dispute between Islam and religious freedom must be understood as a predicament of postcolonial nationalism in a post-Cold War era when national identifications have become increasingly entangled with global identity politics. I will show how the combination of Malaysian nationalism with anti-Western rhetoric has effectively allowed a narrow variety of disembedded Islamism the opportunity to claim the moral high ground. In the process, this strand of Islamism has made progressive politics a more difficult and discredited proposition by labelling it a form of Western ideology. What is needed at this challenging juncture of Malaysian history, I suggest, is a radical change in the naturalised assumptions of religion and human emancipation in both Islamist and progressive traditions. Critical transformative spaces can only emerge if Islamists and progressives alike are able to enact distance from larger national and global ideologies and draw from alternative imaginings of religious and human co-existence. As I argue, such alternatives can be found in the history of Malaysia, which shows how Malaysian political integration has always rested on a combination rather than separation of cultural and civic (difference-neutral) subjectivities. The progressive struggle for human freedom in Malaysia, as I will show, cannot afford to denounce ethnic and religious identifications, but rather should draw on everyday inter-ethnic relations of respect and a common historical and political-economic past. At a time when cultural differences

have become polarised in terms of an oppositional framework of Islami-sation versus Western neo-liberalism, we need to transcend the East-West divide, whether real or imagined. This is important in order that both sides can engage constructively with a variety of political-ethical imagi-nings of human emancipation. These imaginings, despite emanating from specific geo-historical locations, are connected by many of the same ideals such as human rights and freedom. Challenging the East-West divide will also enhance the capacity for action on the part of progressives in Malaysia, who are currently vulnerable to attempts to delegitimise and dismiss their agendas as mere copies of Western ideology.

What follows is a brief sketch of recent controversies involving con-version into and out of Islam in Malaysia. My discussion is highly selec-tive, drawing on particular cases in order to trace, with broad strokes, the parameters of contending views on Islam and human rights and their intricate links with identity politics in Malaysia. A discussion of ethnic politics then follows, one in which I locate the debates on Islam and human rights in the context of shifting and universalising forces of counter-cultural politics and pan-Islamism. Finally, I look to the past to suggest the usefulness of reconsidering earlier demonstrations and narra-tives of interethnic conviviality in Malaysia's history. This provides fruitful terrain in which to search for more balanced conceptions of religious and human co-existence than the extremes presented in the current context.

New Islamic Orthodoxy versus Religious Freedoms in Malaysia

Although the force of Islamism is not new in Malaysia (for example, see Muzaffar 1987; Mutalib 1990; Jomo and Cheek 1992; Othman 1994), the increasing involvement of Malay nationalism within a global web of political Islam has gradually led to the rise of a new wave of Islamic orthodoxy. By the new millennium, Islamic orthodoxy has spawned at-tempts to implement an Islamic state and Islamic criminal law, sparking divisions between Islamists and progressives (comprising both Muslims and non-Muslims) over constitutional guarantees within the multiracial body politic of Malaysian society (Noor 2002; Othman and Hooker 2003; Martinez 2001; Mohamad 2001). This stage of Islamism is characterised by a struggle between groups advocating for Islamic conservatism and those advocating for secular spaces in Malaysian public life. The over-arching aims to protect both religious and secular interests have led to the coming together of a host of ethnic, religious and civic groups that

has never before been witnessed in the Malaysian political landscape. The latest battle between "Islamists" and "progressives" has resulted in a deadlock over differing perspectives on religious freedom.

The immediate catalysts of this impasse were a series of recent controversial court cases involving questions of conversion and apostasy in Islam. In order to elucidate the issues at stake, let me briefly discuss some of these cases. My coverage will be highly arbitrary as I draw on certain cases in order to provide an overview of the issues at stake and the polemical divides that followed. At this point, it should be noted that it is neither my aim nor is it within my expertise to offer a systematic summary of legal implications of each of these cases. Instead, my discussion is aimed at laying the ground for understanding both a new stage of Islamic orthodoxy and the extreme difficulties faced by progressive elements in enacting resistance within the context of an ideological binary between Islam and secular/universal human rights in the Malaysian context.

Although there has long been some controversy over the division of areas of jurisdictions in the country's separate system of civil and *syariah* courts,[1] such disputes have largely gone unnoticed until recently.[2] The first of the cases to propel this controversy into the open, triggering off a national debate, was a legal tussle over the burial rites of one of Malaysia's latest heroes, the Indian Mount Everest climber, M. Moorthy (alias Muhammad Abdullah) at the end of 2005. M. Moorthy, an army commando who was a member of the first Malaysian expedition to conquer Mount Everest[3] died on 20 December 2005, following a fall from his wheelchair.[4] Upon his death, a dispute arose between Moorthy's family and the Federal Territories Islamic Affairs Department (JAWI)[5] over claiming his body from the hospital morgue.[6] Unknown to his family, Moorthy had embraced Islam a year prior to his death. In this tussle, Moorthy's army colleagues got the *syariah* court to uphold their claim that he had converted to Islam. His family members were, however, not allowed to appear before this court to dispute his conversion because they were not Muslims. As recourse, his family turned to the civil court to contest the religious court's declaration, insisting that Moorthy had died a Hindu and should be buried as one. His wife filed summons at the Appellate and Special Powers Division of the High Court to order the hospital to hand over her husband's body and to restrain JAWI from claiming the body pending legal hearing. In addition, she sought a declaration from the court that her husband was not a Muslim but rather a Hindu at the time of his death and that all documents regarding to his

conversion to Islam be declared null and void. Her applications failed when the High Court ruled on 28 December 2005 that it had no jurisdiction to review the *syariah* court's declaration that Moorthy was a Muslim and should be buried accordingly. In his ruling,[7] the judge referred to the powers of the *syariah* courts protected by an amendment to Article 121 (A) of the Constitution, which "prohibits the civil courts from intervening in the areas of jurisdiction of the *syariah* courts or their decisions" (see Othman 1998: 6). Upset by the court rulings, Moorthy's family members did not attend the burial. Tensions ran high and Moorthy's burial was performed under heavy police security. According to the alternative online newspaper portal, *Malaysiakini*, more than eight police officers were tasked with guarding the entrance and exit of the hospital mortuary when the body was carried out. A police outrider rode in front of the hearse while at least four police cars followed behind to ensure the convoy arrived at the cemetery without incident.[8]

Moorthy's case served as a landmark where the High Court had deferred to the *syariah* court in deliberating its judgement on religious freedom. There was an outcry from activist and civil groups, representing both Muslims and non-Muslims, who saw the rulings as an erosion of constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. Distressed by this legal precedence, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) — the country's main interfaith civil society group — organised a candlelight vigil in front of the Kuala Lumpur High Court on the very evening of the judgement.[9]

In contrast, Muslim groups hailed the court decision as upholding the special guarantee provided by Article 121 (1A) to the *syariah* court in deciding on issues concerning Islam. In defence of the *syariah* court, a Malay-Muslim advocacy group, TERAS (Malay Empowerment Group), issued a press statement to assert that, "The syariah court should not be seen as an institution that denies justice to non-Muslims. On the contrary, if its laws are fully applied, there is an assurance of better justice here compared to civil laws, which are the heritage of the British colonial rule."[10]

Apart from the question of religious rights over the dead, cases of forced separation of Muslims from their non-Muslim spouses and children worsened public anxiety over the growing powers of Islamic orthodoxy. Amongst these was a heart wrenching plight of a forty year old Indian woman named Raimah Bibi, who was said to be adopted by Indian Muslim parents as a child but who led a Hindu life after marrying an Indian rubber tapper who never converted to Islam. Under the requirements of

Islamic marriage law in Malaysia their marriage would be illegal. Nevertheless, their "illegal" union was not discovered until some twenty one years later when the Selangor Religious Department (JAIS) happened upon it.[11] Upon its discovery, JAIS forcefully took Raimah and her children away from her husband on 16 April 2007 for rehabilitation and religious counselling. In response, the husband filed a *habeas corpus* application against JAIS in the High Court, alleging the religious department's illegal detainment of his wife and children. In a highly emotionally charged hearing, the High Court granted the husband custody of the children indicating that JAIS had agreed to this arrangement and did not object that the children be raised as Hindus.[12] Raimah was given absolute access to her children but she told the court that she would continue living as a practising Muslim and would hence live apart from her husband — a decision deemed to be part of a compromise reached with JAIS. Although hailed as a landmark judgement for minority rights — given that in Malaysia children born to Muslims must be raised as followers of Islam — the act of tearing families apart by the Islamic religious Council did not go down well with the general public, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

The culmination of public acrimony, however, unfolded in the case of a 42-year-old female Malay-Muslim apostate known as Lina Joy — a name that has become a household word in Malaysian society. Lina Joy's case served to widen the gap between Islamic and secularist factions as she fought for legal recognition of her renunciation of Islam all the way up to the highest of Malaysia's civil courts, the Federal Court. Critical to the Federal Court's decision in Lina's case was the fundamental question of whether Muslim law or the Federal Constitution dominates in the matter of conversion out of Islam. Born a Muslim and originally named Azlina Jailani, Lina Joy became a Catholic in 1988 (at twenty-six years of age) whereupon she changed her name. Her battle began in 1997 when she first applied to the National Registration Department (NRD) to change her name on her identity card to Lina Joy in her desire to marry her Christian partner under civil law.[13] In Malaysia, not only does the identity card officially designate one's ethnic identity but also one's religious affiliations.[14] Having the word "Islam" on the card automatically subjects one to the jurisdiction of the *syariah* courts, which apart from marriage, divorce, guardianship of infants and wills, property matters, and so on, also has limited criminal jurisdiction to punish Muslims for offences against religion such as alcohol consumption, sexual impropriety, or violations of fasting month prohibitions. It is not surprising that under these circumstances, Lina wanted her Muslim name and religious status

changed on her card. Her initial application to the NRD failed but she was successful in her second attempt in 1999. Her Muslim status was however retained on the card as the NRD explained that a certificate of apostasy was needed from the *syariah* court before this information could be changed. This prompted Lina to file a suit against the NRD. In 2001, the High Court ruled in favour of the NRD stating that the *syariah* court and other Islamic authorities must first recognise her conversion out of Islam before her religious status could be changed on the identity card. Lina appealed, whereupon the Court of Appeal ruled in a two to one decision to uphold the High Court rule. The dissenting judge argued that the NRD's refusal to address her application for change of religious status was without legal basis. Since her case represents unresolved matters of public importance, Lina was allowed to appeal to the Federal Court in 2006. In yet another two to one decision on 30 May 2007, the Federal Court upheld the decision that she had to first obtain a *syariah* court confirmation of her conversion out of Islam before the NRD could be compelled to drop the word "Islam" from her identity card.[15] This time the dissenting judge cited Article 8 of the Constitution, which prohibited any form of discrimination (on the grounds of religion, race, descent, place of birth or gender) to rule that the NRD had acted beyond its powers by requiring Lina to produce an apostasy documentation that was not provided for nor authorised by the regulations. He added that since apostasy was a criminal offence in some states, the requirement for the application for an apostasy certificate was "unreasonable for it means the appellant is made to self-incriminate".[16]

Lina Joy's case led to hostilities rarely seen in Malaysia. Amidst the court hearings, death threats were sent to Lina and a Muslim human rights lawyer, who acted as an observer in her case on behalf of the Malaysian Bar Council (MBC).[17] In part this could be because apostasy is an extremely sensitive issue to the Muslim community and Lina's conversion to Christianity worsened the situation because the threat of evangelical Christianity has long been a concern amongst Muslims in the country. Lina's case led to a series of public protests, vigils, and forums as both Islamist and secularist groups sought resolution on the issue of a constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and clarity in jurisdiction of the *syariah* and civil courts over matters of religion. On the day of the court judgement, Islamic groups, headed by the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) — an influential Muslim youth group — held a vigil outside Malaysia's Palace of Justice to await the decision. The

court ruling was greeted by shouts of "God is great!" from the assembled crowd.[18] ABIM's president, Yusri Mohamad, told the press that he welcomed the decision as affirming the existing arrangement relating to the *syariah* courts and the position of Islam in the Federal Constitution.[19] Muslim sentiments still ran high some two months after Lina's final court hearing, which saw a gathering of some 10,000 Muslims at a forum on apostasy at the Masjid Wilayah in Kuala Lumpur.[20] A collective resolution was made at the forum asserting the Muslim right to strengthen Islamic institutions and continue with the Islamisation process in Malaysia. This resolution was later submitted to the Council of Malay Rulers, the prime minister, members of Parliament and state Legislators.[21]

On the other side of the divide, civil groups banded together to show support for religious freedom when yet another case of a Muslim apostate detained at a rehabilitation camp came to public attention soon after Lina Joy's final legal hearing. This was the case of Revathi, an Indian woman born to Muslim converts but raised by a Hindu grandmother, and who married a Hindu man.[22] She was advised by the Malacca Islamic Religious Department to make an application to the state's Syariah High Court to confirm her status as a Hindu but when she did just that, she was instead sentenced to a hundred days detention at a rehabilitation centre. Her detention was extended for another eighty days when she had supposedly not "repented".[23] Incensed by what they saw as another infringement on human rights, various civil and women's groups including the MCCBCHST, the All Women's Action Society, Sisters in Islam, Women's Aid Organisation, Women's Centre for Change, Penang, and Women's Development Collective held a candlelight vigil on 19 June 2007 at the Dataran Merdeka (Independence Square) to demonstrate support for religious freedom.[24] Some 500 people attended this vigil carrying banners, including those that displayed sentiments such as: "Secular is not anti-religion" and "Stop breaking up families".[25]

As the fight between "Islamists" and "secularists" over the supremacy of Islamic law versus Federal Constitution escalated, loose coalitions between diverse groups were formed on each side to consolidate their power base and create platforms to voice concerns. The coalitions formed to advocate secularist interests included: the Inter-Faith Commission, established by the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Bar Council, which encourages dialogue across different religious faiths; the Article 11 Coalition (named after the constitution article that guarantees the right of every Malaysian citizen to "profess and practice his religion") comprising

13 religious and human rights groups; and the Merdeka Statement,[26] a non-governmental nation-building social document aimed at creating equal opportunities and stronger civil liberties, being backed by forty-two think tanks and by human rights, economic and religious organisations, including the Malaysian Bar Council and the Sisters of Islam. On the opposite camp, alliances of Islamic groups included the Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs (ACCIN), a loose coalition of 13 Muslim NGOs; Muslim Organisations in Defence of Islam (Pembela); TERAS; and Lawyers in Defence of Islam,[27] a group established by Muslim lawyers in July 2006 to counter the Malaysian Bar Council's secularist position on the issue of religious freedom.

As these Islamist and secularist coalitions jostled with each other to push their own agendas, there were a few nasty incidents. For instance, angry protesters shut down a public forum in Penang organised by the Article 11 Coalition.[28] On other occasions, Islamic groups pressured the government to ban events organised by their opponents. For example, the ACCIN saw interfaith dialogue as an act of questioning the supremacy of Islam and demanded that the government ban such events.[29] The government gave in to this pressure and called for the postponement of interfaith dialogues.[30] In May 2007, the government imposed a last minute ban on an international Muslim-Christian conference organised by the Inter-Faith Commission.[31]

This row over Islam and religious freedom saw uncompromising positions being assumed on both fronts. For Islamist groups, the supremacy of the *syariah* courts in deciding on Islamic matters was unquestionable and they wanted the powers of this religious court strengthened. They referred to the status of Islam as the official religion in Malaysia's Constitution to support their claims and they criticised secularist arguments of absolute religious freedom as ignoring this special position of Islam. For progressives, the supremacy of the Federal Constitution and the civil courts in adjudicating on religious freedom was absolute and they wanted the reassurance of this guarantee. In support of their claims, they reverted to historical facts and documents to argue for the secular status of the Malaysian state despite Islam as its official religion.[32] The fundamentally opposing positions between the two camps led to much acrimony with Islamists vilifying their opponents as secularists while progressives disparaging Islamists as demagogues. One may well ask: how do we account for such binary oppositions and what might allow for more balanced positions on religion and human rights? It is to these questions which we next turn.

Dis-embedding Universalisms: Pan-Islamic Orthodoxy, Anti-West Rhetoric and Human Rights

Malaysian transformations since the late twentieth century have been characterised by an escalating anti-West rhetoric on the part of the state whereby elements of "tradition" and "Islam" are valorised and re-scripted into new mindsets, ethnic identifications, and grandiose urban built forms to express new national sensibilities that are responsive to market instrumentalities. The height of these polemics was found during Dr. Mahathir's era of administration.

The counter-cultural idiom of Malaysian political economy can be understood in terms of its postcolonial location in late capitalism. Like many ex-colonies, economic modernisation is imperative for national survival. Yet, economic modernisation implicates a hierarchical set of meanings that establish the West as the forerunner against which other countries are judged. Hence, for a developing economy like Malaysia, capitalist modernisation is at once an experience of liberation and domination: it is understood as an opportunity to imagine an autonomous future distinct from the West, on the one hand, but also an unending race to catch up with the West, on the other. As much as this interlocking sense of opportunity and disempowerment is deployed by the state to legitimise its anti-West rhetoric, it is also nevertheless a product of historical and economic structures of subordination and domination and hence resonates with ordinary Malaysians at the everyday level. These ordinary Malaysians are well aware that the level of participation in the global world remains different for people of colour and for those who come from different historical locations outside the western world. This in part explains why the government's critical stance against the West has largely received public endorsement, although there is resistance to government policy on many fronts. This is best evidenced by a consensus amongst supporters and critics of Mahathir in hailing his policy on speaking against the West when he finally retired in 2003 (Aeira 2003: 15).

Undoubtedly, the Mahathir era established Malaysia as a leading non-western country that spoke against Western hegemony on both the trade and human rights fronts. Malaysia was, for instance, head of a lobby called Global 2003 representing sixteen developing countries of the Africa Union and Mozambique that opposed the WTO trade talks (*The Star*, 17 September 2003). The country also played an active role in the Non-Alignment Movement, of which it was Chair towards the end of Mahathir's tenure as prime minister. Countering the universal language of

human rights was also high on Malaysia's agenda. The Malaysian govern-
ment was at the forefront of the critique of the concept of universal
human rights as a form of Western hegemony and ethnocentrism. At a
1993 regional preparatory meeting in Bangkok, before the World Con-
ference on Human Rights in Vienna, Malaysia along with 34 Asian and
Middle-Eastern countries signed the Bangkok Declaration (of Human
Rights)[33] to assert the prior importance of economic and social rights
over the eventual fulfilment of other civil and political rights. Later
at the Vienna conference, Malaysia criticised the universal concept of
human rights as a form of Western ethnocentrism and deemed it cul-
turally inappropriate for non-Western countries (Vidhu 2002: 113).

Apart from speaking against the West, Malaysia also gained a level of
political visibility as an alternative Islamic capitalist modernity — a con-
struction promoted by the government and connected to the emergence
of a global political Islam and an Islamic resurgence in Malaysia in the
wake of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (Muzaffar 1987; Mutalib 1990;
Jomo and Cheek 1992; Othman 1994). This connection to a global Isla-
mic movement saw Islam in Malaysia expand beyond the domain of
Malay nationalism, as many Malays began to identify with the aspirations
of what they saw as a global *ummah* (or community of Muslims), thus
leading to further fragmentation within the Malay community. Never-
theless, the involvement of Malay identity politics within the global tide
of political Islam, particularly after 11 September 2001, saw the emer-
gence of a strident orthodoxy characterised by a preoccupation with Pan-
Islamic practices and symbolisms derived largely from the Middle-East.

The nature of this new wave of Islamic orthodoxy is perhaps best
manifested in the country's latest architectural semiotics of the new ad-
ministrative city of Putrajaya, the country's third Federal Territory and
latest government administrative centre. Comprising administrative offices
such as the Prime Minister's Department and Residence and the Putra
Mosque, the city is a direct transplantation of Middle-Eastern architec-
tural designs alien to the regional context. The Putra Mosque, for in-
stance, has grandiose elements of Persian, Turkish, Egyptian and Arabian
religious architectural designs. As a result, as with much of Putrajaya, the
mosque stands somewhat aloof from, and surreal in, its surroundings. The
spectral quality of Putrajaya architecture has been criticised by Malaysian
architectural critics for neglecting Malay culture and the country's multi-
ethnic heritage (Tajudddin 2005: 48).

The embedding of a de-territorialised pan-Islamism in the Malaysian
political landscape is inevitably the result of the close nexus between

global Islamic politics and Malay nationalism which began to be forged in the 1980s. The rising importance of Islam has seen the two dominant Malay political parties in the country, that is, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) — the main party of the Malaysian ruling coalition (Barisan Nasional) — and its chief opposition, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), actively using an Islamic agenda to gain legitimacy amongst the Malay community. Islam soon became a "pawn" between UMNO and PAS (Mohammad 2001: 112–38) with each side trying to out-Islamise the other in their policy conceptions, gradually leading to ever-narrowing conceptions of Islam, which are also increasingly detached from local practices.

By the beginning of the new millennium, following PAS' domination of two north-eastern states in West Malaysia, the question of establishing an Islamic state and Islamic criminal law had catapulted to the centre stage of Malaysian politics. This set of affairs began when PAS discussed coming up with a blue print for an Islamic state and moved quickly to introduce Islamic criminal law in Trengganu via the adoption of the *Hudud* and *Qisas* Enactment[34] by the State Legislative Assembly in July 2002 (*The Star*, 13 November 2003). The political party had previously introduced *Hudud* law in Kelantan (a state where it had held successive power since the 1990) through the adoption of the Kelantan Shari'a Criminal Code by the Kelantan State Assembly in 1993. This effort was, however, thwarted by the Federal government that invoked the Malaysian Constitution to deem *Hudud* Law unconstitutional due to the provision of a Civil Penal Code in the country. In its second bid to enact Islamic criminal law in Trengganu, PAS was halted by the refusal of the Trengganu Police Force to assist the state government in implementing the *Hudud* and *Qisas* Enactment (see *The Star*, 10 July 2002; *The Star*, 11 July 2002). Inevitably, these events opened up a Pandora's box on Islamic law and the Islamic state in Malaysia.

In an attempt to pre-empt PAS, the Mahathir government escalated the force of Islamic conservatism when it made a surprising pronouncement on 29 September 2001 that Malaysia was already an Islamic state and hence there was no need for such a demand by its political opposition.[35] Perhaps perceived as a UMNO political gimmick at this juncture, this declaration was endorsed by two of UMNO's alliance partners, the Gerakan and MCA political parties, which predominantly represent Chinese interests. Nevertheless, the game of extremist politics had begun together with its inevitable consequences, as witnessed in the current legal crisis over Islam and religious freedom. Interestingly, at the height

of the recent religious controversies in July 2007, the current Deputy Prime Minister repeated the declaration that Malaysia was an Islamic state, arguing that the country had never been a secular state.[36] This time, however, there was strong public criticism of his declaration on the grounds that it violated the social contract behind the Malaysian Constitution. Even the Gerakan and MCA political parties noted their opposition to the prime minister which led to a "gag order" on media coverage on the subject of an Islamic state by the government.[37]

Concerted Islamisation of the Malaysian bureaucracy had paved the way for the consolidation of conservative forces. Throughout the past two decades, the Mahathir administration had slowly upgraded the power of federal-level Islamic agencies in an attempt to regulate Islamic enactments in the various states. As early as 1996, Pusat Islam, a central planning and management body of Islamic affairs, was elevated into the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia or JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia). They were then empowered to draft, streamline, evaluate and coordinate Islamic laws, which included the power to determine what constitutes correct and what constitutes deviant Islamic practices (see Othman 1998: 7). In addition, the powers of the *syariah* courts were protected and expanded. The now infamous Article 121 (A) of the Constitution which "prohibits the civil Courts from intervening in the areas of jurisdiction of the Syariah Courts or their decisions" was amended in 1988 (ibid.: 6). The seeds of the present jurisdictional crisis between the civil and *syariah* courts were sown in April 2000 when JAKIM drew up *Sharia* legislation to stop Muslims from "deviating" from Islam and encouraged other states to follow (Ahmad 2005: 11).[38] At that time, the legislation was already widely debated by the public and a petition against it was sent by civil groups to the Human Rights Commission.[39] In face of public antagonism, the government later withdrew the legislation for further consideration.

Clearly, increasing Islamisation of the state bureaucracy had created religious hardliners within the government. This was further evidenced by a series of debacles involving the zealous behaviour of the various Islamic Religious Councils in arresting Muslims for working in establishments serving alcohol and Muslim women for taking part in a beauty contest under the charge of "insulting Islam" (see Othman 1998, 2003). In addition, a brand of Islamic exclusionism that ignored the spirit of conviviality long found in Malaysian society was promoted by religious authorities. An example of this can be seen in the fiasco of an e-mail circular sent

by the Head of the *Sharia* Department of Malaysia's premier insurance company, Takaful Malaysia, a branch of Bank Islam.[40] In this message, Muslims were warned not to wish Hindus a Happy Deepavali on the basis that this festival was deemed to involve idol worship, with the consequence that even pronouncing or using its name would lead to *syirik* or blasphemy.[41]

Early collective contestations of this emergent Islamic conservatism came from Malay-Muslim public intellectuals, writers, newspaper columnists, academics, and NGO activists (see Noor 2003; Othman 2003; Martinez 2001). Their criticisms, however, evoked anger from the powerful *ulamas* (Islamic clergy), which led the Persatuan Ulama Malaysia (PUM) — an independent body of Muslim religious scholars — to submit a memorandum to the Chairman of Council of Rulers against five of these individuals (all Muslims with the exception of one). The *ulamas* claimed that these five individuals had denigrated and insulted Islam as well as the institution of the *Ulama*. Consequently, they demanded that these people face prosecution for such infractions.[42] Nevertheless, Islamic NGOs such as the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), other NGOs, such as JUST world, Malay-Muslim political leaders, including the former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and the opposition leader Syed Hussin Ali, came out in support of these individuals, calling for more openness.

Clearly, these early clashes between conservative and progressive forces amongst the Malay-Muslim community are a striking corollary of the recent conflict between Islamists and secularists that has come to a head as Islamic conservatism has begun to impinge on the liberties of non-Muslims as well. The struggle over this new Islamic orthodoxy and its extension into the terrain of Malay identity politics highlights the problems of a nationalism that is increasingly tied to transnational identity politics. Malaysia's location within the context of postcolonial interstate systems has seen a strong anti-western rhetoric alongside the extolment of Islam as an alternative model of progress. This coming together of Malay nationalism and counter-cultural Islamic politics has produced a new tide of pan-Islamism in which local Islamic traditions and multi-ethnic considerations are increasingly subverted by a narrow Islamic dominance.

It is this particular configuration of Islam, Malay nationalism and anti-West rhetoric that is giving rise to a single moral-political high force that is making progressive politics a challenging task in Malaysia. In a situation where the state has successfully extolled tradition and Islam to

refute Western liberal ideology and universal human rights, an evocation of the language of human rights to resist Islamic orthodoxy quickly becomes associated with Western ideology and, is as such, rejected. What is sinister in such a scenario is that alternative progressive positions about human emancipation that may not conform to dominant liberal assumptions are quickly flattened out or, even when articulated, glossed over. Against such an atmosphere, we must ask what might allow for more nuanced conceptions of "liberal" action so as to avoid knee-jerk dismissals and help establish dialogic spaces with the opposition?

The solution, I suggest, lies not in resorting to philosophical arguments on the universal entitlement of human rights regardless of religion, race, and so on. After all, the idea of the freely-choosing individual is itself an ideological construct (see Ortner 1996; Abu-Lughod 2002; Mahmood 2005) and, as such, cannot be handled purely in an abstract sense. Rather, the question of human agency is inevitably a project shaped by the precipitates of culture and history. As a start, I suggest that Islamists and progressives must engage in two key practices. First, they have to be reflexive about their own complicities with, as well as distance from, national and global ideologies on religion and human rights. Second, they have to turn to Malaysia's own historical narratives for inspirations of alternative ways to approach Islam and human rights as a step towards a détente in the current political impasse.

Social Practice in History

As a step towards practicing reflexivity on both sides of the Islam-human rights ideological divide, it is necessary to first grasp the full power of the universalising forces of domination and counter-cultural resistance that in today's world influences and reshapes a postcolonial, Islamic and multi-ethnic society like Malaysia. The hierarchical divide between developed and developing world in a post-Cold War world is not merely an incipient, indirect shadow for a country like Malaysia. Rather, the backdrop of global power divisions and asymmetries is a vital drive behind Malaysia's domestic political sagas — in particular, the current battle over Islamic orthodoxy. The narrow, albeit spectral, constructions of pan-Islamic conservatism are not merely products of sectarian politics within the Malay community but are inevitably also responses to the larger forces of global inequality. As much as these exclusionary forms of de-territorialised Islamic imagination are about local politics, these imaginaries must also be understood in terms of a wider, globalised, universal Islamic discourse.

One which is perceived as challenging the conditions responsible for the marginalisation of particular communities *vis-à-vis* the promise of modernity, progress, democracy, and global citizenship in the current world.

Resistance in the face of such a counter-cultural Islamism is inevitably a complicated affair. When such resistance evokes specifically a language of secular human rights, a universalising discourse closely associated with Western cultural and philosophical assumptions, then it becomes an even more problematic proposition. The Western roots of present universal standards of human rights is a reality that cannot be denied given that developed countries had a stronger role in the formative process of the conception of universal human rights after the Second World War (An-Naim 1992c: 428). There is a whole body of literature either defending or criticising the universal language of human rights around the questions of competing cultural perspectives, but it is not our concern here (for example see An-Naim 1992a; Bielefeldt 2000: 90–192). Rather, what matters is the fact that alternative cultural arguments of human rights have yet to receive legitimacy in the current international arena despite advocacy by some developing countries, including Malaysia. At the moment, alternative arguments of human rights appear to be in limbo: they are caught between the peril of, on the one hand, unethical and elitist/state driven cultural relativist agendas and, on the other, a fixation with rejecting western philosophical premises rather than really establishing alternative moral and ethical ideas about human rights. Under these conditions, the progressive struggle against Islamic orthodoxy becomes a difficult if not paralysing endeavour, as seen in the recent gridlock between Islamists and progressives over religious freedoms in Malaysia. In the context of a pervasive ideology on East-West differences, coupled with a lack of an alternative vocabulary of human rights, the touting of secularism as the only workable framework for multi-ethnic Malaysian society by progressives can only make things worse. This is because, in Malaysia, secularism is a word often construed as a western ideology associated with the repudiation of the role of religion in public life. It is hence unlikely that most Muslims in the country would endorse a secularist position. As we have seen, progressive advocates who are Muslims had been accused of being "traitors" and received death-threats. Although what progressives might actually be advocating is more of a concept of a politics based on secularism,[43] which recognises religious liberty rather than an anti-religious position. They must understand that a separation of these two conceptions of secularism is often difficult in the Malaysian context.

In such an atmosphere, if in following western (post)liberal assumptions, progressive factions continue to insist that the politics of emancipation must emanate from civic-secularist idioms, the current impasse over religious freedom will likely continue. There is thus an imperative to find ways of articulating the nuances of "liberal" action within Malaysia's sociohistorical contexts in order to avoid knee-jerk dismissals of their aspirations as mere Western ideology and develop some capacity for dialogue between polemical extremes.

Given that Malaysia's history and political culture have always been constituted by the politics of ethnicity coupled with a concerted Islamisation of public and everyday life over the past three decades or so,[44] a situation where religion, ethnicity and public politics remain mutually exclusive does not seem feasible. I suggest that the struggle for rights and liberation in Malaysia is unlikely to stem from the denunciations of ethnic and/or Islamic/religious regimes of identifications. Rather, if we take a retrospective look at history, we will see that progressive action is likely to be more effective if it draws on a combination of ethnoreligious and civic (difference-neutral) subjectivities that are formed and defined by social experience and connections between different groups over time. Much of this history remains hidden or muted by dominant narratives of Malaysia's postcolonial history, a history in which alternative processes of political and socio-cultural integration in the country's past are ignored.

I argue that to find a way out of the binary opposition between Islam and human rights, it is necessary to principally recognise that, right from its inception, the Malaysian nation-state has been constituted as a modification of the western model of a unitary nation-state bound by one language, religion and culture. It is perhaps more appropriate to call the Malaysian model a multi-ethnic postcolonial nation-state, where the project of building a culturally integrated and territorially bounded community has involved both compromise and tensions arising from two historical configurations. The first of which are, the deep structures of cultural pluralism (inherited from a maritime past and colonial society). The second refers to the twin-imperatives of political autonomy and economic modernisation in post-Independence politics. As Tim Harper (1996: 241) deftly noted, the newly established nation-state in Malaysia inherited a Western political model of nation that assumed a corollary between nation and racial/ethnic identity. Yet, the newly Independent Malaysia also operated on the basis of a distinction between the nation and its cultural foundation, in that the idea of *bangsa* (race or nation) did not refer to nationality. Rather, it referred to a distinct cultural core

within the nation-state — the Malay race (*bangsa Melayu*). A legalistic definition of citizenship (*warganegara*) was accorded to the non-Malay community. Theoretically, this legalistic definition of citizenship enshrines the right of all communities to identify as citizens of the nation. Therefore, there has been a tension in the conception of the nation-state right from the start — one that operates on the bases of a Malay cultural core along with the civic ideals of common citizenship, territory, political struggle and social institutions.

In Malaysia's modified version of the nation-state, we could say that the notion of equality does not mean sameness. Rather, nationhood operates on a precarious notion of ethno-religious differentiation but equal treatment for all members of a national society. This arrangement was inevitably an outcome of an imperative to overthrow the yoke of colonisation as the forging of national unity and the appeal of citizenship became a pragmatic and powerful means for first generation leaders to amass legitimisation of their eventual rule. But citizenship appeal was not enough, the call for material development and a strong state to manage society was equally important for the nation-building enterprise. Therefore Malaysian nationalism and the foundation of its nation-state have always been constituted by the simultaneous processes of culturalisation (that is, using a language of specific cultural and religious difference of Malays and other ethnic identities) and civic subjectivities of equal social rights and economic opportunity, common political struggle and shared destiny within the world capitalist economy. The important point that we need to recognise here is that Malaysian political integration has always rested on a combination of ethno-religious factors and civic subjectivities of political autonomy, economic development and opportunity, and shared historical location in the world.

Needless to say, this modified and perhaps awkward model of the nation-state has within it serious tensions and contradictions — the most important of which are the twin issues of state hegemony and equal rights to economic and social opportunities of other groups as opposed to the privileged position of the cultural core. These issues have, in the past, erupted into ethnic riots, the most severe being the 1969 race riots; they have also resulted in a 20-year policy (1970–90) to positively reinforce the position of Malays in the form of the New Economic Policy, which in turn evoked resentment amongst the non-Malay community. The eventual rise of a narrow pan-Islamism is certainly closely associated with such internal politics alongside Malaysia's location in the changing

stakes of power balances in a post Cold War world. This historical water-
shed of a major transition of global power has seen the conflation of poli-
tical Islam with both radical (counter-West) and conservative moralistic
agendas into a dominant force in Malaysia, which in turn evoked resis-
tance, but this time from both Malay-Muslims and non-Malays alike. As
we have seen, the opposing grounds in this battle appear to fall in line
with state and global ideologies which posit Islamisation and Western
liberal democratisation as binary opposites.

I suggest that the clash between Islam and human rights cannot
be resolved at the level of philosophical arguments. Rather, both sides
need to look to history to recover the moral and civic dimensions of
ethnic interchange as potential for the politics of respect, incorporation
and unity. Only by recovering the convivial pasts can both sides better
reflect on their own complicities with, and enact ethical critique of, the
larger national and global ideologies on religion and human rights.

Revisiting the days of early independence would reveal how con-
viviality was negotiated within the formula of recognising both ethno-
religious difference and shared historical experiences. In the heyday of
independence, when the nation-state was experienced as a source of promise
and emblematic of a hope of a common future, there appeared to be
more openness and a readiness to consider ethno-religious sensitivities of
all communities. This was particularly the case with regard to the concep-
tion of Islam and Malayness as national symbols, especially when com-
pared to what we are witnessing today. It may be appropriate to take the
case of the National Mosque in comparison to the Putra Mosque to make
my point here. The National Mosque, completed in 1965, was the first
showcase of the centrality of a Malay-Islamic identity to the newly-born
nation-state. In contrast to the foreignness and grandiosity of the new
Putra Mosque design, the National Mosque is instead noted for its origi-
nality and sensitive response to Malaysia's plural heritage. Discussions on
the construction of the National Mosque show that it was not conceived
as a mere Islamic building. Rather, the National Mosque was specifically
designed to project the importance of Islam and Malayness within the
context of a multi-ethnic modern nation-state. The first Prime Minister,
Tunku Abdul Rahman, described the National Mosque as a building that
"stands for the unity of all the people of Malaysia" (Lai 2005: 151; Tajud-
din 2005). Inspired by a strong architectural ethic of its time to make
modernist styles responsive to local cultural and climatic particularities,
it was built by blending features of the traditional Malay house with
modern designs in order to respond to the natural landscape. The result

was a modernist building that exudes an inviting spirit of Islam which is not ostentatious or exclusive when compared to the secluded, aloof and grand stature of the current Putra Mosque (Tajuddin 2005). In addition, unlike the heavily Middle-Eastern features of the Putra Mosque, the National Mosque does not have any borrowed elements from outside such as the tiered pyramid roof found in pre-colonial Southeast Asian mosques or the Mogul-inspired onion-shaped dome or minaret from British colonial architecture,[45] or any Middle-Eastern mosque designs (Lai 2005: 155–8). Rather, it has an original architectural style that expresses the centrality of Malay-Islamic identity but uses the trope of the tropical climate to signify commonness despite diversity. If such trans-ethnic relations of conviviality and mutuality had a place in policy conceptions in the past, they should be equally feasible today.

Even as the Malaysian nationalist imaginary has become increasingly entangled with global modes of collective identifications, it is by prioritising *and not* subverting local sensibilities and histories that a vibrant alternative model of modernity could be constructed. As a society forged out of a long history of openness to the movement of people, ideas and trade as part of the maritime world of Southeast Asia, and eventually colonialism and the common struggle for independence, it is more than likely that moral and permeable dimensions of ethno-religious identities and social interchanges would have had developed over time. Scholars have in fact pointed to deeper convivial pasts in the Malay world of Southeast Asia where trans-national bonds of solidarity were forged across various ethno-religious groups in an earlier transient, migratory era of existence of the late nineteenth century. Although narrow Islamic reformism reared its head in the region at the turn of the twentieth century, it was restrained by alternative narratives of religious and cultural differences. This is noted in Joel Kahn's book, *The Other Malays,* where he shows how an ecumenism of *Jawi Watan* — a non-exclusivist identity of the Jawi people as simultaneously Malay-Muslims of insular and peninsular Southeast Asia and members of a world-wide community of Muslim *ummah* — was a dominant force shaping open outlooks on life, religion, and community in the frontier regions of the Malay world, encompassing what is now Malaysia, at least until the early decades of the nineteenth century.

There is hope that such open and convivial conceptions of Islamic and Malay identity may yet gain the momentum needed to dislodge dominant polemics. Amidst the dispute between Islamists and secularists,

other voices were found either recognising the mutuality between Islamic and secularist values or pointing to shared values between Islam and other faiths. These minority views could be found in opinion letters to newspapers, for example. Let me cite two such opinions carried by *Malaysiakini*. The first is a letter entitled "Secular nation can be just as Islamic":

> A secular nation can be more Islamic than a self-proclaimed 'Islamic nation' if it can demonstrate justice and mercy to the disadvantaged (be they immigrants, women, children, old folk, the poor, the physically and mentally challenged, minorities), govern itself in an ethical manner that exposes and punishes corruption and is accountable to its constituents (Letter to Editor by Jess, *Malaysiakini*, 11 May 2006).[46]

The second is entitled, "Islamic state term too nebulous":

> To avert calamity, Malay leaders must move away from such nebulous terms as 'Islamic state' and focus on clearly understood adjectives to describe their aspirations for Malaysia. As an example, the way forward may be to articulate a vision of Malaysia as a compassionate, corruption-free and just society while emphasising that such values are not only Islamic but also intrinsic in all the major faiths of the world (Letter to Editor by Umran Kadir, *Malayskiakini*, 6 May 2006).[47]

There were moments during the dispute over Islamic orthodoxy which saw major political figures such as the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi attempting to pose more nuanced views. In August 2007, the prime minister clarified that "Malaysia is not a secular state and neither is it a theocratic state",[48] but unfortunately the potential of this alternative definition of the Malaysian state has not been realised. However, the public backlash in the last General Elections, where the National Alliance lost control of five state governments, although it held on to a simple majority in the Parliament, suggests hope for a future resolve in the conflict between Islam and human rights. The new political shift may facilitate conditions for working out the thorny questions of Islam and human rights at the level of social practice and negotiation. On 11 April 2008, the then Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced that there would be a new requirement for Muslim converts to declare their religious status to their family members.[49] This announcement was welcomed and supported by the MCA and MIC political parties (representing Chinese and Indian interests) as well as by the MCCBCHS and various other civil activist groups.[50]

Conclusion

In sum, this paper has argued that the politics of mutuality, incorporation and unity in present Malaysia must look to the moral and social-civic dimensions of ethnic interchange rooted in a common past. It is by reflecting on how different ethno-religious groups, who had long lived side by side and shared common historical and material struggles, traversed and transcended difference, and forged respect, mutuality and unity that we could find ways out of the ideological deadlock between Islamic and secularist perspectives on religious freedom. Holding on to either an extreme Islamism that refuses to recognise the rightful place of other ethno-religious viewpoints or to a narrow secularist conception of human rights that refuses to recognise the place of ethno-religious difference in mediating notions of human emancipation will lead nowhere. There are two pertinent questions arising from this scenario that both sides need to consider. Is progressive action (or the pursuit of justice and liberty) only conceivable in secular-civic terms alone? Can there be progressivism within Islam? The resolution to these questions, I believe, lies not in the philosophical dimension but in the historical one. This is so because the issues of rights and freedom can only be resolved at the level of social practice. Recovery of alternatives is not easy for sure. The challenge is to find ways to learn from, and make known, the suppressed narratives of inter-ethnic conviviality and mutuality forged from a long history of cultural diversity, common experience and struggle that made up the modern nation-state. The past is likely to offer more viable and relevant alternatives than the extremes of a dis-embedded narrow Islamism or a myopic conception of human rights in secularist terms alone.

Notes

1. Malaysia's Federal Constitution provides for both civil law (after the British Common Law) and Islamic law (following *Shariah* law of the Shafie School within *Sunni* Islam). *Syariah* laws in Malaysia conventionally regulate family and property matters as well as certain religious offences amongst Muslims in the various states. At present the *syariah* courts provided by the Federal Territories Act 505 is a system of three-tier Islamic courts parallel to the civil courts, that is, the *Syariah* Subordinate Courts, the *Syariah* High Courts and the *Syariah* Appeal Court (Othman 1998: 5).
2. Several earlier cases already highlighted the clash of jurisdictions between the civil and *syariah* courts but did not receive wide media and public attention except amongst activists. In 2003 for instance, there was the case of

Shamala, an Indian-Hindu woman whose husband used the *syariah* court to procure custody of their two children when he converted to Islam (for details, see Ahmad 2005: 16–8).

3. The first Malaysian Mount Everest expedition, where Moorty was part of the team, occurred in 1997 with two members, M. Magendren and N. Mohandas, conquering the peak.

4. He had become paralysed following an accident during military training seven years prior to his death. See "Status agama pendaki Everest dirujuk ke mahkamah hari ini", *Malaysiakini*, 21 Dec. 2005. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/44800> [last accessed 2 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

5. In Malaysia, Islam is a state matter. Islamic enactment provides for the setting up of a Religious Department (*Jabatan Agama*) in each state that is responsible to the day-to-day administration of Islam and the Syariah Courts. Each state also has a Religious Council (*Majlis Agama*) which is headed by a state *Mufti*. The Religious Council is empowered to aid and advice the ruler and to exercise authority over all Islamic matters covered by relevant statute laws and *Hukum Syariah*. In some states the *Majlis Agama* has the authority to issue *fatwas* (legal opinions) on matters pertaining to Islamic law (see Roff 1998: 214–7).

6. "Tussle over religion of deceased Everest hero", *Malaysiakini*, 22 Dec. 2005. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/44889> [last accessed 2 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

7. "Everest Hero Case: High Court has no jurisdiction", *Malaysiakini*, 28 Dec. 2005. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/45050> [last accessed 2 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

8. Fauwaz Abdul Aziz, "Heavy Security at Everest Hero's Burial", *Malaysiakini*, 28 Dec. 2005. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/45075> [last accessed 2 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

9. "Interfaith group to hold candlelight vigil", *Malaysiakini*, 29 Dec. 2005. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/45094> [last accessed 2 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

10. "Teras: Do not touch syariah jurisdiction", *Malaysikini*, 7 Jan. 2006. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/45445> [last accessed 2 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

11. Apparently, the authorities discovered the illegal marriage when the couple enrolled their children into a school and copies of their identity cards were submitted to the Education Department. See "Muslim wife, five children taken away", *Malaysiakini*, 16 Apr. 2007. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/65995> [last accessed 2 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

12. R. Surenthima Kumar, "Couple agrees to live apart, custody of children given to Hindu husband", *The Sun*, 3 May 2007. <http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/legal/general_news/couple_agrees_to_live_apart_custody_of_children_given_to_hindu_hubby.html> [accessed 2 Apr. 2008].

13. R. Surenthima Kumar, "Lina Joy loses appeal to drop 'Islam' from her NRIC", *The Sun*, 31 May 2007. <http://www.thesundaily.com/article.cfm?id=18077> [accessed 6 Apr. 2008].

14. The Malaysian identity card or now *Mykad* (a micro-chip based smart card) is a compulsory official document issued to an individual from age 12. It was first introduced by the British in 1949 as a means to control communist insurgency.

15. The judges who dismissed the appeal were Chief Justice Tun Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim and Datuk Alauddin Sherrif. The judge who dissented was the Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak, Datuk Richard Malanjum. See Shaily Koshy, "Crucial decision in Lina Joy case", *The Star*, 30 May 2007. <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/5/30nation/17874155&sec =nation> [accessed 6 Apr. 2008].

16. R. Surenthima Kumar, "Lina Joy looses appeal to drop 'Islam' from her NRIC", *The Sun*, 31 May 2007. <http://www.thesundaily.com/article.cfm?id= 18077> [accessed 6 Apr. 2008].

17. Lina Joy had to go into hiding after threats to her life. The lawyer Malik Imtiaz Sarwar received a death threat that was also widely circulated via e-mail during the trial. See "Death threats to human rights defender and lawyer, Malik Imtiaz Sarwar" in the homepage of Article 11, Federal Constitution and Protection for All, <http://www.article11.org/Media%20Room/ SUARAM-8.06.htm> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site now discontinued].

18. Soon Li Tsin, "No joy for Lina", *Malaysiakini*, 30 May 2007. <http://www. malaysiakini.com/news/67914> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

19. Fauwaz Abdul Aziz, "Don't court controversy, say Muslim groups", *Malaysiakini*, 30 May 2007. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/67954> [last accessed 12 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

20. Fauwaz Abdul Aziz "10,000 Muslims attend forum on apostasy", *Malaysiakini*, 24 July 2006. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/54345> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

21. Ibid.

22. Andrew Ong and Ng Ling Fong, "Revathi, that's my name forever", *Malaysiakini*, 6 July 2007. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/69600> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

23. During her detention, Revathi's Muslim mother obtained a *syariah* court order granting her custody of Revathi's fifteen-month-old baby.

24. Kelly Ooi and Wong Bor Yang, "Hundreds light a 'candle of hope' for Revathi", *Malaysiakini*, 20 June 2007. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/ 68860> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

25. Ibid.

26. This initiative was launched by the Center for Public Policy Studies and Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute on 2 Aug. 2007 (Bede Hong and

Hon Yi Wen, "Minister breaks rank on Islamic state", *Malaysiakini*, 2 Aug. 2007. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/70670> [last accessed 12 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

27. See Fauwaz Abdul Aziz, "Lawyers set up group to defend Islam", *Malaysiakini*, 13 July 2006. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/53818> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

28. Anil Netto, "Mob rule: Deja vu in Penang", *Malaysiakini,* 16 May 2006. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/opinions/51130> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

29. Claudia Theophilus, "Muslim groups oppose interfaith-commission", *Malaysiakini*, 8 Feb. 2006. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/33510> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers]; Claudia Theophilus, "Muslim groups demand interfaith commission be rejected outright", *Malaysiakini*, 1 Mar. 2005. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/33968> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

30. Claudia Theophilus, "Interfaith Commission: PM's stand will not derail plans", *Malaysiakini*, 28 Feb. 2005. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/33953> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

31. "'Confusion' reigns in interfaith meet ban", *Malaysiakini*, 11 May 2007. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/67093> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

32. Progressive factions often cite the Memorandum by the Alliance between the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) to the Reid Commission (an independent commission tasked to draft the Malaysian Federal Constitution prior to the country's Independence), dated 27 September 1956, which states, "The religion of Malaysia shall be Islam. The observance of this principle shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practising their own religion, and shall not imply the State is not a secular State". For an example, see press statement by Ambiga Sreenevasan, President of Malaysian Bar Council, "Malaysia a secular state", *Malaysian Bar Council*, 18 July 2007. <http://www.malaysianbar.org.my/press_statements/press_statement_malaysia_a_secular_state.html> [accessed 12 Apr. 2008].

33. This was a regional preparatory meeting before the World Conference on Human Rights at Vienna in June the same year.

34. *Hudud* laws are limited to offences that are strictly defined and punished by the Quran or the *Sunna* (prophet's teachings). These include theft and fornication. *Qisas* (Jinayat) are homicide crimes and are punishable by exact retribution (an eye for an eye) or monetary compensation (see An-Naim 1992b: 33).

35. This statement was made at the opening of the Gerakan 30th Delegates' Conference in Kuala Lumpur. See "Islamic state discourse: chops and

churns", *Aliran Online*, <http://www.aliran.com/oldsite/monthly/2002/2d.
html> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site now discontinued]. On 4 Aug. 2001,
the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Tan Sri Abdul Hamid
Othman had earlier declared that Malaysia had already fulfilled the re-
quirements of an Islamic state. A government booklet on "Malaysia Adalah
Sebuah Negara Islam" was then distributed but later withdrawn as the
booklet's cover had uncannily used the image of slashes, lightning, and an
airplane evoking the 11 Sept. 2001 event (see Martinez 2001: 474–503).

36. At the opening of an Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM)'s
conference on "The role of Islamic states in a globalised world", Deputy
Prime Datuk Seri Minister Najib Tun Razak said that "Malaysia has never
been a secular nation as the government has always been driven by the
fundamentals of Islam", *Bernama*, 17 July 2007. <http://www.bernama.com/
bernama/v3/news.php?id=273699> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site only avail-
able to subscribers].

37. Ng Ling Fong and Soon Li Tsin, "Ministry bans Islamic state debate in
media", *Malaysiakini*, 19 July 2007. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/70148>
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38. For instance, in the northern state of Perlis, a law on apostasy for converts
entitled, *Islamiah Qidah* Protection (State of Perlis) Bill 2000 was passed
(Ahmad 2005: 11fn66).

39. The Human Rights Commission or SUHAKAM (*Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi
Malaysia*) was established by the Malaysian Parliament under the Human
Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999, Act 597.

40. Bank Islam, a state backed operations established in July 1983, is Malaysia's
first financial institution to operate on *syariah* compliant principles.

41. "Muslims warned against Deepavali greetings", *Malaysiakini*, 11 Oct. 2006.
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/58029> [last accessed 6 Apr. 2008; site
only available to subscribers].

42. For an elaboration of this controversy, see Mohamad 2002.

43. Heiner Bielefeldt has argued that the concept of "political secularism based
on religious liberty" is not popular in most Muslim societies in the world.
In part he attributes this to an inability amongst Muslims to separate this
political concept from "an ideological form of secularism that aims at banning
religion from public space" (2000: 112).

44. Some would argue that the Islamisation of public life has its roots in the
ideology of Islamic reformism found in Malaya and the larger Malay world
of Southeast Asia in the early twentieth century (see Kahn 2006: 84–106).

45. The onion-shaped dome found in mosques is a legacy of British colonial
architecture (Holod and Khan 1997: 14).

46. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/50942> [last accessed 12 Apr. 2008;
site only available to subscribers].

47. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/50603> [last accessed 12 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

48. Derrick Vinesh, "PM: Malaysia is neither a secular nor theocratic state", *The Star*, 5 Aug. 2007. <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2007/8/5/nation/18508516&sec=nation> [last accessed 12 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

49. "MCA, MIC welcomes notice-to-convert requirement", *Malaysiakini*, 11 Apr. 2008. <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/81217> [last accessed 12 Apr. 2008; site only available to subscribers].

50. Ibid.

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Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

Edited by Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd
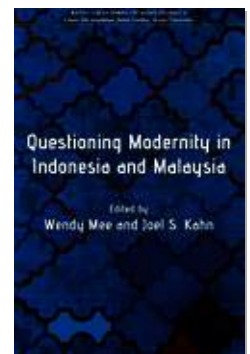
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Ethnicity, Nation-state and Citizenship among Chinese Indonesians

Thung Ju-lan

The current Indonesian state has undergone a period of bloody ethnic and religious conflict since the end of the Suharto regime in 1998 (Wilson 2001). Many commentators have raised doubts over the Indonesian nation-state's ability to accommodate the range of ethnic differences within its border, thus bringing into doubt the optimism of earlier nationalists and the foundational ideology of Indonesia: "unity in diversity". It was perhaps for this reason that Anthony Reid (2005) in the *Jakarta Post*,[1] and with reference to Michael Keating's notion of asymmetrical government for plurinational states, raised the possibility of a state with "more than one nation" as a solution for Indonesia. Yet it is hard to see how this offers a solution to the problems faced by Indonesia's Chinese. Reinstating the privileges of a local *ethnie* — as the basis for a nation within a state — may assist particular local indigenous groups to renegotiate their position within the state, but it will do little for groups within the state seen as "non indigenous". In this sense, the current implementation of decentralisation (or regional autonomy) in Indonesia is likely to even further marginalise Chinese Indonesians.

A close look at earlier nationalist and proto-nationalist writings reveal a tension that continues to haunt the nation-state. The tension became evident in discussions of who should be considered Indonesian in a future Indonesian nation. At the heart of this tension was not ethnic differences *per se* but the form of political identity that should be accorded to cultural/ethnic groups seen as *pribumi* or indigenous, on the one hand, and to non-indigenous peoples, on the other. As I discuss below, this distinction was enforced through a range of politico-legal institutions established

during the colonial era, and continued with some modification into the postcolonial era.

The focus of this chapter is on the political identity of the Chinese in Indonesia. It suggests that the general trend amongst Chinese Indonesians to regard themselves as "cultural Chinese" is the outcome of a particular political logic that dates back to the colonial era, when the Dutch government categorised the Chinese immigrants — and other foreigners, except Europeans — into "Foreign Orientals" with special rights that legally and politically differed from that of the so-called *Inlander*, or indigenous communities.

The distinction between being a "cultural Chinese" as distinct from a "political Chinese" is commonly heard in Indonesia. And this distinction was not in any simple sense imposed on Chinese in Indonesia, certainly policies and legal definitions, and well as political events, have positioned Chinese as political outsiders. For many Chinese in Indonesia, arguing their status as "cultural Chinese" rather than "political Chinese" was, and continues to be, seen as the best way to negotiate the discrimination and the threat of violence. Yet, drawing on insights from the work of Joel Kahn (1995) and Mahmood Mamdani (2001), the following discussion argues that this distinction between "cultural Chinese" and "political Chinese" is itself part of the racialised and ethnicised constitution of political identity in Indonesia. Rather than providing a solution to discrimination and violence, such a distinction only sustains them.

Violence and the Cultural/Political Chinese

Anti-Chinese sentiments have a long and recurrent history in Indonesia. Many times violence against Chinese has worked to reinforce a view of Chinese as political outsiders.[2] After the mass killing of alleged communists in the aftermath of Suharto's rise to power in 1965, many Chinese withdrew from political activities, fearing that they would be further targeted as "foreign outsiders" (Thung 1998; Budiman 2005). During the subsequent three decades of the Suharto era, Chinese-ness was further vilified as "outside the nation" — with the closure of Chinese language media, the ban on Chinese public performances, such as Chinese New Year lion dances, and the adoption of non-Chinese names by many Chinese Indonesians. The more recent tragic events surrounding May 1998 in Jakarta and other parts of Java are evidence that anti-Chinese sentiment continues to be strong. As Jemma Purdey has shown, the violence against the ethnic Chinese continued until early 1999 in a similar

pattern to that before May 1998 in Cilacap, Kebumen, Bagansiapi-api, and Holis, a suburb of Bandung, indicating that anti-Chinese violence was not simply state-led, but rather because "the *massa* possess a set of memories of violence and also anti-Chinese sentiments and antipathies" (Purdey 2005: 34). Despite this, the end of the Suharto era has witnessed an awakening of Chinese pride and the reflowering of many aspects of Chinese culture and language amongst Chinese Indonesians (Fuller 2006). President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) abolished Presidential Decision No. 14 of 1967 with Presidential Decision No. 6 of 2000, entitling the Chinese to practice Chinese customs and religious activities, including the celebration of Chinese festivals in public (Lindsey 2005). Nevertheless, one aspect of Indonesia's political culture remains strong and that is Chinese Indonesians' continuing reluctance to participate in organised politics.

This attitude is particularly pronounced within Chinese organisations that were established after the May 1998 tragedy that led to the fall of New Order regime. Such organisations often insist that they only engage in social and cultural activities, but not political ones. The statutes of their organisations reveal this. *Perhimpunan INTI* (*Indonesia Tionghoa*) or Chinese Indonesian Association, for example, states that it is "a mass organisation, … [but] … not part of, or affiliated with any political party".[3] Similarly, *Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia* (PSMTI, Indonesian Chinese Social Association), in its fourth chapter, sub-chapter five, explicitly affirms that it is "a social organisation … [that] … is not involved in politics, … not affiliated with a political party or with an organisation that is under the auspices of a political party, and will not change into a political party".[4]

In the 2004 Election we could see a growing number of Chinese candidates in the national legislature (DPR or House of Representatives) and Regional Representatives Council (DPD) (Tjhin 2004). Only a few Chinese are really active in politics, for example Alvin Lie of *Partai Amanat Bangsa* (National Mandate Party), who has been in the party since 1999; or able to take a seat in the bureaucracy as a government official, for example Kwik Kian Gie (under Megawati's Presidency) and Mari Pangestu, the present Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy. In 2006 another Chinese was elected as Vice Governor of West Kalimantan for the period of 2008–13. Christiandy Sanjaya or Bong Hon San is the partner of Cornelis MH, a Dayak of Sanggau (Tjiptono, *detikcom* 2007; Suhaeri, *Borneo Tribune* 2007). Nevertheless, up to today the total number of Chinese involved in political parties or working in

government offices is less than 1 per cent of the total Chinese population in Indonesia,[5] which according to Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin and Aris Ananta (2003) is between 1.45 per cent to 2.04 per cent or about 2.9 to 4.2 million out of the total population of Indonesia (205,843,196 people) in 2000.[6] For many Chinese, their lack of political participation is closely related to the feelings of insecurity that have haunted Chinese Indonesians after the 1965 incident[7] and accusations of being supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) (Thung 1998). The misconceptions surrounding the involvement of Chinese communists in the events of 1965 were repeatedly stressed over the three decades of the New Order and this has created a generation of Chinese who themselves believe such historical inaccuracies, and identify themselves as "cultural Chinese" in order to distinguish themselves from those well-known "political Chinese" active before 1965, such as Siauw Giok Tjhan, the chief of BAPERKI (*Badan Permusyarawatan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia*,[8] Indonesian Citizenship Consultative Body) during the 1950s and 1960s (Coppel 1984).[9] This attitude in turn has produced a politically phobic younger generation.

At the same time, the New Order's hostility to the expression of Chinese-ness in cultural forms has also left its mark, with many finding it difficult to identify coherently or consistently as Chinese. So, Chinese-ness has become "something that is very vague" rather than something that binds the Chinese in Indonesia on the basis of shared culture and language, as happened under the leadership of the Tiong Hoa Hwee Kuan (THHK, The Chinese Organisation) from the turn of the twentieth century, which launched intensive re-sinification processes through THHK schools all over Java (see Suryadinata 1997: 3ff for letters written by the founders of the THHK). Chinese-ness for younger Chinese born after 1965 is often interpreted and contextualised, following the growing megapolitan cities like Jakarta and Surabaya, into "global citizen's identity" or "professionalism" (Thung 1998).

It is even possible that the end of the New Order regime has seen the entrenchment of the distinction between cultural and political Chinese-ness, as increasing numbers of Chinese explore their "ethnicity" but continue to eschew political activities. While many Chinese after May 1998 felt the need to campaign against Chinese discrimination and demand the same rights as other Indonesians,

> [t]he dilemma for the Chinese activist in the political arena has been
> that participation in a mainstream political party is unlikely to produce

the desired results, but on the other hand banding together to achieve them can draw accusations against them that they are 'exclusive' and cutting themselves off from the wider society (Coppel 2003: 334).

The Chinese too have started to find their place among a growing number of (local) ethnic and religious movements that fight for the recognition and protection of their civil and political rights. With Law No. 29 of 1999 on the Ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965 and Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, as Lindsey has argued, basically the Chinese have a strong legal basis to resist both discriminatory laws and policies. But, the fact remains that the Chinese have no political confidence or audacity "to assert their rights through the judicial process" (Lindsey 2005: 65). So, the question is whether in the future the Chinese will have the necessary courage to change their political status. This is part of a project of (re)interpreting the meaning of Chinese-ness within the changed socio-political landscape of post-*reformasi* Indonesia. It is within this dual context of inquiry — on the one hand, the continuing conflict between Chinese and indigenous Indonesians, and on the other, this search for cultural roots — that I start my discussion of the need to re-construct the relationship between ethnic groups and the nation-state in the context of Indonesia's plural society.

The Modern Culturalisation of Power

In many analyses of conflict in Indonesia — whether between Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians or amongst Indigenous groups — political and economic arguments have taken precedence over cultural explanations (Jones 2000).[10] The latter are usually dismissed based on their irrational character. But, the fact that the mobilisation and exploitation of the issue of ethnicity and religion has played a very damaging role in provoking violence, should — I think — make us reconsider the importance of applying cultural perspectives in our explanations of the cause of violence. However, what I understand as cultural explanation is not simply an understanding of the cultural differences that exist between two ethnic groups. Instead, I am drawing on Kahn's (1995) important point on the culturalisation of everyday life. As he argues:

> The defining feature of new, postmodern age which refers to the culturalisation of everyday life — the dominance of signs and of particular kinds of signs, those that serve to mark off groups and subgroups of humans one from another (Kahn 1995: ix).[11]

The project of interpreting cultural otherness, or the link between culture and violence, leads us directly to considering the link between difference and power.

Yet, the project of interpreting cultural differences, and hence of cultural alterity, is highly problematic given that the modernist discourse of culture and cultural difference is "so closely implicated in the project of European empire" (Kahn 1995: xi). This asks us — who in Kahn's perspective might be referred to as "the modern intelligentsia, the main producers and consumers of the dominant and subaltern images of culture and differences" (Kahn 1995: xii) — to "step outside the relationships of empire" (Kahn 1995: xi) when considering the issue of cultural difference in the postcolonial and postmodern world. This is of course very difficult as the language we draw on to critique the management and classification of cultural difference — in line with a modern view that sees identity and ethnicity as structuring relations in society — is the same as that used in the dominant discourse of ethnicity and difference that we seek to criticise. As Joel Kahn clearly pointed out,

> And while there is no doubt, as a whole host of postcolonial theorists have hastened to point out, that the discourse of racial hierarchies, of superior and inferior peoples, of civilising mission of the West, has been handed down to us by nineteenth century apologists for colonialism, we also have the nineteenth century to thank for the very language by which we continue to define, and to criticise empire, that is the language of that profound cultural alterity without which empires could not even be seen to have existed. While it may have been 'social Darwinism' that gave us the modern language of dominance and subordination, it was quite clearly a form of expressivism that defined for the imperialist who was to dominate and who to be subordinate. And it was that same language in which the challenge to 'alien' rule and domination has since then had to be phrased. In this the discourses of empire/counter-empire in the nineteenth century spoke the same language of culture, difference and destiny, just as they have in the twentieth (Kahn 1995: 35).

It was such questions that led me to interrogate the common "traditional" approach to the relationship between the Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians. Studies on the Chinese Indonesians were started — and dominated — by Western scholars, such as Donald E. Willmott,[12] Jamie A. Mackie,[13] and Anthony Reid.[14] They are among those westerners who introduced, and later together with Indonesian scholars, strengthened the

image of the Chinese as "trading minority" or "middleman minority". Since then, as far as I am aware, almost all the existing studies on the relationship between the Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians perceive the "problematic" relationship between those two groups as the consequences of firstly, majority and minority relations, and secondly, economic disparity. Placing Chinese Indonesians within that framework is, I think, quite problematic, because as an outside minority group the Chinese are forever "second class citizen", considered to have less power, and culturally inferior and politically marginal. It also tends to rewrite the historical legacy of the Chinese across the archipelago. Denys Lombard's book on *Nusa Jawa Silang Budaya* (1996) shows us how Chinese settlers have become part of Indonesian society for more than a thousand years, with their social and cultural markings found in architecture, language and technology.

If most of the books we read on Chinese Indonesians are "the textual representation by and for westerners of non-western 'cultures'" (Kahn 1995: 2), then even for me as a non-Western researcher the "difference" of "Chinese culture" will be written within the framework of how "other" this "culture" looks like in the eyes of "Western culture". This has meant to date that Chinese Indonesians have largely been represented as the Other to indigenous Indonesians because this is the way Westerners as a whole viewed the Chinese in Southeast Asia. (As mentioned above, the Dutch classified the Chinese early on as "foreign orientals" and contrasted them to indigenous Indonesians, a binary classification that strengthened in the postcolonial period.) We, the non-westerners, have duplicated Western modes of perception, and this underlines the importance of recognising how postcolonial discussions of cultural otherness may inadvertently take the form of "a renewed project of empire" (Kahn 1995: 6).[15]

To some extent I have to admit that I am still writing from the position of the "hegemonised non-Western", accepting the dominant, hegemonic "Western" culture. Even when I try to (re)conceptualise the relationship between Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians from the perspective of a local researcher, I am still indebted to western ideas about ethnicities, identities and nationalities, about culture, diversity, difference and multiculturalism. Even as a non-Western researcher, it is difficult to see how I can step out of the modes of perception and of intellectual production that are now so much part of my own intellectual landscape, and indeed so much part of Indonesia's own cultural and political landscape. One first step in this process however, is to revisit the nature and classification of cultural difference from the time of empire and see how

this may be continuing to structure the production of cultural and political difference in the present.

Chinese, Indigenous and the "Modern" State: Ethnic and Civic Citizenships?

Various studies on Chinese Indonesians after the fall of Suharto's New Order held the government responsible for creating long-established anti-Chinese sentiments and violence among the Indigenous Indonesians through its discriminative policies. While the New Order allowed Chinese businessmen unprecedented opportunities to prosper, Chinese Indonesians occupied "pariah status in cultural and political spheres" (Ariel Heryanto, cited in Coppel 2003: 328) at the same time. Officially, the New Order forced the assimilation of Chinese Indonesians, and in line with this, banned the public use of Chinese language leading to the disintegration of the Chinese press. Chinese Indonesians were pressured to change Chinese names to Indonesian-sounding ones and to restrict the practice of Chinese cultural and religious activities. The New Order's "forced" assimilation abolished what Leo Suryadinata has called the three main pillars of Chinese culture, namely Chinese language schools, Chinese organisations and Chinese language newspapers (Suryadinata 2002).

Few studies have so far looked behind such policies to see why they were formulated in the first place. At one level, the policies of the New Order are consistent with the political elite's conception of Indonesia as a "modern" nation-state[16] at the time of Independence, in which ethnicity was seen as a problem. An independent Republic of Indonesia was a creation of the post-World War II era, but the ideas that inspired its realisation can be traced back several decades earlier. The most important historical marker for the construction of the Indonesian nation was 28 October 1928 when several "indigenous Indonesian" youth organisations (such as Jong Java, Jong Ambon, Jong Sumatranen-Bond and Jong Islamieten Bond) vowed to become one nation with "one country, one people and one language". The event that was later nationally celebrated as the Youth Pledge Day, viewed ethnicity as an obstacle to national unity and modern forms of citizenship. In the post-war period, the ideas of ethnicity as obstacle were also circulated by a nationalist elite which sought to override parochial attachments through patriotism.[17]

Yet in the first half of the twentieth century it was far from clear whether this call to erase ethnicity incorporated Chinese Indonesians.

Certainly before World War II, Chinese nationalists were not at all convinced that they belonged in the same way as indigenous Indonesians (see Suryadinata 1981). After the war, the situation continued to be complicated by the fact that not all Chinese (just as not all indigenous Indonesians) had supported the nationalist cause. In addition, there were differences of opinion as to whether Chinese Indonesians should assimilate — a position endorsed by *peranakan*-associated[18] groups, represented by Tjung Tin Jan and Lauw Chuan Tho — or pursue an integrationalist line — as endorsed by groups such as BAPERKI.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the New Order elite, the Chinese *should* cease being different and, along with indigenous Indonesians, *should* begin to think of themselves as citizens in line with *Pancasila*, the national ideology. (The *Pancasila* covers five basic principles, i.e., belief in the one and only God; unity of Indonesia; just and civilised humanity; democracy led by wise guidance through consultation/representation; and social justice for the whole Indonesian people.) Chinese Indonesians along with other Indonesians were asked to "self-modernise" their ethnic group, and adopt a more modern, nationalist civic identity. As a result, Chinese Indonesians during the New Order government's "forced" assimilation policy did suppress their Chinese-ness, and many did successfully "self-modernised" themselves as "citizen".[19] However, it is also true that despite such forced assimilation, the Chinese never did lose their sense of difference and continued to be perceived as an outside minority group. The loss of cultural and social institutions identifiably Chinese never resulted in weakening the sense that Chinese Indonesians are Other to all other indigenous groups. Perhaps this is why Chinese cultural and social institutions were so heavily targeted for assimilation.

The failure of assimilation has since become clearer. Not only can we see it in the violence directed at Chinese Indonesians in May 1998, but also the speed in which regional autonomy was pursued in the post-New Order period, arguably a political frame in which the Chinese are forever denied an ethnic space within the nation (see Mamdani below). There were even debates on constitutional reform in the People's Consultative Assembly in 2002 over a proposed amendment, which would have further strengthened a provision in the Constitution favouring *pribumi* at the expense of Chinese (see Freedman 2003). Perhaps the ultimate proof is that, apart from some changes in the area of culture and religion, most of the legislation discriminating against Chinese Indonesians remains on the statute books (see Freedman 2003). So in spite of the fact that the

Indonesian Constitution of 1945 stipulates that all citizens are equal in front of the law and that most Chinese are Indonesian citizens, the Chinese are still considered to be "outsiders": their label as being of "Chinese descent" persists on their identification cards, continuing to separate them from those considered "indigenous".

Trying to understand more fully the failure of assimilationist practices to erase differences in the political identities of Chinese Indonesians and other Indonesians has led me to consider two types of political identities discussed by Mahmood Mamdani (1998, 2001): civic and ethnic. In terms of Mamdani's analysis, we could say that Chinese Indonesians possess a civic identity, which was first racially defined during the colonial period, and continued into the postcolonial state. According to Mamdani, citizen's rights during the colonial era in Africa were linked to assumptions of civilisation, which where highly racialised. A similar pattern can be discerned in Indonesia, where racialised categories such as "foreign orientals" (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*) were, in terms of the colonial hierarchy, considered more civilised than indigenous Indonesians (*Inlanders*), and thus accorded higher status. However, in comparison to the European "race" they were less civilised, and thus entitled to less citizen rights than Europeans. According to Mamdani, "subjected races" — the Dutch equivalent of foreign orientals — were subject to both petty privilege and petty discrimination. They were given rights similar to the European, such as citizenship rights that came as part of "the rights of the settler", but there was always a distinction maintained between "the [European] settler" and "subject races". In the Indies, this distinction supported a range of legal discriminations against Chinese, many of which were institutionalised through the zoning and pass systems. What all settlers shared — whether European or "subject races" — according to Mamdani (1998) was:

> Settlers were without ethnic homes. They were, by definition, rootless, foot-loose, not tied to any specific territory, always trekking. They were said to come from somewhere, but from nowhere in particular. Neither did they seem destined for anywhere in particular.

The racialised definition of Chinese Indonesians as well as their political identity as without an "ethnic home" in Indonesia were to have important ramifications on the political identity of the Chinese in the postcolonial state.

At the same time the colonisers introduced another distinction, this time between indigenous ethnic groups and the non-indigenous "races".

Indigenous groups, following Mamdani's observations, were classified in terms of an "ethnic space": "Every ethnic group was … said to have its own separate set of "custom laws", to be enforced by its own separate "native authority", administering its own "home area" (2001: 24).

And this native (indigenous) identity would operate legally whether or not the individual so defined was born or lived in his or her ancestral area. Rather one was defined politically and legally in terms of this ethnicity and thus obliged to "belong" to one's ethnicity and to follow the customs of one's group (Mamdani 1998).

For Mamdani, this set of colonial distinctions resulted in people being given civil and political rights on the basis of different principals. According to his schema, indigenous peoples were given civil and political rights on the basis of their ethnicity, while the non-indigenous subjected races (such as the Chinese in the Indies) were given civil and political rights on the basis of their "race" (and presumptions of racial hierarchies).

The civic citizenship that was once the prerogative of "the settlers" ceased to be exclusive in the postcolonial era when both native and settler were recognised as citizens. But, as Mamdani has indicated, within the new independent state, native identity could still be the basis of an exclusive right — that of ethnic citizenship — which only the native could be recognised as possessing. For Mamdani, this exclusive right also has practical consequences in terms of access to land and struggles for greater representation. (Both of these have been raised by indigenous Indonesian in demands for greater autonomy and control over resources.) As an ethnic citizen, the native or the indigenous person could continue to claim an area of land as his or her "customary" homeland, which the civic citizen could not. "Even if the civic sphere ceased to make a distinction between citizens who were indigenous and those who were not, the ethnic sphere continued to make this distinction" (2001: 31).

In the postcolonial context, Mamdani argues that amended colonial logic not only continued to allocate different political identities on the basis of indigeneity, but led to conflict and violence, as shown in his study (2001) of the conflict in Rwanda between the Hutu and Tutsi. Even if the distinction between the indigenous and the non-indigenous had ceased to be racialised; it continued to be ethnicised. As a consequence: "Every ethnic area made the distinction between those who belonged and those who didn't, between ethnic citizens and ethnic strangers" (1998).

It is within this constitution of citizenship, according to Mamdani, that "ethnic conflict is structurally embedded" (1998). And as he points out, this ethnic conflict is not limited to conflict between those who are

considered indigenous and those considered non-indigenous settlers. The potential for conflict is generated and generalised through a contradiction between economic development and the nature of citizenship, so that conflict can erupt between any group — including so-called indigenous groups — where one group is in the position of the ethnic stranger — that is not at home in their designated customary territory. His explanation is as follows:

> The more commodity production expands, the more labour is set into motion, and the more the proportion of the non-indigenous — of migrant labour and migrant peasants who have the political and civil rights of a civic citizen but not the social and cultural rights of an ethnic citizen — increases, the more ethnic tension is generated (Mamdani 1998).

Besides the sporadic occurrence of anti-Chinese riots throughout the post-colonial era in Indonesia (for example, in 1965, 1974, 1980, and reaching a peak in 1998), the violent conflicts between the Dayak and the Madurese in West and Central Kalimantan in 1999 and 2001 provides a further example of this type of conflict based on the tensions generated by the claims of the "ethnic citizen" against those considered to be "ethnic strangers".

Indonesia and Rwanda Compared

Mamdani's analysis of Rwanda makes the point that the conflict he discerns on the basis of settler and native identities is based in the institutionalisation of such identities — particular through legal and political mechanisms. For that purpose, he first makes a distinction between two types of identities, between the "cultural" and the "political", that is, between those politically enforced and those not. Using the case of the Hutu and Tutsi, his historical explanation shows that at first the distinction between the two was culturally based. For example, the Tutsi's cultural identity was that of migrants and pastoralists, and the Hutu's cultural identity was that of agriculturalists. This changed into a "political identity", when the Tutsi's identity as a "race" and the Hutu's identity as an ethnic group, were written into law by the colonial rulers in the 1920s. As such, for Mamdani, their distinct political identities were "no longer just socially acknowledged, reproduced or negotiated … [T]hey were politically enforced" (1998). As colonised subjects, Mamdani argues,

the Tutsi were "victims in the civic sphere" — "a proto-type settler", while the Hutu were "victims in the ethnic sphere" — "a prototype native".

Mamdani notes the bitter irony in the conflict that erupted between the Tutsi and the Hutu in that both groups were determined to make history but that both groups became the prisoners of history. As Mamdani argues, both groups were determined to make history through their actions, the Hutu who attained power after the 1959 "social revolution" wanted to secure democracy above all:

> The "indigenous" demand for a differentiated citizenship, one that makes a clear distinction between native and settler, the indigenous and the non-indigenous, is usually constituted as a demand of the majority; in other words, it is constituted as a democratic demand (1998).[20]

For the Tutsi, who came to power after the 1994 genocide, they wanted justice above all else. In Mamdani's opinion, the two groups "have turned into prisoners of the same history", where the minority Tutsi fear that democracy is a mask for finishing an unfinished genocide, while the majority Hutu fear that the demand for justice is "a minority ploy to usurp power forever" (1998).

The analysis of the situation of the relationship between the Hutu and the Tutsi provided by Mamdani is similar in many respects to that of the relationship between indigenous Indonesians and Chinese Indonesian, whose political identities have similarly been constructed through colonial and postcolonial legal and political institutions. For example, through the "misinterpretation" of article 26, section 1 of the 1945 Constitution and its explanation,[21] the foreign-ness of the Chinese (which was highlighted by the Dutch's categorisation of the Chinese as "foreign orientals") is reemphasised within independent Indonesia. So, as a result, Chinese Indonesians are always treated as "*non-pribumi*" or not native, and their loyalty continues to be questioned, and this becomes the basis of all discriminative policies issued afterward, including the abovementioned Presidential Decision No. 14/1967 that prohibited Chinese identity and rituals being displayed or performed in public. There are of course differences but there are also grounds for comparing the case of Chinese Indonesians and those of Hutu and Tutsi. It is probably true that Chinese Indonesians demand justice through the abolishment of discriminative policies, but it would be difficult to claim that they fear democracy in the same way the Tutsi did. It would also be a stretch to claim that indigenous Indonesians fear justice the way the Hutu did. If as Mamdani

suggests that the Hutu-Tutsi conflict was a case of "justice is denied", we could possibly say that the conflict between Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians is because of no justice served. The question is justice for whom? There is no simple answer to this question, because as with the Tutsi and the Hutu, the relationship between Chinese and indigenous Indonesians has been constructed and institutionalised over time. Yet as in Rwanda, Chinese and indigenous Indonesians have likewise become "prisoners of history", albeit for entirely a different reason: the Chinese continue to be "victims in the civic sphere" *vis-à-vis* the indigenous Indonesians. In a nation where indigenous Indonesians can appeal to two forms of citizenship, as civic and ethnic citizens, those groups which are restricted to only the civic form, will always risk having this institutionalised difference operate as a form discrimination and exclusion.

For Mamdani a solution to the pattern of conflict and violence accompanying different citizenship claims can only be addressed through institutional reform. At the heart of the problem, for Mamdani, is the politico-legal institutionalisation of categories of difference such as native, settler, indigenous, and non-indigenous. Rather than attempt "to turn settlers into natives" or "to strengthen the regime of individual rights and thereby fortify settlers against encroaching native demands", Mamdani offers a third possibility, namely institutional reform. For Mamdani institutional reform must basically deliver a single citizenship to all, through "an overall metamorphosis" of native/settler distinctions. In this way, all citizens can be "politically reborn" as "equal members of a single political community". This community must be established on the basis of "equal and consenting citizens", and what he called "survivor's justice" or "the practical embodiment of empathy". I think his idea could also be applied to Indonesia in order to transform the relationship between Chinese and indigenous Indonesians.

Chinese Indonesians, Nation-state and Citizenship

Currently, Chinese Indonesians continue to be politically positioned as "a second class citizen" *vis-à-vis* those Indonesians who can claim indigenous status. Yet having said this, one also needs to be aware that (unlike in the above example) so-called indigenous Indonesians are themselves heterogeneous, with each ethnic group seen to differ considerably from the other(s) in terms of culture and identity. Under these circumstances, the position of the Chinese is not so very different from that of each "indigenous" sub-group, where a group may be seen as superior to others, but

at the same time will be considered inferior to another group. As a formally labelled "outsider", the Chinese in particular are precariously placed between the "dominant" state and this highly stratified social structure, so much so that they occupy a position that is neither "here" nor "there". Hence it is no surprise that the Chinese have come to be identified as an "economic animal" but "politically marginal".

Yet whether we are discussing Chinese Indonesians or indigenous Indonesians, what strikes one is the extent to which they are trapped in what Joel Kahn called the modern "imperialist" language of dominance and subordination (Kahn 1995: 35). This can be seen in the way Chinese and indigenous Indonesians continue to structure their mutual relationship in terms of their particular ethnic identity. As Kahn has argued, "[t]he language of empire and counter-empire is, by definition, a language of culture and alterity" (Kahn 1995: 34). This feature is quite obvious among indigenous Indonesians when they emphasise their Java-ness, Sunda-ness, Batak-ness, Minang-ness, Aceh-ness, Papua-ness, etc. This is not to suggest or to presume that "cultural difference lies somehow outside modernity" (Kahn 1995: 20). I agree with him that the "process of naming difference, of thereby constructing alterity within modernity, … [is] … constitutive of the modern world view" (Kahn 1995: 20). Rather it would be more peculiar for us to consider ethnic identities and differences as "somehow *pre*-modern or at least *non*-modern" (Kahn 1995: 23), the way many Indonesian "nationalist" scholars — as mentioned above — tend to treat anything primordial — such as ethnicity — as "not modern"[22] or an obstacle to "modernity". Perhaps it would be more appropriate to refer to "the very appropriation of cultural alterity to modernity" (Kahn 1995: 23) within and among ethnic groups.

The very fact that Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians continue to draw their identity on their particular ethnicity has placed them at odds with the "modern" state, in that they exist inside the state but they are outside it, particularly when they insist on acting as an ethnic group rather than as citizen. What I want to suggest here is that the "false" underlying assumption behind the appropriation of cultural alterity has created a cultural gap within the dynamic mode of the "modern state" exactly because, while local (Indonesian) intellectuals adopt "(western) modernity of citizenship" introduced by and through the state, at the same time they deny the fact that their ethnicity too is part of the "same" modern appropriation. Rather they place their ethnicity as "eastern culture" *vis-à-vis* the modern state and citizenship which are generally seen as the representative of "western culture". The argument that the

issue of "*putra daerah*" or native son is locally rooted while the idea of democracy comes from western countries, are two obvious examples of this perspective.

Chinese Indonesians, although, on the surface seem to suggest a rather different approach to the process of (re)constructing their Chinese-ness within the context of the Indonesian "modern" state. Compared to some indigenous groups, we can see how they are rather "well-adapted" to the so-called "modern" citizenship. However, in their everyday life, as another "ethnic" group, the Chinese are part of the same appropriation process since their lives as Indonesians intermingle with that of other Indonesians. I think, it is within this cultural gap — or what Joel Kahn termed "the profound difference between ruler and ruled" (Kahn 1995: 35) — between ethnic groups and the state that the Chinese could find their similarities with other (indigenous) Indonesians. It is in their relationship with the state that the Chinese cannot escape the fact that they, along with other (indigenous) Indonesians, are subject to the power and policies of the state. It is the postcolonial state which has most clearly inherited "the discourse of racial hierarchies, of superior and inferior peoples, of the civilising mission of the West" (Kahn 1995). For this reason, I believe that cooperation between Chinese Indonesians and other (indigenous) Indonesians in order to improve their social and political status within the Indonesian society is imperative.

As long as the Chinese continue to see themselves as "being *vis-à-vis* indigenous Indonesians", I believe they will always be an "outsider", a "foreign" minority, and will be treated as such. If the Chinese continue to hold on to the image of themselves as "economic animal, but politically marginal", I think they will be seen and treated as such. So, to break the cycle, I think, the Chinese must start to think of themselves as "insider", as part of the Indonesian society, and that they have an equal position with other (indigenous) Indonesians, so they might start working to establish their position, as Indonesian citizen and an integral part of the Indonesian nation. The Chinese and the Indigenous Indonesians should establish what Mamdani above has suggested, namely "a single political community". Within such a framework, together with other (indigenous) Indonesians, the Chinese could work on building the Indonesian nation where all ethnic groups (including the Chinese) have an equal position, rights and obligations, or to use Mamdani's terms "a political community of equal and consenting citizens". In this case, their (the Chinese) "opponent" is not other ethnic (indigenous) groups, but the

state with its racist and discriminative policies. So far, the Chinese have acknowledged these discriminative policies but not the state's racism. Without addressing such racism — and the construction of cultural alterity which is such a feature of the modern state political identity — Chinese Indonesians will continue to frame their complaints in terms of an indigenous majority and Chinese minority without finding any real solution to the underlying problem.

To change such a long established perspective is not an easy and simple task, especially, as explained before, Indonesian academics themselves tend to see the relationship between the Chinese and indigenous Indonesians from a western point of view. Trying to see the Chinese-Indigenous problem from the perspective of an "insider" or "engaged actor" will require a total and fundamental change, particularly within the academic community. As Mamdani (1998) has indicated, "the world of the native and the settler — or of the "outsider" and the "insider" — was not just a political and social world. It was also an intellectual world." The change will involve not only a multiple series of conceptual inquiries but also a methodological search for the most appropriate practical approach toward the issue.

Ethnicity and the Concept of "Modern" State: A Concluding Remark

The relationship between ethnicity and nation-state is not static, but it also follows a particular pattern of knowledge production and reproduction that goes beyond the limits of time and space. If during the colonial period, the colonial state created a racialised narrative of settler-native divide to control ethnicity, so after the establishment of Independence, for the same purpose of control, the "modern" state — under the native's rule — ethnicised it. Nevertheless it still conforms to a modernist discourse of culture, difference and power, or the "modern" language of dominance and subordination. If under the Dutch, we can say that the Chinese were differentiated as "subjected races" in contrast to *Inlanders* as "ethnic subjects", so in the post-Independence era this distinction was reframed into "ethnic strangers" and "ethnic citizens". Thus, the relationship between ethnicity and the nation-state is always an expression of power, namely the "power to exclude" — the power of the state to decide who is in ("insider") and who is out ("outsider").

If the reproduction of what Joel Kahn called "the process of naming differences" or "the discourse of racial hierarchies, of superior and inferior

people, of the civilising mission of the West" persists following the difference between the ruler and the ruled embedded within the concept of "modern" state, so the question is: What should we do to reduce the damaging effect of such powerful knowledge if we could not change or destroy the state? Could Mamdani's suggestion of making a "single political community" solve the Chinese Indonesians' problem? Could it overturn the hegemonic divide between ethnic citizen and ethnic stranger? Might it also help to resolve other sources of ethnic tension within Indonesia, such as in the example of Kalimantan mentioned above? Such divides are deeply embedded in the concept of a "united" Indonesian nation-state, in which the state as a "modernising agency" remains one of the most divisive factors? I have no answer to these questions, except to suggest that we try this alternative in order to address the violence and injustice in Indonesia today.

Notes

1. Anthony Reid, "Aceh reflects new thinking in Asia", *The Jakarta Post*, 24 Aug. 2005.
2. In an earlier episode of violence in the Central Java town of Koedoes in 1918, shocked Indies Chinese interpreted this as evidence that the Dutch were unable to protect the Chinese. This reinforced the growing Chinese nationalism amongst Indies Chinese at the time and the argument, first publicly expressed in the Semarang Conference of 1917, that the Chinese should not be politically involved in the Dutch East Indies as their rightful home and protector was China (Suryadinata 1981: 24).
3. <http://id.inti.or.id/> [accessed 13 Dec. 2011].
4. <http://psmti-pusat.org/id/> [accessed 13 Dec. 2011].
5. There is no statistical data concerning Chinese involvement in political parties or working for the government, so this number is just an estimate.
6. Census 2000 is the first national Census that included ethnicity.
7. The 1965 incident is known as the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI)'s *coup d'etat*, which was started with the killings of seven generals. For details, see Robert Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali* (Clayton, Vic.: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990).
8. BAPERKI was formed in 1954 and was predominantly a Chinese organisation. Although nationalist in identification, arguing that a Chinese could be an Indonesian citizen, it strongly advocated the preservation of Chinese cultural and social institutions.
9. Charles A. Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1984).

10. Charles Coppel (2002) also raised a question about "politics or culture?", but what he means is that the studies on the Indonesian Chinese have been excessively concentrated on the politics rather than on their cultural life, or their broader cultural output. Nevertheless, as he also admitted, "the question presents us with a false dilemma", because "[w]e need them both [since] neither of them, taken in isolation, will give us a satisfying understanding of that complex but fascinating web which is history".

11. Joel S. Kahn talked about three different cultural domains: (1) cultural in its more anthropological sense which refers to systems of signs, meanings and world views of particular groups of human beings; (2) of modern age, that consists of cultural mosaics, diversity, difference; of the threats to indigenous ways of life; of subcultures and multiculturalism; of ethnicities, identities and nationalities. This is the discourse of culture difference that is so closely implicated in the project of European empire; and (3) of new, postmodern age which refers to the culturalisation of everyday life — the dominance of signs and of particular kinds of signs, those that serve to mark off groups and subgroups of humans one from another (1995: ix).

12. Willmott wrote the well-known "classic" book on *Chinese of Semarang: A Changing Minority Community in Indonesia* (1961).

13. One of Mackie's well-known first book is *The Chinese in Indonesia: Five Essays* (1976).

14. One of his famous books, *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe*, was edited together with Daniel Chirot (1997).

15. In Joel Kahn's opinion, "[h]ow otherwise can we account for the fact that postcolonial theorists themselves presume the persistence of imperial thinking into the postcolonial age? And if there were no such continuities in colonial/anti-colonial thought, how is it that postcolonial theory, in spite of its purported rejection of European or western notions of cultural otherness, at the same time brings western theory in by the back door in its reliance on particular variants of contemporary European theory — notably post-structuralism, decontructionism and the like?" (1995: 9–10).

16. The "modern" conception of Indonesian nation-state embedded in the Constitution of 1945 could be identified through various legal words found in each chapter, such as the State of Indonesia shall be a <u>unitary state</u> which has <u>the form of a republic</u> (chapter 1, article 1.1, emphasis added); <u>Sovereignty</u> shall be <u>vested in the people</u> and shall be exercised in full <u>by the laws</u> (chapter 1, article 1.2, emphasis added); Indonesian state will based on law (chapter 1, article 1.3; <u>All citizens have equal status before the law</u> and in government and shall abide by the law and the government without any exception (chapter X, article 27, emphasis added); <u>Freedom of association and assembly, of verbal and written expression</u> and the like, shall be prescribed by law (chapter X, article 28, emphasis added).

17. The idea might be following contemporary economists of development such as Pierson that saw "Indonesian custom (*adat*) as part of an undesirable tradition, a tradition which would only act as an obstacle to the modernisation of colonial society" (Kahn 1995: 84).

18. A *Peranakan* is a locally born Chinese. Often we could find a mixed blood among *Peranakan* as a result of their mixed marriage with indigenous Indonesians.

19. The experience of the Chinese in Malaysia is quite different from that of Chinese Indonesians, because they (Malaysian Chinese) are not expected to suppress their Chinese-ness the way the Chinese Indonesians did. Instead, the Chinese-ness of Malaysian Chinese is being relatively preserved through the racialised discourse of Malay nationalism — Malay ethno-nationalism.

20. Mamdani illustrated this with reference to Habyarimana's backing of the creation of an organisation called Maghrivi in Goma, Ruchuru and Musisi in Kivu Province in the early 1980s. Habyarimana made two demands in return for his material and political support: one, that all Tutsi be defined as non-indigenous, no matter where they lived; and two, that all questions of citizenship be settled *democratically, by majority vote*" (1998).

21. Article 26 section 1 states that "Citizens are native Indonesian persons or persons of other nations who have acquired a legal status as citizens", while its explanation says that "<u>People of other nations, such as those of Dutch, Chinese and Arabic descents</u>, whose domicile is Indonesia, recognize Indonesia as their home country and <u>are loyal to the Republic of Indonesia</u>, may become citizens" (emphasis added). The English translation of Indonesia's 1945 Constitution can be found at <http://www.constitutionnet.org/files/the_1989_constitution_of_indonesia.pdf> [accessed 13 Dec. 2011].

22. Perhaps they, like Cornelius Van Vollenhoven, see Indonesian communities as distinctively "non-western" (rather than "pre-western") (Kahn 1995: 86).

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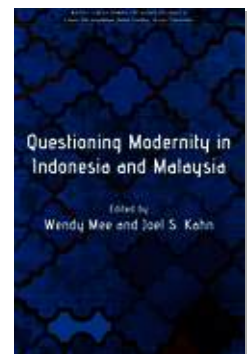
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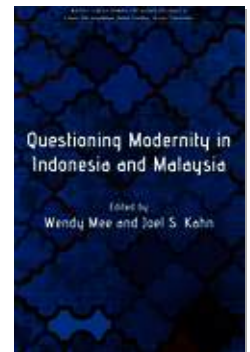
The Youth, Modernity and Morality in Malaysia

Maila Stivens

This chapter explores an unfolding series of cultural contests around the place of "the youth" in modernising Malaysia. Discussing a number of key episodes of social anxiety, it looks at the ways in which "the youth" has become a central site of metaphorical warfare in cultural contests about modernity and the future of the nation. A core issue is the demonising of the young within popular discourses about the "social ills" or "problems" brought by the contemporary social order. The youth have found themselves the focus of a series of complex moral projects promoted by the state, religion, and the media: these projects are both deeply embedded in the local politics of gender, "race", class and religion and simultaneously linked strongly to emerging global conjunctures. Drawing on materials from my research projects in the country,[1] the chapter follows the trajectory of these social anxieties within pronouncements by state functionaries, religious leaders and other public figures, and more widely within the media over the last few decades.

"Social ills" or "problems" have been prominent planks of Malaysian government pronouncements and other national cultural production in recent years, featuring regularly in speeches by ministers and religious functionaries, rallies, television propaganda, popular cultural productions and academia. There has been a common and sustained core to these themes:

> Every year, we are confronted with more social ills, with all sorts of names and titles. The drug addiction menace, which has not been fully tackled, we have loafing culture, *bohsia* [young girls engaging in "easy-pickup" sex, discussed below][2], *bohjan* [young men similarly engaged] and black metal [music] issues to contend with, and now we are faced

with the *mat rempit* ["street racing boy" — illegal motorcycle racers]
issue (Mohd Zan Abu, delegate to the 57th ruling party United Malays
National Organisation [UMNO] General Assembly in 2006, Bernama
2006).

"Drugs, incest, baby abandonment, domestic violence, rape, paedophilia,
gangsterism, divorce, homosexuality … these are but a handful of the
social ills we seem to be suffering from", wrote local journalist Rose
Ismail in 1997 (1997: 1). "Others may fear what the morrow may
bring but I am afraid of what happened yesterday. Old Arab saying.
So, we've got problems. And, if the statistics are correct, the problems
are rather serious. Our youth — some, at least — are ignoring the wrath
of God, killing, raping and bullying others, taking and selling drugs,
prostituting themselves, vandalising property, indulging in 'mindless
Western-inspired activities' and, where possible, lounging around with-
out a care in the world (ibid.)."[3]

The chapter will not explore all these youthful behaviours, which include
criminal and antisocial activities, but will focus on several discourses that
have played starring roles in the cultural politics of youth: the ongoing
concern about idle loafers since the 1990s (*lepak*: to loaf, or loiter); the
boh-sia "syndrome", so termed; "black metal" music for the last decade
or so; and, more recently, illegal biker racing. These anxieties have linked
up with well-documented earlier concerns about the behaviour of young
women electronics factory workers (see Ong 1987).

The chapter sees a particular tension between the drive for "develop-
ment", with its whole-hearted embrace of capitalism, and the widespread
derogation of the young for being "modern". I see the pressures for a
relentless fashioning of youthful selves through consumption as pointing
to the important interplay between consumer capitalist cultures, economy,
polity and religious practice; this interplay simultaneously contains within
it key social fracture lines. I am especially interested in the links between
such processes and the ways in which young people have been subjected
to intense disciplines within developed state and religious moral projects.
Global capitalism has been endorsed by successive governments, with
only muted critique coming from state circles during the last three
decades. But many local commentators from different political vantage
points, including core elements of the state, religion and complex media
assemblages, see the cultural consequences of supposedly western style-
modernity, affluent hyper-consumption and contemporary cultures as
threatening the very social fabric of the nation.

These developments clearly and interestingly parallel those reported for the US, other western countries and neighbouring Asian countries: modern Malaysia, like many other places within the global order, can be seen to be making war on — some of — its young (see Giroux 2000). In Malaysia, as in the West, government, religion, media and academia construct the "youth" as a "problem" and work on devising governing measures to control them. But as in the West, a degree of reflexivity about and resistance to the idea of "moral panics" has also developed within the cultural politics surrounding the youth, with the term appropriated by both popular commentary and critics of the demonisation of the young.

Modernity, Morality and Anxiety

Writing about Malaysian "modernity" is complex; the theorising of modernity — and postmodernity — outside narrow Euro-American-based frameworks has been highly problematic (see Kahn 2001; Stivens 1994, 1998a). One needs to distinguish the local version from the "westernisation" with which it is often conflated both in popular and scholarly discourse and to see such modernity as always embedded in specific social and cultural forms (Kahn 2001).

The modernising of Malaysia has been spectacular, with remarkable rates of growth and low unemployment for much of the recent past. There have been marked improvements in life expectancy, infant mortality and literacy, although income distribution has been more problematic and political freedoms even more so. Crouch (1996) described the country's political order as a "soft-authoritarian" regime. Affirmative action policies since the early 1970s were designed to raise the status of Malays, the numerically-dominant ethnic group within the classification system dividing the population into separate groups of "Malay", "Chinese", "Indian" and "Other" (MCIO).[4] Former Prime Minister Mahathir's Vision 2020 for a fully developed Malaysia by the year 2020 presented Malays in the 1990s with an image of a "new Malay" — the *Melayu baru*. The Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM) established in 1992, was charged with creating an Islamic work ethic and finding a balance between spiritual attainment and material development.[5] The "new Malay" discourse can be read as an effort to supplant forever the memories of the supposedly emasculated, fatalistic and negligent Malay of the colonial "lazy native" discourse (see Syed Hussein Alatas 1977; Malaysia 1992). In the past there had been extensive slippage between images of this "lazy native" and the idealised, subaltern rural dweller of the Malay nationalist

imaginary. A globalised, economic rationalist, often hypermasculine, discourse now envisaged a new, confident class of Malays.

A critical development has been the growing significance of a resurgent global Islam; this has seen a resacralisation of Malaysian modernity (see Hefner 1998), with tensions around the role of religion in the modern Malay world, including the moral projects of "tradition", "family", the West, the youth, and sexualities. A substantial minority of contemporary Malays hope for the alternative modernity of an Islamic state:[6] such supporters of versions of revivalist Islam are well-represented in the new middle classes. The quest for these alternatives is embedded in a post-colonial critique of modernity, which on occasion identifies the West as "toxic" (cf. Iranian concepts of "westoxification"). Indeed, one can argue for seeing Malaysian modernity and a remade modern Islam in various versions as mutually constitutive.[7]

As significant foci of the cultural politics of the modern, Malay youth have found themselves centre-stage in a series of arguments about the ways in which a progressive Islam might fit its adherents for an alternative modernity. Evading the ills of the West, this utopian future would be based on proper parenting, morality and family values to secure the future not only of Muslim youth but all other young people and thus the nation itself (see Stivens 2006 for discussion). I shall suggest that the errant youth — and the responsibility of parents and society for their behaviours — become consummate counterfoils to the muscular Malay Muslim future envisaged by state agents and Muslim religious elites and dissidents alike, serving as central symbols for what might go wrong in the future if due vigilance, control and discipline are not exercised.

Social Anxiety

Does the concept of moral panic, coined in a European if not Eurocentric context of particular state forms and media constellations, work in this distinctive setting? The ground-breaking term "moral panic" was coined by the British sociologist Jock Young (1971) and adopted by Stanley Cohen in 1972 to describe a process in which society "every now and then" appears to be subject to periods in which "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interest" (Cohen 1980 [1972]: 9; see Cohen and Young 1973). The concept soon moved beyond a narrow sociology of deviance to enter other scholarly fields as well as everyday journalistic and other parlance. It was subsequently reformulated and critiqued in a number

of ways, which included a questioning of Cohen's original model of the unfolding of such panics, challenges to the usefulness of the term, and complexifications of the relationships between media and society (see McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Johansson 2000; Thompson 1998; Goode and Yehuda 1994). By 1995, McRobbie and Thornton were arguing that moral panics (in Britain) "have become the way in which daily events are brought to the attention of the public" (1995: 560) but that such panics were harder to constitute than they once were. In contrast, however, Thompson (1998: 2) saw an "increasing rapidity in the succession of moral panics" and "the all-pervasive quality of panics that distinguish the current era". As Ungar suggests, both views may represent different dimensions of such contests (2001). McRobbie and Thornton observe that multiple voices now contribute to the debate during moral panics (1995: 566), with much more complicated and fragmented connections among them (ibid.: 567). Ungar too, seeking to compare and contrast "moral panic" and "risk", argues for seeing the sociological domain carved out by moral panic as most fruitfully understood as the study of the sites and conventions of social anxiety and fear (2001: 271). More recently, a group of authors has revisited the earlier debates, opting for understanding moral panics as volatile episodes within long-term projects of moral regulation (Hier 2002, 2003, 2008; Critcher 2009), or as short-term decivilising processes within long term civilising processes (Rohloff and Wright 2010). These approaches are seen by Rohloff and Wright (2010: 415) as going some way to overcoming the problems of judgmental normativity and temporality that characterise much of the moral panic research. Many of the episodes of social anxiety around the youth, sexuality and other issues like "the family" in its "family values" versions in contemporary Malaysia can indeed be seen as representing power struggles over moral regulation (see Thompson 1998) and moral boundaries (see Johansson 2000: 33). The resacralisation of late modernity has seen the ongoing politicisation of culture taking a profoundly moral turn, as in the US culture wars (see Clarke 2008).

To read these debates from a Malaysian perspective is challenging. The notions of risk and moral panic need to be carefully located in time and space (see Caplan 2002). As I shall argue, some of the "panics" over the last decades have indeed been the clearly elite-staged and managed "state-theatre" events of some of the original cultural studies formulations about the hegemonic role played by panics (Hall *et al.* 1978). Hill, writing of neighbouring Singapore (Hill 2003: 107), has highlighted the role of what he sees as state-constructed moral panics there in "crisis

production" and "crisis amplification": he views the latter as serving as a means of generating public concern to justify policies; they are presented to the populace as necessary to solve perceived problems within a supposedly precarious social order threatened by multi-racialism and political subversion.[8] While somewhat functionalist, such arguments about the workings of sites of social anxiety can apply to Malaysia: both countries can be treated as strongly overlapping cultural zones, not least because of their shared colonial history. The roles of the powerful "soft-authoritarian" Malaysian state (Crouch 1996) and multi-ethnic politics, however, are both distinctive and determining elements in these contests. Some of the episodes to be described clearly constitute fully developed state, media and religious "panics", with the constructions of "folk devils" following some of the forms of the classic debates: they are crucially centred on contests around modernity, moral regulation and the setting of moral boundaries. Nonetheless, it may be more helpful to identify such episodes as "sites of social anxiety" than to pigeonhole them as "moral panics" in the classic sense. As I shall show, such contests can vary in duration and intensity, and are highly specific. They are also on occasion strongly contested, with many new and diverse media sites for such contestations.

Modernising the Youth in Malaysia

Writing about the category "youth" and its politicisation within modernising Malaysia can pose some interesting issues and challenges: first, the category "youth" has been analysed mainly within frameworks developed by scholars working in western contexts. Second, like "childhood", it is fluid and contested. Also, researchers inside and outside the country are enmeshed inevitably in a series of late modern debates about positionalities (see Stivens 1994). These problems are intensified when the object is a group like the youth that is on occasion marginalised, devalued and demonised, especially young people from more socially excluded groups. As elsewhere in the world outside the West, young people in Malaysia predominate demographically. But they have been neglected within many central theoretical discussions about forms of "citizenship", democracy and governance globally (see Kulynych 2001; Stivens n.d.). There is a strong case to be made for bringing the study of childhood and youth more centrally into the analyses of politics, economics and culture in the Southeast Asian region (see Stivens n.d.). Youthful voices themselves are mostly absent from both scholarly work and the growing body of mainstream cultural production surrounding them within Malaysia: this again

parallels the situation elsewhere within the region and globally. Moves for children's rights have not resounded locally in any developed way, in spite of the Malaysian government's Malaysia ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995, its enactment of the Child Act in 2001, and the energetic role of a number of NGOs and organisations like the Malaysian Bar Association.

The category of "the youth" in Malaysia has changed profoundly with the dramatic economic and social transformations of recent decades in the country.[9] Relevant changes include greatly extended periods of education for better-off classes; longer economic dependence on parents; the entry of large numbers of young women into education and modern labour sectors; sharply rising ages at marriage for both sexes (now in the late 20s); and the decline of arranged marriages. It seems clear that we are seeing the ongoing development of a new youth regime stretching from the mid-teens for ten or fifteen years or more. With massively increasing levels of consumption, the young have become prime objects for merchandisers: the more affluent in particular have been energetically involved in the production of their modern and postmodern selves through the consumption of the commodities required by the proliferating local and globalising youth subcultures. Inevitably, they been targeted in critiques of consumption and materialism that are closely tied to anxieties about the future of the nation — as one politician argued in the early 1990s, "we can kiss Vision 2020[10] goodbye if consumption takes hold of Malaysian life" (Malaysia 1992: 184).

Some commentators in the US and elsewhere have foreshadowed the development of the "global teenager" (see discussion in Campbell 2004). Young people from more affluent classes in Malaysia could be seen to be increasingly constituting the self-oriented, pleasure-seeking, consuming and consumerist, reflexive/self-monitoring/self-fashioning modern/postmodern selves that have been alleged to emerge with modernisation in the developed and developing world. There are, however, important issues around the power relations constituting the "choice" central to such subjectivities which are raised by theorisations of reflexive modernisation: these issues both undermine the idea of the global teenager and point to serious issues around gender and power relations. I would argue, first, that Malaysian "youth" can only be fully comprehended in its historical and geographical specificities: young people there are not "global teenagers" even if they partake of and produce aspects of global consumption and cultures. Moreover, writing about what she terms a post-feminist sexual contract for young women in the West, Angela McRobbie with other

feminist writers has provided a powerful gendered challenge to the per-
vasive themes of "choice" and "responsibility" within the work on indi-
vidualisation and "reflexive modernisation" associated with Beck and
Giddens (McRobbie 2004: 261; Beck 2002; Beck *et al.* 1994). McRobbie
suggests instead that neither author mounts a substantial critique of the
power relations within such individualisation processes which work so
effectively for young women in particular at the level of embodiment. She
sees both Beck and Giddens as inattentive to the regulative dimensions
of the popular discourses of personal choice and self-improvement (2004:
261). It is, of course, debatable whether such a post-feminist culture,
or in Rosalind Gill's helpful term "sensibility" (2007), in either its local
or global forms, is identifiable in any straightforward way as such in
Malaysia. Nonetheless, the burgeoning "special interest" women's maga-
zines certainly present young Malaysian women with an imaginary of
highly energetic "smart", "savvy", "sexy" and above all "spirited" young
womanhood. (These terms are all taken from popular local women's maga-
zine descriptions of their readers.[11]) This imaginary echoes strongly the
global structures of meaning often understood as post-feminist, directly
recalling the energy and drive required of the self-fashioning young citizen-
subjects required by the new order discourses — male and female. As I
shall argue, the social anxieties around the youth, however, are strongly
focused on fears that the young will not deliver such new order qualities.

The Youth and "Social Ills"

As noted, "social ills" or "problems" have been prominent planks of elite
and popular cultural productions. Youthful transgressions and rebellions
have joined a series of other issues marking the sites of particular concern
about the effects of new affluence and modernity on the citizenry and
the nation itself. Interestingly, the electronics factory "girls" of the social
anxieties of the 1970s and 1980s still haunt later pronouncements. [These
young women were nicknamed *Minah karan*/"*electric Minah*" — the
"electric" was a deliberate double-entendre (see Ong 1987).] Thus in
1997, Datuk Dr. Syed Othman Alhabshi, the Deputy Director-General of
the Institute of Islamic Understanding (IKIM), noted his concern about
"moral degradation and social ills" (1997: 1); but, pointing to the then
recent outing of corrupt money politics, he noted the "bigger concern
for the overwhelming immorality among the Malay youths", and about
"some factory girls who abandoned their newly born babies, returning

home at early hours of the morning from discos, sleeping on the staircases of the flats when their flatmates did not open the doors for them at such early hours" (Alhabshi 1997: 1). With many others, he saw these problems as "dominant among the Malays" [sic] (meaning presumably, that the problems were most serious among Malays) (ibid.).[12]

Lepak and *Boh-sia*

Young people *lepak* — "loitering" around the shopping mall zones, amusement arcades and other parts of the cities — have featured strongly in Malaysian cultural contests about the youth. The young have been constantly reproached for wasting their time "hanging out" and not applying themselves to the hard work required by the new Malaysian order. I have described at greater length in an earlier publication (2002) the cultural contests surrounding *lepak* and *boh-sia* but the *boh-sia* episodes 1993–95 are worth recounting briefly as a pivotal point in these contests.[13] After TV3 ran a program about the supposed social problem of loafing in 1993, numerous stories in *The Star* and the *New Straits Times* followed: the (English-language) *New Straits Times* ran a story about young girls — *boh-sia*, so-called "easy pickups", some as young as 12 — hanging out and engaging in "indiscriminate socialising and promiscuity" in certain spots in Kuala Lumpur, especially a road behind the Sultan Abdul Samad building (Hisham Harun 1994a: 23). It was reported that by 9 p.m. it was "not unusual to see some 30 to 50 [girls] roaming the street, chatting the night away with bikers and leaving with these boys in the wee hours of the morning. Luxury cars and vans can also be seen cruising around the area" (ibid.). The girls were described as "looking for a good time", "carefree", but some also as "hard" and "bitter" (ibid). Subsequently, the loafers and *boh-sia* found themselves subject to police raids, with 100 people detained for loafing and later, drug tests (Hisham Harun 1994a, 1994b; Rai 1994). Those with no police records as runaways and whose urine tests were negative were discharged into the custody of their parents after a "stern warning" (Hisham Harun 1994a, 1994b; see also Al-Attas 1994; Lewis 2006; Nain and Wang 1999; *New Straits Times* 1994a; Stivens 2002).

This was not the end of the matter, however: Thompson notes that "in October 1994 alone, there were 257 *boh-sia* — related stories in two major Malay language newspapers, more than four articles a day in each paper!" (2002: 71, citing Thompson 1997). Curfews were introduced,

amidst concerns by state agencies and state Islamic Councils about the supposedly increasing number of Muslim girls and youths loafing/loitering. The *boh-sia* "syndrome", mostly located within a generalised trope of "social ills", has continued to be presented as evidence of moral problems for years after these events by politicians and other commentators (see Ho Wah Foon 1997 and quote at the beginning of this chapter.) The many texts from elite quarters about *boh-sia* have harped on the quality of parenting that such young people have received, with supposedly defective supervision and surveillance (see for example *Straits Times* 1994b).

This social anxiety was both highly gendered and ethnicised. In terms of gender, boys were more likely to be admonished for *lepak*, while girls, as *boh-sia*, were thought to be "bad girls" in great moral danger. Young girls have been seen as especially vulnerable, but also as problematically out and about in the new urban spaces, especially the "public" spaces of privatised malls. These tropes were also overtly ethnicised, as well as classed, coming to focus on the involvement of working class Malay youth, rather than young people from the other (essentialistically categorised) ethnic groups and classes. Ethnicity had been fudged in the original stories, with the young women involved being given pseudonyms that masked ethnicity, but the ethnic sub-texts were to recur in the later episodes discussed below, some of which were also predominantly concerned with Malay youth.[14]

Such social anxieties had not gone unchallenged, however, as I have suggested, and there were dissenting voices from the beginning, including members of *Puspanita*, the Association of Public Servants (Stivens 2002; *Straits Times* 1994c). Youthful voices, too, joined the fray, arguing successfully for complicating the understandings of *boh-sia*: thus two female students from Penang pointed out the highly gendered sub-texts in the contests in a letter to the press, arguing that the boys were not condemned or penalised for picking up *boh-sia*, while the girls were labelled as "rosak" ("spoilt", "damaged"), hardcore *boh-sias* (*New Straits Times* 1994b; Abraham 1994).

Music and Anxiety: Black Metal

At the time of the *lepak* and *boh-sia* episodes there had also been extensive concern expressed about the morality of "rock" and other music concerts, although some mainstream commentary was less judgmental (see Al-Attas 1994). Some of the youth involved in religious movements were

as concerned as their elders: the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), for example, called for a ban on concerts by both local and foreign artists, alleging that such performances "would only worsen the problems of loafing, abandoned babies, runaway youths and drug addiction" (*Straits Times* 1994a). Such anxieties have been ongoing, drawing on ideas of the pernicious influence of "western culture" — "*budaya kuning*" ("yellow culture", see Yusof 2010). In 2004, for example, *Harakah*, the official newspaper of the Islamic opposition party, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS), joined others in denouncing the youth, claiming that hundreds — in some accounts thousands — of condoms were found at a Sure Heboh concert organised by TV3 (one of the main television stations) (Rais 2004). This charge was met in turn with accusations in blog land in particular that this figure was not only massively inflated, but showed an unhealthy concern with issues of youthful sexuality. In 2002, a video by the Australian singer Kylie Minogue was banned, allegedly "because the censor decided the film focused too much on the star's bottom" (Kent 2002). Later in that year, the government of the Malaysian state of Kelantan announced a ban on performances by women and by all pop and rock groups. PAS, which controlled the north-eastern state, was reported as saying that the move was intended to "halt moral decay among young people". The state government planned to withhold entertainment licences from all pop and rock groups, and female artists were to be allowed to perform only before all-female audiences (Kent 2002).

The year 2001 saw the eruption of a new, highly developed episode of concern around so-called black metal music.[15] As local musicologist Tan Sooi Beng notes, black metal had emerged in the 1990s as part of an anti-commercial underground scene in the country which included punk, thrash metal and other subgenres of heavy metal such as black/death metal and alternative (Tan 2002: 1; see Walser 1993). The groups performed at non-profit gigs in clubs, pubs, discos and open spaces in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Kuantan, Penang, and Alor Star, "with a strong DIY (Do-It-Yourself)" spirit. They sang in both Malay and English before teenage fans of diverse social backgrounds who rented buses and travelled to different towns to participate in gigs during the weekends (Tan 2002; see also accounts in Yusof 2010 of various contretemps with the authorities, and Thompson 2002; Liew and Fu 2006; LeVine 2009).

As Tan notes, heavy metal had already been identified in Malaysia with violence and aggression, but the 2001 episode of social anxiety

rapidly took on significant proportions: Khattab, for example, reports that from 18 July 2001 until 1 November 2001 there were over 40 continuous stories in the *New Straits Times* on the issue of youth deviance and alleged [black metal] satanic worship. Over 60 stories appeared from 18 July to 14 October in the *Utusan Malaysia* (a Malay language newspaper read mainly by the rural and urban Malay-educated majority, Khattab 2002). Police seized merchandising linked to a black metal group accused of promoting devil worship: three days of raids in the northern state of Perak, for example, netted small quantities of paraphernalia (T-shirts, video compact discs, video tapes, books and posters — see Ananova 2001). Forty students from a secondary school in Puchong (in Petaling Jaya, part of the Klang Valley conurbation west of Kuala Lumpur proper) were identified as followers of a black metal group by black metal tattoos on their bodies and arms (ibid.). In August 2001 Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad called for a special cabinet session to discuss the involvement of youths in undesirable activities, including the black metal cult [sic] (AFP 1 Aug. 2001). It was reported that the government and Muslim clerics feared that black metal had encouraged some young people to dabble in the occult. The state of Negeri Sembilan (south of Kuala Lumpur) announced that it would ban black metal after Islamic authorities had claimed that it had a bad influence on young people (BBC 2001b; CNN.com 2001). State-run radio and television were ordered to play less heavy metal music and began requiring foreign groups to submit videotapes for approval before playing concerts in Malaysia (BBC 2001b). Many foreign artists were also barred from performing in the country, including Megadeath, who were threatened with arrest (Holmgren 2005). Students were first strip searched for signs of black metal paraphernalia like upside-down crucifixes, then detained; some were required to undergo treatment including counseling, rehabilitation and the administration of a herbal medicine (by a private drug company) to "stimulate thinking" (Holmgren 2005, citing BBC 13 Aug. 2001).

In October 2005, again, the anxieties about black metal led to government officials investigating "heavy metal cult" members, who they believed practised animal sacrifices and destroyed religious texts including the Koran (AP 5 Oct. 2005). In January 2006 black metal culture was declared a deviation from Islamic teachings, and liable to penalties under syariah law. The National Fatwa Council ruled that black metal culture was totally against the *syariat* (Islamic principles) and could lead to its followers being *murtad* (apostate). It was alleged that the "black metal

cult" was involved in practices based on those supposedly engaged in by the US band Metallica. After this, however, the director-general of the Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) Datuk Mustafa Abdul Rahman was quoted as saying that it was impossible to get the authorities to ban black metal music even though it deviated from Islamic teachings: the teachings of one religion could not be imposed on those of other faiths and they had to be "sensitive" (*The Star* 2006a). In relation to this, it should be underlined that the upsurge in anxieties again appeared to be aimed mainly at Malay youth. "Black metal adalah masalah remaja Melayu. Yang memijak Quran dan kencing atas Quran dulu pun adalah remaja Melayu" ["Black metal is a problem of the Malay youth. Those who stepped on and urinated on the Quran were similarly Malay youth"] (Kuseman 2006).

The wall-to-wall media coverage in both 2001 and 2005–6 produced considerable reactions, with young people entering cyberspace in numbers to challenge the "old" media accounts (see Randhawa, Centre for Independent Journalism [Malaysia], 2006, for examples from 2005–6). Fans and members of the bands concerned strenuously defended the black metal bands, saying that the rituals were harmless and part of the genre (AFP 2006) and that this coverage was deeply confused about the character of punk, and heavy, death and black metal. Critics highlighted police heavy-handedness, which included a New Year's Eve raid in 2005 on a self-described Hardcore Punk concert at an underground music club Paul's Place (see Tan 2002; Atan 2006; Teik 2006; Yusof 2010). According to these accounts the official reaction to the concert was nothing short of spectacular:

> As you already know: While many of us at our respective New Year's Eve parties were happily waiting to take advantage of our fellow drunk party guests, 380 kids who were attending a supposedly satanic concert at Paul's Place on Old Klang Road were detained by the police. Subsequent reports saw our newspapers scrambling, some more creatively than others, to come out with their own versions of the truth.
>
> According to one paper the next day, this concert was a replacement for a sex party that was supposed to take place in Langkawi. So, in relating two fictionalised events, the press has created quite an enchanted world of its own device. It is a world of frightened imagination and thick superstition, overrun by a population with demons on their minds. Everyone here has the penchant for seeing the devil in each other. I will call it the Black Mental world, so named after the Freudian slip made by one TV station (Teik 2006).

The police allegedly arrived with nine trucks, hauling off the 380, who included nearby stallholders and tourists, to the Brickfields police station. They were detained without charge and tested for drugs. (Only seven were reported to test positive.) Reasons given for the raid included claims that it was a black metal concert, that there were suspicions of drug abuse and sale of alcohol to Muslims, and finally, that the premises lacked a permit for such an event (see Teik 2006; Yusof 2010). Yusof reports that a band member present told him that the police had come across a flyer with the devil's face on it and assumed it was a "black metal" event (2010: 180). The important role of the Malay media in constructing these episodes can be underlined here, including "highly editorialised" and "biased" features on black metal subcultures in *Mastika* a popular Malay tabloid monthly magazine, as well as articles in *The Star* (Yusof 2010: 181).

Scholars like Tan (2002) point to the transgressive character of the local music scene, seeing black metal as responding to and rebelling against certain forms of authority that deny young people the right to express themselves.[16] Local critics of the pronounced social anxiety at the time argued that freedom of expression was at stake: Tan, for example, suggests that the pressures on black metal were linked to larger political developments in the society, coming relatively shortly after the Reformasi movement had arisen around former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim (2002). Lewis notes the context of wider issues including police and financial crime and government posturing about Islam (Lewis 2006: 66). More globally, one can also consider the arguments of Mark LeVine, in his book *Heavy Metal Islam*. Seeing heavy metal, punk, hip-hop, and reggae as the music of protest, which is in many cases considered immoral in the Muslim world, he hazards that this music may also turn out to be the soundtrack of a revolution unfolding across that world (2008, 2009).

Mat Rempit: Minah Rempit

We're Not So Furious: Mat Rempit Anthem

> I wonder if you know,
>
> How to be a Mat Motor,
>
> If you like it, come and try it,
>
> Then you'll realli realli know.
>
> We're not so Furiouuuus.

Rempit-Rempit-Rempit

We're not so Furiouuuus.

Rempit-Rempit-Rempit. (weird laughter)

…

(Hitz.Fm,

<http://www.justsomelyrics.com/1715831/Hitz.FM-We-re-Not-So-Furious—Mat-Rempit-Anthem-Lyrics> [accessed 30 Dec. 2010])

In 2006, as noted, the social anxieties that I have discussed were still being linked to one another in entangled discourses about social problems, but there was a new concern: illegal bike racers/"street racing boys", or *Mat Rempit*. The terms *Mat Rempit* (male) and *Minah Rempit* (female) refer to people who take part in so-called "illegal street racing" involving "underbone" motorcycles (*kapcai*) or scooters. David Lim (2006) has written about the precursor to *Mat Rempit*, *Mat Motor*, the biker. As he notes, *Mat Rempit* is a "wilder variant of Mat Motor, regularly prowling the night streets in pairs, packs or swarms" (2006: 7).

With *Mat Rempit*, however, the cultural politics surrounding the youth was moving firmly into new spaces like film, YouTube and the blogosphere, some distance from the media spaces directly controlled by elites. Both *Mat Motor* and then *Mat Rempit* have featured in full-length feature films, first *KL Menjerit* (2002) on bikers, then *Rempit* in 2006 (directed by Farid Kamil), as well as *Adnan Sempit* (directed by Ahmad Idham Ahmad Nadzri) in 2010, increasing the level of media noise around these phenomena. These films were clearly aimed at young (Malay) male audiences: as Lim notes, the film *Mat Motor* was produced for a primarily lower-income, male, Malay, young adult audience, who like "rough activities like illegal street-racing" (2006: 7). In May 2007, how-ever a new breed of illegal racers was seen to be "menacing the streets with their daredevil stunts — and they were not boys. These minah rempit [young women] do everything their biker boyfriends do, including racing for thrills, money and sex" (*The Star Online* 2007).

A much-watched YouTube video of *rempit* activity, "Mat Rempit Stunt", shows a Malay girl dressed in jeans and t-shirt standing on the back of a motorcycle in rural Kedah while the male rider performs stunts. One version posted in 2006 had been viewed 120,374 times by mid-2008, 552,868 times by October 2010, and 650,332 times by 10 December 2011 (Mat Rempit Stunt 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Tpc8d4ZWVc>). Deputy Internal security minister Datuk Fu Ah Kiow

was not amused by this public celebration of thrill-seeking transgression, which he felt was posted to taunt the police and to incite unrest: the culprits would be traced and action taken against them (Suparmaniam 2007).[17]

But it is also clear that state agents' responses have been far from uniform: the minister for Youth and Sports Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek, for example, took a different view, suggesting various measures to norma-lise motor racing, and arguing that the "Street Gangsters" label given to *Mat Rempit*, youths with a penchant for street racing, "is a bit too much". "He said only a handful of Mat Rempit were involved in crime while the majority were just ordinary youths looking for some fun" (Bernama 23 May 2009). There has been a series of ministry, UMNO youth and UMNO women's branch proposals about ways to try to engage with *rempits*, such as finding places for them to race, rebranding them with a less derogatory name and enlisting them as the "eyes" and "ears" of the Malaysian Police Force.

New Straits Times columnist Zainul Arifin, was also understanding:

> We demonise and alienate them. It is all so easy. Just file them under menace to society. Of course, some deserve to have the book thrown at them, but that still does not address the larger question.
>
> Why do Mat Rempit[s] exist and what do we do with them? Maybe, rather than outright condemnation, all they need is tough love (Zainul Arifin 2006).

Opinions about these efforts to be more inclusive towards *Mat Rempits* in both mainstream media and newer alternative media, including cyber-space, have been highly variable, however, with many accounts alleging violent, or belligerent or criminal behaviour and even church burning by *rempits*:

> For those foreigners who do know what Mat Rempits are, they are basically gangsters who ride around on small cc. motorcycles in con-voys. They have a tendency of being violent and belligerent with abso-lutely no respect for the law. You can liken them to the Hells Angels or small time Yakuza. Except, they are usually small and scrawny....
>
> The government is doing too little to address this menace. The Mat Rempit are dogs, bastards and "anak sundal" [sons of bitches]. They are a menace to society, and if the police doesn't do something soon... Malaysia will find itself with less tourists, scared citizens, and perhaps some citizens who will take the law into their own hands ("Mat Rempits Terrorise & Rule the Streets in PJ, KL and more",

22 April 2009. <http://politika-malaysia.blogspot.com/2009/04/mat-rempits-terrorise-rule-streets-in.html> [last accessed 15 October 2010; site now discontinued].

A blog entry, "Drunken Minah Rempit Show Off" (23 Aug. 2007, originally on mybikerz.com, reposted on <http://www.zimbio.com/Search+engine+optimization/articles/314/Drunken+Minah+Rempit+Show+Off>) sounded off about a YouTube video "Drunken Minah Rempit":

> Watch this video I found in YouTube. Very Very shameful!!! I do not know how can this Minah Rempit dare to show-off her breasts to public and let people record their action. What is so good to be Minah Rempit huh?! Bloody stupid Minah Rempit!
>
> Parent should monitor what their daughter doing at the outside. Better know their friends, background as well before let your daughter hang-out and doing something stupid behind you (mybikerz.com, 2007).[18]

A Singaporean (Malay) blog suggested "canning" [sic] (that is, caning) *rempits*, saying, "What saddens me the most is that this is actually a 100% Malay problems. You don't see youths of other races being soooo stupid to be involved in this type of Cheap thrill" (True Blue S'porean Mat Rocker 2007). (Bikers, including Singaporeans, have reportedly been racing up roads north of Singapore in Johor.)

Conclusion

It is clear that "the youth" in Malaysia has become a significant cultural space for the acting out of contests about modernity and the future of the nation (see Stephens's 1995 discussion of children): young people have found themselves the objects of sustained moral projects promoted by state, religion, and the media and demonised within highly reductionist discourses of "social ills". These projects are both deeply embedded in the local politics of religion, gender, "race", and class, and simultaneously linked strongly to emerging global conjunctures. This complex politicisation of youth has seen each succeeding episode of social anxiety building on the one before, becoming part of a generalised trope. This trope reiterates the linkage of some spectacularised yet very limited and limiting imaginaries — *lepak*/loafing, *boh-sia*, black metal and *Mat/Minah Rempit*. While "*boh-sia*" mainly appears to inhabit the world of soft and less soft porn in cyberspace now, illegal bike racing has a real celebratory, transgressive presence on sites like YouTube, as I have suggested. The earlier

concerns about *boh-sia* have also morphed into a nationwide concern about babies born outside marriage being dumped by young mothers.

The media overall play a complex part in constructing and contesting these imaginaries. There have not been uniform views on youth phenomena even within the conservative mainstream media, as I proposed. Media analysts agree that content is steered by the proxy owners who are closely linked to the political parties of the ruling coalition, with the Malay media drawing the largest audiences (Yeoh 2010).[19] While such government control and monitoring of the media have been draconian, with many outlets simply conveying ministerial concerns, the advent of the internet has also seen numerous blogs, as well as a number of more critical news websites like *Malaysiakini*, *Malaysia Today* and the *Malaysian Insider*. But the latter, too, have suffered political pressure, including a police raid in 2003 on *Malaysiakini* and the detention of the founder of Malaysia Today Raja Petra Kamarudin. Moreover, outlets like newspapers also have their own sectional interests: these include efforts to increase sales and hence advertising revenue with frequent accounts of supposedly salacious happenings among the young, all within the bounds set by the controlling interests. This again has highly gendered dimensions: Malaysia, with many other modern social formations, has seen a steadily growing sexualisation of public cultures. Theorists are highly divided about this development in the West, with analyses varying from feminist arguments about objectification (Attwood 2006) to the arguments of McNair (2002), who associates ongoing sexualisation within the media with a democratisation of desire.

Young people are far from passive agents in all these processes; they and their allies have been "biting back" both in the old media spaces (and their new online versions) available in a tightly-controlled society and in the new cyberspaces so dramatically opening up to them during the period of the unfolding of these successive episodes. Moreover, in a highly reflexive move, the term "moral panic" itself has been appropriated into Malaysian cultural politics. Thus a 2006 article entitled "Malaysian parents and leaders do not need to press the moral panic button yet" reported that the Malaysia Youth Index (MYI) 2006 survey showed that most youths "were not involved in unhealthy activities like drug abuse, gambling, liquor, loitering, illegal racing, premarital sex or vandalism": Prof Dr Samsudin A. Rahim told a news conference, "Often, negative issues relating to youths are given wide publicity to the extent that these create a moral panic in society about the lifestyle of the young that is considered

not in line with the aspirations of society and the country" (*The Malaysian* 2006; see also *The Star* 2006b). These findings were backed up by Lee *et al.*'s extensive empirical survey of young people in the Malaysian state of Negeri Sembilan 2006; see also *New Straits Times* 1994c).

The social anxieties about the youth clearly echo concerns about the possibilities of youthful transgression, resistance and rebellion in a period of reform politics and concern about wider issues of corporate crime and corruption within the society. *Reformasi* (the democratising reformation movement) under the leadership of former deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim rose, fell, and rose again with the 2008 elections, which upset the ruling two-thirds coalition majority. As I showed, local writers directly link reaction to transgressive music, for example, to state-level political developments. The tropes of errant youth appear to be embedded in highly anxious, dystopic visions of the contemporary order that belie some of the government rhetoric about the economic benefits of Vision 2020 and "Malaysia boleh!" — "Malaysia can do it!". Such critique surfaced among the middle-class Malay informants whom I interviewed in the 1990s in Kuala Lumpur and Penang, for example. These critiques may well have more specific origins as well: until the 1997 Asian economic crises, the present government, like a number in the region, adopted a highly triumphalist tone, but the crisis seriously undercut that confidence. I suggested at the beginning of the chapter that there is a particular tension between the drive for "development", with its whole-hearted embrace of capitalism, and the widespread derogation of many young people — especially Malays — for being "too modern", regardless of their actual activities. The concerns about the rise of the teenager and the growing importance of youthful consumption within the very shopping centres so derided by the critics highlight the profound national ambivalence about growing affluence and modernity itself. The anxieties about young people clearly relate closely to questions of consumption, authority, sexualities and the critiques of modernity itself, including those emanating from state and/or more conservative religious circles, as well as some of the more "progressive" sources: it is noteworthy that the latter do not necessarily critique the idea of "social problems". Young people "loafing" and "loitering" under the gaze of security guards in the highly regulated spaces of the glossy, air-conditioned shopping centres have few other places to go: it is not surprising, perhaps, that their hanging out should become a literal site of social anxiety and a leitmotif of unfolding contests about the modernising order. The important obverse of all this,

however, is the less well-off youth, especially Malays, whose sense of so-cial exclusion may well lead to their involvement in activities like *rempit* racing. Of course, black metal fans, too, loiter in shopping centres, con-suming, if on a more modest scale. Such inactivity, however, is counter to the new order, which as I proposed, argues for highly energetic, if not hyperactive, new, young, modern Malay and Malaysian citizen-subjects.

The politicisation of the cultural category the "youth" is also clearly entangled in a more general and diffuse manner with a number of im-portant social fracture lines. The workings of the social inclusions and exclusions of age discrimination, gender, ethnicity and class within these cultural contests are all highly significant. In terms of class relations, the original *lepak* and *boh-sia* episodes suggested a small degree of class mixing, including young people of all classes "hanging out", but also pointed to men in luxury cars on the prowl allegedly taking advantage of the young women. Most commentators see these phenomena as being closely linked to working class Malay youth, however. The later black metal, and more so the *Mat Rempit* discourses, were clearly class and ethnic specific, as I reported, involving mainly working-class Malays. It is arguable that the demonisation of the young in all these episodes is indeed a version of the classic folk-devils, picking on groups that are already to some extent socially excluded from the brave new world of the remade Malaysia.

As noted, the sites of social anxiety are also profoundly gendered. Young boys in particular were reproached for *lepak*. But while young women and girls also "loitered" and "loafed", and similarly failed to be the required industrious new consumer-citizen-subjects, the warnings about the perils of modernity for young women have been of a quite different order: they face grave moral danger from unruly femininities and sexualities. They are to be controlled, corralled or at the very least counseled into greater compliance and docility. Commentary on black metal mostly assumes that the fan base is mainly male, like the bands. But there has been at least one "grrrl" fanzine from Malaysia in cyber-space, challenging this view (Zobl 2001). Similarly, the *Mat Rempit* epi-sodes have concentrated on transgressive masculinities, although as we saw, there is again an important female presence. The representations of black metal also segued into fears of mutinous sexualities attending young people's music outings more generally, but were much more focused on dangerous masculinities.

While ethnicity was deliberately fudged in the case of the *boh-sias*, attention was much more overtly concentrated on Malays in the case of *rempits*. Not least of the complexities involved is the highly problematic,

essentialising ethnic classifications of the government and wider society. While ethnically-segmented youth cultures appear differentiated from each other from the outside, they may well be far less differentiated in practice, with reportedly increasing inter-ethnic sociabilities in urban contexts at least. In 2006, however, there were some unfortunate "ethnic" incidents at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) widely disseminated on YouTube which, along with recent controversies around religious conversion and apostasy, have threatened to re-embed ethnic divisions.[20]

Religion and the associated ethno-nationalisms form further significant social fracture lines within the country, which link to the global in significant ways. The developed moral projects of state and more conservative Muslim and Christian forces overlap strongly in their emphases on "family values", "Asian family values", and, for Muslims, versions of "Islamic values" (see Stivens 2002, 2006). A series of lavish government-backed and funded campaigns has included exhortations to build happy families for a happy nation through family values; large-scale initiatives to "improve parenting", including workshops for civil servants; and pre-marriage courses for couples run both by state agencies and religious organisations (compulsory for Muslims) (see Stivens 2007). The significant involvement of local Christians in these projects as well is noteworthy (see Stivens 2006). Elsewhere, I have pointed to the ways that state and media discourses in the country are constructing models of family life that are couched in the strongly managerial, bureaucratic language hailing from the powerful "neoliberal" discourses coursing through the world. Family life is presented as a site of renewed moral endeavour to produce ideal citizen-subjects: advice is wielded about how, for example, to manage one's marriage like a business, and marital disagreements like a business meeting (Stivens 2007). In many cases, as I showed, religious authorities too have called for counseling to deal with problems, a technocratic, psychologising and medicalising fix to the "problems" supposedly posed by wayward youth. Such representations of young people and their faulty parents provide clear lessons for Malays in particular about the dangers of not conforming to the envisaged muscular Malay Muslim future. This alternative modernity is only to be secured by ongoing and persistent vigilance, surveillance and discipline.

The global in its many dimensions is clearly highly significant here. Malaysian versions of family values, for example, are also patently part of larger global structures of meaning, from which they draw further power: Malaysian state agencies have forged some highly significant global alliances with conservative religious forces, including the Christian right

of US fundamentalisms and the Vatican, in order to promote "family values" and further "strengthen" families: this happened for example at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (Stivens 2006, 2007). Family/Islamic values discourse shares a global family values discourse about "modern" — and more so "postmodern" — society being toxic to families/children and young people. But such local moral projects, as I have been emphasising, are nonetheless highly specific phenomena. Similarly, one must understand the local, indigenised forms of global phenomena like black metal, for example, as highly particular cultural forms, even while contemporary Malaysian teenagers and young people clearly operate in some global spaces, not least in cyberspace, for example linking to music nodes in Scandinavia and elsewhere.

While the local youthful cultures of hedonism, fun and energetic performances of new masculinities and femininities are arguably central to the cultural logics of emerging affluent capitalist orders, in particular ever-elaborating consumption, that centrality is nonetheless complex. As I have argued, expanding consumption is critical in producing new subjectivities, identities and structures of feeling in general — and among the young in particular — within Asian modernity/modernities, but these are to be understood as highly specific local forms. [21] There are, however, contradictory links between, on the one hand, the social disciplining imposed by the state and religious moral projects, to produce the hoped-for new, responsible, self-fashioning young citizen-subjects required by the new order discourses — male and female — and on the other, the relentless fashioning of selves by young people through their massive engagement in the new consumption ordained by the enthusiastic embrace of capitalist development. Loafers, easy pickup-girls, black metal fans and bikers simply do not make the grade in either imaginary.

Transgressive youthful unruliness renders such wayward youth potent symbolic sites of anxiety, subject to both discursive discipline and very real punishment. Malaysian patterns are simultaneously both highly local and solidly part of wider patterns of attempted containment of the youth across the world (see Giroux 2000). As will be clear, however, young people in the country are far from passive agents in these processes: they have flouted authority in a range of transgressive actions, as suggested; and they and their allies have been "biting back" both in the old, controlled media spaces (and their new online versions) and the new cyberspaces. I would emphasise here the ways in which such youthful agency in its many forms must be understood as constitutive of modern/global orders, part of the making of such orders, and not simply as an *effect* of such orders.

Notes

1. This chapter draws in part on some material explored elsewhere in two earlier publications (Stivens 1998c, 2002). I am very grateful to the Australian Research Council for funding for a series of projects, including *Modernity and the Malay Middle Class: Family, Work and Class in the Emerging Middle Class in Malaysia* (1990–93); *Gender and Southeast Asian Modernities: Public and Private Revisited* (1995–96); *Re-inventing the "Asian Family": "Asian Values" Globalisation and Cultural Contest in Southeast Asia* (2000–02); and *Imagining the Asian Child: Towards an Anthropology of New Asian Childhoods* (2006–07). The Malaysian research has involved extensive historical and sociological research into the growth of the Malay middle classes, a two-month period of residence on a Seremban middle class housing estate, a number of trips gathering materials in Malaysia, Singapore and the UK, and extended interviews with a hundred households in Seremban Kuala Lumpur and Penang. This research built on my earlier rural-based research in Negeri Sembilan, reported in Stivens (1996).

2. *Boh-sia* (also *bohsia*) is a Hokkien word which means "no sound". Later, a new term entered the discourse, *boh-jan* (*bohjan*), to refer to teenage boys engaged in the same activities: *boh-jan* incorporates *boh* with the first syllable of the Malay word *jantan* or male.

3. Such discourses are part of a wider set of circulating meanings regionally and globally. See, for example, Rydstrøm (2006) for a Vietnamese discussion.

4. Malays, who are mostly Muslim, are classified in the Census with various indigenous groups as *bumiputera* (literally sons-of-the-soil); they comprise 53 per cent of the total population (Malaysia 2001). Bumiputera comprise overall 65 per cent portion of the population (Malaysia 2001).

5. See Vatikiotis (1993) *inter alia* for an account of Prime Minister Mahathir's role in this.

6. About a quarter of my "new Malay middle class" study households, for example, supported versions of revivalism. See Stivens (1998b).

7. See Nagata (1984, 1994, 2001), Norani Othman (1994) for discussions of these developments. Malaysia is not an Islamic state, but Islam is the official religion of the country and the constitution assumes all Malays are Muslim (Nagata 1994: 69). Mahathir did in fact claim in 2001 that Malaysia was an Islamic state. See Al-Azmeh for discussion of Muslim modernities (1993). See also Stivens (2003).

8. Others, like Lewis (2006), suggest Singapore had little need to pursue moral panics through the media, as the authoritarian control by the ruling PAP party was so effective, while Liew and Fu (2006) suggest that the Singapore state has become increasingly reluctant to determine explicitly, and to enforce, otherwise contentious standards of public morality or aesthetics.

9. For an account of Malaysian development, especially Malaysia Incorporated, see Malaysia (1992: 51); Crouch (1996); Kahn (1996); Khoo Boo Teik (1994).

10. Vision 2020 was former Prime Minister Mahathir's plan for Malaysia to reach fully industrialised status by the year 2020 (see Malaysia 1992).

11. Singapore/Malaya had their own rich and complex histories of women's movements, but those movements were also always highly ambivalent about the self-actualising dimensions of western feminism, notably the perceived messages about sexual freedom/autonomy.

12. He did, however, go on to say: "I personally am worried if we only identify a certain group such as the Malay youths as our target group and ignore other immoral and unethical practices committed by other groups" (1997).

13. Since writing my 2002 piece, I encountered the account of the *boh-sia* episodes by Nain and Wang (1999).

14. See Lee *et al.* (2006) for an empirical study documenting the actual low levels of (premarital) sexual activity among Malay students, contra all the media noise about the young. See also *New Straits Times* (1994c) for a report on an empiricist, attempted documentation of actual rates of "loafing".

15. In the mid-1990s black metal as a version of "extreme metal" music was originally popularised through the Norwegian scene, involving bands such as Burzum and Emperor (Harris 2000). Harris suggests that Scandinavian black metal bands constructed powerful myths of nationhood from ideas of pagan, Viking, anti-Christian ancestry that often crossed into overt racism (2000: 20). See Baulch (2007).

16. On the development of Malaysian popular culture, see Bennett (1999, 2002); Besley (2003); Huq (2006); Springhall (1998). See also Zawawi Ibrahim (1995) and Kong (2006) *inter alia* on Singapore. See also Weintraub on Islam and popular culture in Indonesia and Malaysia (2011), Lent (1995) and Kim (2008).

17. At the time of writing, many copies had been removed from YouTube as unsuitable, suggesting that cyberspace is far from immune from social anxiety and censorship.

18. There were numerous comments on the *New Straits Times* article (Suparmaniam 2007), and on the mybikerz.com site website, with sizeable repostings, including <http://www.monsterblog.com.my/2007/03/15/clash-over-mat-rempit-videos> [last accessed 20 October 2007]. None are now available.

19. The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad (NSTP) has been widely viewed as a mouthpiece of its long-time proxy owner, the ruling United Malays National Organisation. It is now mainly owned by Media Prima Berhad, a media conglomerate again allegedly linked to UMNO (Yeoh 2010: 6). See Yeoh (2010) and Yusof (2010) for analyses of Malaysian media ownership and the effects of this ownership.

20. The March 2008 election, with the success of cross-ethnic opposition coalitions, greatly raised the hopes of those looking for a lessening of ethnic tensions, but subsequently a series of high-profile issues around religious conversions and apostasy have greatly increased these tensions.
21. See Oehlers (2002), Lewis (2006) and Wee (1999) for accounts of youth in neighbouring countries.

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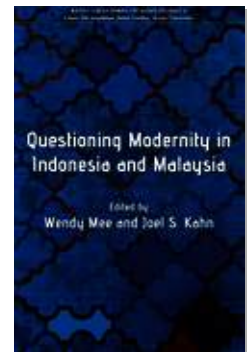
Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

Edited by Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

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The Relevance and Limits of the Model of Small Commodity Production: Rethinking Malay Rubber Smallholders

Oh Myung-Seok

Debates on the definition of "peasant" have become notoriously tiresome (Silverman 1983: 7). There seems to be no possibility of reaching a final agreement on the definition among scholars. It is hard to avoid the feeling that conceptual confusion becomes worse as the debates go on. As we try to define peasant more clearly and narrowly, more peasants in the real world slip out of the boundary of the definition. On the other hand, as we try to define peasant more broadly, the category of peasant loses much of its analytical utility to explain diversities and differences among real peasants. This contradictory situation is not peculiar to the concept of peasant, but common with the concepts of "culture", "middle class", "primitive mentality" and so on.

Despite this difficulty, I will first try a conceptual examination of the category of peasant, focusing on the model of small or petty commodity production. This examination is closely related to the issue of modernity for a process of commoditisation has often been regarded as a crucial dimension in the dualistic model of "the modern" versus "the traditional". My critique targets this dualistic model, which I argue is present in the bipolar opposition between the model of small commodity production and the discourse of "peasantism". Instead, I will stress the need to recognize the intermingling or entanglement, not just coexistence, of commodity exchange and gift exchange to explain the nature of contemporary peasant economy. As an empirical example, my own work on Malay rubber smallholders (Oh 1993), which was theoretically based on the model of small commodity production, will be rethought through this new perspective.

Commoditisation of the Peasant Economy

Subsistence-oriented production was commonly indicated as one of the characteristic features of a peasant economy in earlier anthropological literature (Redfield 1960; Firth 1946; Wolf 1955). This inferred that peasants' aim was subsistence, not reinvestment or profit, even if they sold part or the whole of their products to the market. These writers certainly recognized the existence of commodity production among peasants, but failed to fully understand the implications of the commoditisation process on peasant economic organisation.

In his early works on Sumatran Minangkabau peasants and Southeast Asian peasants in general, Kahn proposed the model of small commodity production as an analytical tool to explain peasant economic organisation (Kahn 1980, 1982). Rather than identifying small commodity production with peasant economy, he suggested small commodity production was a particular form of peasant economy. The emphasis on commodity production implicated by this model led researchers to consider the involvement of peasant economic activities with market mechanisms. More specifically, Kahn's concern was to show the structural relations between small commodity producers and national or world capitalist market systems, and to investigate the effects of the structural and historical relations on peasant economic organisation. This approach differed from the classical or neo-classical economic theory in that it was based on a Marxist problematic, that is, the historical process of capitalist penetration into the peasant economy, the reproduction of small commodity production articulated with the world capitalist system, and the prospects for capitalistic differentiation of the peasantry. In what follows I examine the relevance and limits of this model of small commodity production from the perspective of the commoditisation process in general.

The commoditisation process refers to the expansion of commodity exchange in the spheres of objects and labour, and the homogenisation of exchange value from qualitative value into quantitative price as expressed in terms of money. The commoditisation of the peasant economy suggests that not only agricultural products but also land, labour and other agricultural inputs (tools, seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and herbicides etc.) are sold and purchased as commodities. The theory of commoditisation implies that the logic of commodity exchange affects peasant economic organisation ever more extensively and deeply. One conceptual problem that emerges here is how to distinguish a fully-commoditised peasant economy as an economic category from that of a capitalist economy.

It is a well-known fact that peasants, at various historical times and across diverse regions of the world, sell at least part of their produce as commodities. The sale of agricultural products was the element of commoditisation of the peasant economy first noticed by researchers. The proportion between production for self consumption and production for the market has been often used as an index of the degree of commercialisation of the peasant economy. Kahn's works on Sumatran Minangkabau blacksmithing villages and Negeri Sembilan rubber-growing villages in Malaysia present the cases of small commodity production where rice cultivation for self-consumption and commodity production of iron tools and rubber co-existed (Kahn 1980, 1981). My own research in a Johor village in Malaysia shows the case where smallholders were entirely engaged in the production of cash crops of rubber and palm oil (Oh 1993).

Apart from the commoditisation of products, the model of small commodity production pays great attention to the commoditisation of agricultural inputs (Kahn 1982). This is a more critical point directly relevant to peasant economic organisation. Increasing dependence on the market for the supply of agricultural tools and production materials has been an important recent change in peasant production worldwide. This phenomenon clearly indicates that peasant economic activities have become more deeply involved with the capitalist market system. The Green Revolution in rice cultivation with widespread use of HYV seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides and machinery is the notable example of that trend (Wong 1987: 4).

The commoditisation of land is one of the crucial points where the peasant model of earlier anthropological literature and the small commodity production model significantly depart from each other's positions. The peasant model regards man's attachment to land "by ties of tradition and sentiment" as a critical element of the definition of peasants (Redfield 1960: 19). Land is not just a means of production in a utilitarian sense, but a material base for a peasant way of life. Borrowing Weiner's term, land is a kind of "inalienable wealth" at least in its partial meaning (Weiner 1985: 210). In traditional peasant villages, land is often the communal property of kin groups or village communities and, at the same time, a material symbol expressing group identity. The close link between land and group identity imparts an attribute of inalienability to land, making it less liable to commoditisation.

Modern private property law has not only broken up traditional communal land, but it has also disentangled land from its nexus with group identity. It has provided individual landowners with the rights to

dispose of or alienate land according to their will. Private property law constiutes a legal device for facilitating the commoditisation of land. The model of small commodity production accepts the introduction of private property law and the formation of a land market as structural conditions for the emergence and development of small commodity production. Though the model recognizes the slow process of, and cultural resistance to, the commoditisation of land, it no longer perceives "sentimental attachment to land" as a constituent feature of "peasantness".

Considering the fact that modern private property law and the land market have become a reality for most peasant societies worldwide today, the small commodity production model seems to provide a more feasible approach to the land issue. But there remains a blind spot which the model is less able to explain. Land inheritance among family members, sometimes including kin beyond the nuclear family, reveals the practice of gift exchange, effectively restricting the application of a commodity exchange of land. Land, despite being largely viewed as a commodity in peasant villages in Malaysia today, loses its commodity status at the critical point of its intergenerational exchange. Inheritance of agricultural land is not just the provision of a means of production, but implies a continuity of parental occupation and residence in a specific locality for those family members who remain in the village. The perception of land as fully commoditised limits our explanation of this phenomenon.

The small commodity production model also finds its limitations in the application of the commoditisation process to the sphere of labour. The model accepts that the commoditisation of agricultural labour, in other words, the employment of agricultural wage labour, has been at most partially developed and that family labour has remained a dominant form of labour supply despite the deepening involvement of the peasant economy within the capitalist market system. Family labour organisation is in fact a determining factor by which small commodity production is distinguished from capitalist production. The ambiguous term, "small", in small commodity production actually indicates the scale of economy run mainly by family labour.[1]

The model fully recognises that peasant family labour is not at all isolated from the national or international labour market, but it insists that farm hands are mostly recruited through domestic labour. In this aspect, the small commodity production model bears close similarity with Chayanov's family labour farm model (Chayanov 1925). The two models also hold a common opinion that the development of the capitalist

market system will not necessarily bring about capitalist differentiation of the peasantry. While the small commodity production model shares the view with Marxist theory that the commoditisation process is an historical motor of economic transformation, it recognises the obstruction of commoditisation of labour at the level of farm organisation. It is the main point on which Kahn regards small commodity production as a particular form of peasant economy.

But can the dominance of family labour as farm hands be a decisive criterion for "peasantness"? Has not the small commodity production model defined its difference from capitalist production too narrowly? An examination of "peasantness" from the perspective of a gift economy will enable me to address such questions.

Gift Exchange and the Peasant Economy

The dualism of natural economy versus market economy is not only too simple but it is unrealistic. Ethnographic researchers on primitive or tribal economy have proven that their economic life is far from "natural" in the sense of the self-sufficiency of producers, but rather it develops into complicated and sophisticated gift exchange of products among kin groups, neighbourhoods, friends, and neighbouring communities. There is no reason to believe that peasant village economy lacks this kind of gift exchange, even though its economy has become increasingly dependent on the market. A closer look at the exchange networks of peasants reveals the usefulness of the concept of gift exchange to understand the nature of those exchange networks. This is certainly not a new proposal. Anthropologists associated with the substantivist school of economic theory, like Polanyi (1957), Dalton (1968) and Bohannan (1967), made the contrast between gift exchange and market exchange their primary theoretical concern when they investigated peasant economies. My proposal for analyzing the relation between gift exchange and commodity exchange to understand the nature of contemporary peasant economy is basically a continuation of the substantivist perspective, though I stress intermingling or entanglement rather than coexistence as a characteristic feature of that relation.

It is nonsense to try to explain a peasant economy only from the logic of a gift economy when contemporary peasant societies, whether in western or non-western nations, are partially or wholly engaged in commodity production. But the assumption that a peasant economy is

completely commoditised is also misleading. To properly understand how the commoditisation process has proceeded and has been obstructed at the same time, it is necessary to consider the logic of gift exchange apart from "the subsistence ethics of peasants" (Scott 1976).

Formulating rather schematically, gift exchange is an exchange of objects and services between "reciprocally dependent" persons for promoting social and emotional bonds while commodity exchange is an exchange of objects and services between "reciprocally independent" persons, often between strangers, for utility and material interests (Gregory 1982: 42). In his pioneering work on gift exchange, Mauss (1950: 3–5) emphasised that the oppositional social principles of reciprocity and antagonism are expressed in *total prestation*, which seems to me a more fruitful approach to understand the logic of gift exchange than that of Gregory's schematic model.

Ethnographies of peasant villages in various regions in the world are full of accounts describing gift exchange between families, kin, neighbours, friends, and patron-client type of hierarchical relations. The common theme of these ethnographies is that those social relations, whether harmonious or conflicting, have personal, emotional and moral characteristics distinct from contractual relations closely linked with market exchange. These personal, emotional, moral relations are expressed, maintained, and contested through continuous gift exchange among peasants. Reciprocal labour exchange in agricultural and non-agricultural activities, feasts, festivals, and rituals are the notable occasions for gift exchange between both equals and non-equals.

Gift exchange cannot be immune from market penetration into peasant economy. It is, however, premature to assume that commodity exchange has replaced it wholly. There seem to be extremely diverse results of interactions between gift exchange and commodity exchange, some practices of gift exchange simply giving away, some adjusting to, and some resisting the commoditisation process. These complex interactions, which I term intermingling or entanglement, make the dualistic model of gift exchange versus commodity exchange too simplistic to explain what has really happened in a peasant economy increasingly dependent on the market. The extent and nature of the intermingling of gift exchange and commodity exchange is a question that only empirical researchers can answer in specific historical and local contexts. From this perspective, I would rather locate the "peasantness" in a broad, grey zone between two axes of gift exchange and commodity exchange.

The Peasant Community

Redfield (1960) defined peasant community as an intermediate type between primitive community and city. He distinguished peasant community from primitive community on the grounds that the peasant community is not an isolated and self-contained one unlike the primitive isolate. Further, he distinguished peasant community from city on the grounds that peasant community has a *Gemeinschaft* type of social relations and ethics as distinct from urban *Gesellschaft*. He thus used double criteria in this classification, of "isolated" versus "related" in the comparison between primitive community and peasant community, and of "communal" versus "contractual" in the comparison between peasant community and city.

What roles does the peasant community have in the small commodity production model, when the model assumes the production and reproduction of small commodity producers as mainly determined by their relations with the market? Imagine a village predominantly composed of small commodity producers. Villagers may live a life independent of one another in economic terms, as each of them possesses their own land, recruits farm hands from their own family labour, and relies on the market for the supply of agricultural inputs and the sale of their products. Without economic interdependence among villagers, the village may look like an urban residential area rather than a community. This image is certainly an exaggerated one that is hardly realised in real peasant societies. The logic of the small commodity production model, however, implies the global historical trend towards disintegration and disappearance of traditional peasant communities. It does not seem to be coincidental that Kahn's descriptions of Minangkabau villages in Sumatra and Negeri Sembilan in the 1970s draw an image of individualistic villages composed of strongly independent small commodity producers (Kahn 1980, 1981).

But, it is misleading to perceive small commodity producers as "potatoes in a sack". The weakening or absence of economic interdependence among individual households in a village should affect, but does not necessarily negate personal, emotional, and moral relations among villagers. Rather I assume that the locality of a peasant village has certain definitive implications for social relations among the villagers. Most peasant villages in the world have spatial boundaries, village names, shared but contested memories of history, and administrative organisations. More importantly, villagers, though not all of them, keep intergenerational and kin relations, and share early experiences in their life in a specific locality. These facts provide conditions for the formation of village identity and

the continuity of personal relations among villagers. Cultivation of land, if accepted as a part of the definition of peasant (Wolf 1955), provides a techno-environmental condition for making locality a constituent element of peasant community. The fact that some members of individual families continue to reside in a village and cultivate their inherited land indicates the meaning of land as both a space of living and as a means of economic occupation for peasants. The inter-generational successions of land for both residence and cultivation impart a specific locality on peasant community.

Markets are surely a powerful force that contributes to overcoming parochial locality by moving commodities, persons and ideas beyond local boundaries. The small commodity production model informs us of the central importance of market forces in expanding exchange networks crossing local and national boundaries. In a similar fashion, globalisation theory points out the global flow of commodities, persons, capital, technology and ideas. It questions the relevance of the anthropological concept of culture, which has conventionally presumed the close link between a culture and a specific space, and suggests the concept of "deterritorialised culture" to explain global modern culture in the contemporary world (Appadurai 1996: 53–4). Despite these phenomena, I would argue that we need to recognise community-type social relations and locality as a characteristic feature of peasant society. Intensification of market exchange and globalisation should change the nature of community, but I do not believe that it will necessarily dissolve peasant communities. Recent anthropological research on globalisation has also reported the phenomena of a revitalisation of local culture and a localisation of globality as a response to globalisation processes (Featherstone 1995: 92–7).

I do not intend to assume the isolation and autonomy of a village by an emphasis of community as a characteristic feature of peasant society. The image of an isolated and autonomous village is not applicable to modern peasant societies at all. Neither do I perceive the social relations of a peasant community simply to be communal, harmonious, and reciprocal. There is no reason not to believe that conflict, competition, and self-interest are always present in the social relations of a peasant community. As Mauss (1950) identified the double-edged nature of gift exchange, that is, self-interest and disinterest, reciprocity and animosity, I would posit the dual dimension of social relations for the concept of peasant community. Concepts of the "moral peasant" (Scott 1976) and the "rational but selfish peasant" (Popkin 1979) respectively emphasize one dimension of social relations in a peasant community. The analytical

utility of the concept of peasant community lies in the fact that social relations in a peasant village contain personal, emotional and moral aspects that cannot be explained by market mechanisms, contractual relations, and utilitarian interests. My proposal that the intermingling of commodity exchange and gift exchange should be considered in the study of peasant economy is closely linked to the recognition of a peasant village as a community perceived differently from the strict *Gemeinschaft* model.

"Peasantism", Cultural Otherness and Historicity

The discussion thus far on the relevance and limits of the small commodity production model mainly deals with conceptual issues for the construction of the concept of peasant as a generic category. A generic category is a part of a classificatory system that aims at making comparisons possible on the universal criteria. But, any classificatory system is not free from a particular mode of thinking and its historical context. The category of peasant was an ideological construct of a particular historical period in Europe, and the anthropological model of non-western peasants inherited this conceptual legacy. The concept of peasant developed by the German Historical School and Russian Populist in the nineteenth century, which Kahn called "peasantism", was a representation of peasant alterity as a kind of criticism against the European modernity at the time (Kahn 1990). The idea behind the construction of peasant alterity was to contrast historical (or national) specificity with the universal history of the Enlightenment, and posit anti-capitalistic, anti-market tradition of moral values against capitalistic modernity of utilitarian rationality. Peasant culture was imagined to form the root of a national (or ethnic) spirit. *Gemeinschaft*-type social relations, social cohesion, social harmony, self-sufficiency (autarchy), moral and spiritual values, and domestic economy were the contents of the category of peasant in this European peasantism. Peasantism became interchangeable with traditionalism.

It is worth noting that the European peasantism assumed European peasants to be cultural Others to modern classes or modern social groups emerging as a result of industrialisation and capitalistic development in Europe at the time. In comparison, anthropologists in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century found cultural Others to modern Europeans in the non-European tribal societies. They conceptualized this cultural Otherness as "primitivism" as exemplified in the debates on primitive mentality by Tylor, Frazer, Mauss and Levy-Bruhl. Then, the "discovery"

of peasants in anthropology since the 1930s signalled the recognition of another cultural Other as distinct from the primitive tribes of the isolated and self-contained community (Redfield 1960: 10–4). In this new construction of peasant as cultural Other, the divide between the Europeans and the non-Europeans firmly established in earlier primitivism debates lost its relevance, to some extent, because anthropologists soon realized that non-European peasants had much in common with European peasants in the past and present. However, anthropologists' efforts to define peasant as a generic category or a human type was basically to locate them in contrast to modern capitalistic society as the nineteenth century European peasantism did. It is thus not coincidental that the European peasantism permeated, if partially, with Redfield's concept of "the Little Community as a whole".

In its perception of the cultural Otherness of the peasant, the small commodity production model has a clearly different position from that of the European peasantism and classical peasant model of anthropology. The former makes small commodity producers look more like a modern class of petty-bourgeois. Seen from the perspective of commoditisation as a crucial constituent element of modernity, small commodity producers cannot be cultural Others distinct from modern social groups. But, if the capitalistic relation of production is regarded as a truly modern economic form and, at the same time, capitalists and labourers as truly modern classes, small commodity producers based on family labour remain distinct from capitalistic modernity.

To overcome the limitations of the small commodity production model, I propose that we need to pay more attentions to the cultural meaning of "inalienability" contained in land, the intermingling of gift exchange and commodity exchange, and the localised social relations of a peasant community despite the on-going process of commoditisation of the peasant economy. This proposal selectively adopts what the European peasantism and the anthropological model of traditional peasants regarded as the uniqueness of peasantry. In this formulation, peasant as a social category is featured as a hybrid one, which cannot be well captured by the dualistic model of modernity versus tradition. Considering that there does not exist a social group that perfectly fits the ideal type of either modernity or tradition, the boundary between the peasant and other social classes or social groups becomes blurred, and it is difficult to clearly perceive what constitutes peasant alterity. We now face the limitation of the analytical usefulness of a generic category of peasant to explain peasant

societies in reality, for there are wide divergences in the way market relations and localized social relations of peasant community articulate, and commodity exchange and gift exchange intermingle.

Just at this point of deadlock, historical research on specific peasant societies becomes necessary. The generic category of peasant is only useful in the sense that it provides a certain theoretical direction for historical research on specific peasant societies; it draws the attention of researchers towards the way in which commoditisation and community relations constrain, and are constrained by, each other. In this regard, I will now turn to my own work on Malay rubber smallholders to concretely examine the relevance and limits of the small commodity production model, and evaluate my alternative approach proposed above.

Peasant Model and Small Commodity Production Model on Malay Peasants

I conducted fieldwork in a Malay village located in the Batu Pahat district in Johor, Malaysia, in 1989–90 for my PhD dissertation (Oh 1993).[2] The small commodity production model I adopted in the dissertation seemed to be a relevant analytical tool to explain the economy of rubber smallholders in the village, who were entirely engaged in the production of cash crops and were quite distinct from "traditional" rice-growing Malay peasants in the northern states of Malaysia, like Kedah or Kelantan. In retrospect, I was too much concerned with the commoditisation process, while paying insufficient attention to the working of social mechanisms, contradictory to or complementary with commoditisation process.

There have been competing views on the nature of Malay peasantry. One is the peasant model that emphasises communal social relations in "traditional" Malay villages: the Malay *kampung* (village) is "a kind of republic that was internally homogenous with communitarian relationships among its members, self-sufficient and complete unto it" (Kahn 2006: 14). This image of the Malay *kampung* was a modern construct, invented and shared by both British colonial officials and Malay nationalists in the early twentieth century (Kahn 2006: 9). The former created this representation for the sake of their paternalistic concern for British Malaya's indigenous people, as exemplified in the introduction of the Malay Reservation Act. The latter sought the cultural essence of Malayness from traditional *kampung* life, to be distinguished from immigrant "races" at this period (Kahn 2006: 10–1). European peasantism of the nineteenth century

was transplanted into the new colonial space of British Malaya through complex interactions between colonialism and nationalism. The image of a traditional Malay village has been partially reproduced not only in academic research on Malay peasants (Djamour 1965: 19–22; Kuchiba *et al.* 1979; Fujimoto 1983; Banks 1983; Carsten 1997), but also in Malay popular culture, for example, in Ramlee's films (Kahn 2001: 103).

Criticism against this image or representation was raised by Marxist-oriented scholars in the 1970s to 1980s. They argued that Malay peasants had experienced fundamental transformation caused by the penetration of the world capitalist system into the peasant economy, whether in the process of capitalist differentiation of peasants or in the process of reconstitution of peasants into small commodity producers (Jomo 1988: 119–22; Muhammad Ikmal Said 1985; Zawawi Ibrahim 1982; Wong 1987; Kahn 1981). In my dissertation, I defined Malay rubber small-holders as belonging to a category of small commodity producer, and explained its historical formation in relation to the colonial economy.

Parit Yob, a village included in my research, is located on the western coast of Johor state. It was built on uninhabited swampland by mainly Javanese immigrants in the early twentieth century, when the kingdom of Johor became incorporated into British Malaya and the rubber boom was at its climax. The villagers have concentrated on cultivating a few commercial crops, rubber and areca nut in the early period, and more recently rubber and palm oil, while almost neglecting subsistence crop production, including rice cultivation. The livelihood of the villagers has been heavily dependent on commercial crop production, as cash income earned by the sale of cash crops has been spent on the purchase of necessities from the market for their livelihood. The image of Parit Yob was apparently far from that of a self-sufficient, traditional Malay *kampung*. The link with the market was not so much a factor causing social and economic changes in the village as a material condition for the village formation itself.

It is a capitalistic world market rather than a domestic market that the villagers have had a link with, and have been dependent on. At least until the Second World War, the demand for rubber was mainly incurred by the automobile industry in the USA and the supply of rubber was dominated by plantations in British Malaya, the Dutch Indies and French Indochina. The British colonial government in Malaya provided land, labour (Indian labourers) and infrastructure for British-owned rubber plantations, and suppressed the growth of Malay rubber smallholders

through the introduction of the Stevenson Restriction Scheme in the 1920s and the International Rubber Regulation Agreement in the 1930s. These measures were implemented to regulate the wide fluctuation of rubber prices in the world market, but heavily discriminated against the interest of rubber smallholders in favour of rubber plantations. Despite these governmental interventions, Malay rubber smallholders succeeded in growing significantly at this particular historical conjuncture between the capitalistic world market and the colonial power.

Bauer (1948) criticized the official statistics of the colonial government on the Malayan rubber industry, which set 100 acres as the threshold between estate holding and smallholding, because this definition of smallholding was far from the reality of smallholding in British Malaya. He reported from his own observations that most Malay rubber smallholders owned three or four acres that were tapped by family labour (Bauer 1948: 9). Of 80 households in Parit Yob in 1990, 31 per cent owned less than 3 acres, 42.5 per cent between 3 and 10 acres, 17.5 per cent between 10 and 20 acres, and 9 per cent over 20 acres. Most rubber-growing households, except for a few rich landowners, operated an average sized holding of between 4 and 7 acres, including the cultivator's own land and rented land (Oh 1993: 199). Bauer's observation in the 1940s that a small sized holding and a family labour farm was the characteristic of Malay rubber smallholders is still relevant to the case of Parit Yob in 1990. I concluded that Malay rubber smallholders were "small commodity producers who were formally subsumed by capital" (Zawawi 1982: 73), as they maintained the production organisation of a family labour farm while the conditions of their production and reproduction were regulated and controlled by the world rubber market.

In retrospect, there are apparent limits to the small commodity production model in explaining the "lived experience" of rubber smallholders in the village. I will focus on land issues below, though there are certainly other social, economic, and cultural spheres relevant to make the discussion more comprehensive. The nature of peasant land has been a critical issue on which the small commodity production model and the peasant model have competing views; the former perceives land as a commodity with exchange value and the latter perceives land as an object with "identity value", which cannot be easily alienated from the personhood of its owner. I will try an alternative approach to this issue, partly helped by Appadurai's (1986) discussion on commodities. Appadurai argues that it is futile to search for "magic distinction between commodities and other

sort of thing" and we had better focus on "a situation that can charac-
terize many different kinds of thing, at different points in their [commo-
dities'] social lives" (Appadurai 1986: 13). Taking up this point, I
examine commodity and gift contexts in which land becomes "different
kinds of thing at different points in its social lives" and I point out how
land transactions involve the intermingling of commodity exchange and
gift exchange.

Commodity Context of Land

An examination of the Land Register of Batu Pahat Land Office with
regard to land owned by the villagers of Parit Yob reveals an interesting
fact that land sales occurred most frequently during the 1920s and 1930s.[3]
Considering that the first settlers of the village began to clear swampy
jungle from the beginning of the twentieth century and that cleared land
was recorded in the Land Register from the 1920s, it can be assumed that
the early period of village formation was when the commoditisation of
land was at its most brisk. According to Hj. Kaliwon, a first generation
from Javanese migrants in the village, the first title holders recorded in
the Land Register were not necessarily people who cleared the land them-
selves, but who bought the land cleared by others and applied for land
titles in the Land Office. If these sales of land without titles, thus not
recorded in the Land Register, were rather frequent as he suggested, the
extent of commoditisation of land in the early period of village formation
was greater than the records of the Land Register imply.

    The land dispute between Hj. Kasbullah and Hj. Omar, both Java-
nese migrants, in the early 1930s reveals some aspects of a commodity
context of land at the period (Oh 1993: 129–33). They seemed to be
close friends, travelling together to Mecca in 1928. But Hj. Kasbullah
claimed in 1932 that Hj. Omar's application for land titles of certain
lots was illegal. According to Hj. Kasbullah, he bought 19 acres of 5
lots, for which Hj. Omar sought land titles, from someone who cleared
the land, and he employed Hj. Omar and paid wages for cultivating and
looking after the lands, because Hj. Omar had sold all of his land (about
12 acres) to raise money to go to Mecca. In contrast, Hj. Omar argued
that the disputed lands had long been abandoned by Hj. Kasbullah who
moved to another village, and he said he got permission from the village
headman to occupy the lands, and brought the lands into cultivation by
his own efforts. The main point of his argument is that Hj. Kasbullah
had lost his land rights due to his long abandonment of the lands, and

he was the rightful owner because he brought the lands into cultivation with the permission of the village headman.

Initially, the Batu Pahat Land Office issued land titles to Hj. Omar, but, confusingly, it was Hj. Kasbullah who paid the land registration fees to the Land Office. The total fees for the land titles of 19 acres were $481, including the land premium ($10 per acre), survey fees ($1.5 per acre), and annual rent ($2 per acre) for 6 years including rent arrears. The sum of $481 was a great financial burden, as the monthly income of a rubber smallholder operating 4 acres of their own or that of a rubber plantation labourer was less than $10 in the early 1930s (Bauer 1948: 61; Department of Labour 1933: 14–6). The Collector of Land Revenue decided that the lands should be equally divided between the two. After that decision, Hj. Kasbullah sold his lots to a Chinese shopkeeper who had lent him $350 for the land registration fees, while Hj. Omar also sold his lots to a Chinese shopkeeper to whom he was indebted for credit purchases of daily necessities.

This land dispute case shows that the British colonial government, Javanese immigrants and Chinese traders interacted as major agents in the commodity context of land in this period. After incorporating Johor kingdom into British Malaya in 1914, the most urgent task for the colonial government in Johor was to implement a new land law based on the principle of modern private property. The concept of land tenure expressed in this law was to give individual owners "the right of perpetual occupancy, with the power of alienation" (Lim Teck Ghee 1976: 14). The land title was only ensured by its entry into the government land register, for which applicants should pay land registration fees and the boundaries of land should be surveyed and demarcated by land officers. Private proprietary rights, quantitatively measured land lots, cash payment of land registration fees and annual rents were institutional devices for the commoditisation of land.

Old village residents describe issuance of land titles as "the purchase of land from the government", as they had to pay substantial land registration fees. Those land developers who could not pay these fees on their own were forced to sell the land or borrow money from Chinese traders or Indian moneylenders (*chetties*). Despite the financial burden of obtaining land titles, such a "land rush" by peasants ensued in the 1920s and 1930s that the Batu Pahat Land Office, on a few occasions, closed the Land Application Book because of the increase of arrears of land survey work. The causes of the land rush were a large influx of immigrants from the Indonesian Archipelago and "the rubber boom" in the early

twentieth century. Attracted by the high price of rubber, the immigrants opened up new land mainly for rubber cultivation. Land titles were necessary to obtain "rubber coupons" from the government for selling their rubber on the market under the Stevenson Restriction Scheme in the 1920s and the International Rubber Regulation Agreement in the 1930s. There was a close connection between the land market and the rubber economy as land prices reflected fluctuations in rubber prices on the world market. Land was an economic asset that could be exchanged for cash through sale or mortgage.

As for the commodity context of land, we also need to consider the living conditions and social relations of the immigrants in the village. Most of the villagers migrated from different parts of Java, either individually or as part of a family unit, and at different times. They were, therefore, strangers to each other. Land was seldom cleared by communal work, nor owned collectively. If commodity exchange is a mode of transaction between mutually independent persons or strangers (Gregory 1982: 42), the "reciprocal independence" of early immigrants to the village provided a social context for commercial transactions of land between them. Relatively better-off immigrants employed new immigrants without means of subsistence to clear the jungle or cultivate their land. In some cases, the former brought their relatives from Java and employed them as debt-labourers for a few years in return for covering their travel costs. In other cases, they married their daughters to their young immigrant employees. These were tactics whereby kin relations were converted into commercial relations and vice versa.

The Gift Context of Land

I have so far focused on the commodity context of land in relation to colonial land law, the rubber economy and social relations among the early immigrants in the village. However, land transactions have not only occurred in a mode of commodity exchange, even though land maintains its "commodity candidacy" (Appadurai 1986: 13). Land inheritance has also been an important means of transfer of land ownership and usufruct, which I consider as a form of gift exchange between parents and their children, relatives, spouses, and also between the living and the dead. Examination of the means of access to land by the current residents of Parit Yob shows that 43.3 per cent of the total land has been obtained by inheritance, including land transfer of legal ownership or usufruct only, while 38.1 per cent procured by land purchase (Oh 1993: 169–70).

The transfer of usufruct, which I include in land inheritance, happens when a spouse or children of the deceased continue to occupy and cultivate the land of the deceased without entering into the legal procedure of land distribution among the inheritors. The land belonging to this category comprises 19.5 per cent of the total land at the time of my research.

Land inheritance reveals both voluntary and obligatory aspects of gift exchange (Mauss 1950: 1), of which the latter has been well defined in norms and laws. Traditional inheritance norms and laws of the Malays, whether based on *shariah* (Islamic law) or *adat* (customary law), constitute a part of the gift context of land.[4] Beyond the legal aspects of the gift context of land, we need to closely look at the mechanism of partition and reproduction of the family farm, which is dependent on both the market and the inheritance of family property.

Malay parents feel it is their obligation to help their married children form their own households while the children feel obliged to support their aged parents. These notions of family obligation are reflected in the practice of inheritance in different ways, depending on the conditions of individual households, e.g. the size of land holdings, the number of family members and the developmental cycle of family composition.

Not a few relatively rich parents have transferred part of their land to their unmarried or married children while still alive without going through the procedures of Islamic inheritance law. However, actual land distribution of this type is usually limited to a few of their old sons and daughters because the parents need to keep the amount of their land-holding sufficient to maintain an adequate farm size for themselves. Land that has not been distributed before the death of parents will go through official channels of Islamic distribution of deceased property. Among the current village residents, there are a number of households of the second generation of Javanese immigrants whose kin relations are very close, such as siblings or siblings-in-law. Most of them are the children of relatively rich parents who inherited a portion of land from their parents when the latter were still alive, and who settled in the village after their marriage. That social networks of bilateral kin and affinity relations were gradually formed in a village composed of migrant "strangers", is closely related to the practice of inheritance patterns among the relatively rich households.

It is difficult for family farms at a subsistence level to transfer a part of their land to their children while the parents remain alive, because it would result in too much fragmentation of family land of a small size. It is more common in this class of family farms that a newly-married child

stays at his or her parent's house and cultivates a part of parent's land before moving out when his or her younger sibling marries and pursues the same sort of arrangement in turn. This pattern shows a temporary transfer of usufructs of parent's property between parents and their married children without an actual transfer of land ownership.

Children's obligation to support their parents also influences the practice of inheritance. When their parent become old, sick or lose their spouse, one of their children often moves into the parent's house and supports them. It depends on the actual situation of the children, rather than seniority or gender, that determines who will take on this role. Upon this decision, he or she obtains a usufruct right to parent's house and land, which is recognized as compensation by his or her siblings and parent. The extent to which the parent-supporting child claims his or her right of ownership over the deceased parent's property depends on the economic situation of each household. In cases of relatively rich family farms, the child seems to agree with the arrangement that he or she inherits the parent's house and his or her portion of parent's land, while the remaining land is distributed among the other children. In cases of family farms of a subsistence level, the child often maintains a usufruct right on the deceased parent's entire land without initiating the Islamic process of land inheritance, especially if one of parent is still alive. In some cases, deferment of formal land distribution continues long after both parents have passed away. This situation causes conflict among the children, sometimes resulting in a lawsuit, or just tacitly tolerated as compensation.

The practice of inheritance of land ownership and usufruct described above is closely connected to the mechanism of reproduction of family farms, in which the notion of obligation between parent and children plays an important role. Underlying the practice, there exists a representation of land as family property by family members, even though land is legally private property. Then, can we suppose that the land is a kind of "inalienable possession" inseparable from family identity? It seems inappropriate to apply the concept of inalienable possession to land in a strict sense, because all the land in the village remains basically in a state of "commodity candidacy". In the village, there is no land belonging to the category of *pesaka* in the sense of "ancestor's land" of a kin group, which might have a stronger sense of inalienability. Despite this, it is worth noting that parental house and a land where the house locates has a special meaning attached to family feeling which affects, to a certain extent, the practice of land sale and land inheritance.

The landscape of Parit Yob is a characteristically linear one, as most houses are located on either side of the main village road parallel to the straight layout of *parit* (drainage canal). The houses are built in individual rectangular lots of 2 to 6 acres, adjacent to the road or *parit*. The land where each house is located is not only the most important cultivable land but also a residential space for family members. Family members are reluctant to sell that land to strangers, regarding it as the most valuable property for inheritance; this is expressed when a married child living with an elderly parent usually inherits the land with parent's house. More than half of the households in the village have their current houses on land inherited from their parents, whether they inherited both the land and their parent's houses or they built new houses on the land inherited upon setting up a new household. Continuity of residential space across generations promotes an emotional attachment to the land and the house, even though succession to one's parent's house does not mean the succession of a descent line commonly found in patrilineal or matrilineal kinship system. The bond to particular land has an emotional impact on family members upon land sale and land inheritance.

I have explained the transfer of parent's land to their children through inheritance as a form of gift exchange (see Schrauwers 1999: 317). It is worth noting, however, that commodity exchange intervenes in the process of land inheritance. There are a number of cases where inherited land is sold at market price after the completion of legal inheritance procedures. This occurs especially when a single lot of small size is distributed among several inheritors according to Islamic regulations and one of them decides to buy portions of their co-owners to become the sole owner of the land. If they cannot find a purchaser among themselves, they may sell the land to others, each receiving money according to his or her portion. In recent times, there were a few cases in which a non-resident child has purchased their parent's land when his or her parent needs a substantial amount of money to go to Mecca or for living expenses. As rural-to-urban migration has been very active in the village since the 1970s, the majority of the younger generation of family members now live in small or big towns. Some of these economically successful migrants have purchased their parents' land, which their parents continue to occupy and cultivate without paying rent while they are alive. The purchase of one's parent's land means to both fulfil the obligation to support elderly parents and invest for profit from rises in land prices. This land sale between parent and one child results in the disinheritance of the other children.

Conclusion

Gray (1978: 185) wrote of Johor peasants in the colonial period that it was neither possible nor desirable to fashion a "peasantry" in Johor because most of the "Malays" in Johor had cast off a sense of the past and of reciprocal responsibilities, and a loyalty to place and to livelihood, which were constituent socio-cultural elements of a peasantry. It is true that rubber smallholders of Parit Yob represent an image quite far from that of "peasantness" implied in the peasant model. The model of small commodity production is relevant in explaining their structural relations with the world capitalistic market, which has affected, if not determined, the production and reproduction of the rubber smallholders.

As seen in the analysis of land transactions, however, the logic of both commodity exchange and gift exchange works simultaneously, and land becomes the object of commodity exchange and gift exchange depending on different contexts. The commoditisation process of land has not been completed at all, and social forces accelerating or restricting the process have been present concurrently.

There is also a limit in the small commodity production model to explain social relations among villagers, which are not dealt with in depth here. Parit Yob is far from a community of well-integrated and harmonious social relations based on kin and communal relations as the image of Malay *kampung* implies. The village has neither a common ancestor who is widely respected by the villagers nor any significant communal property owned by the village or kin groups except a village mosque and a small cemetery adjoined to the mosque. There are no notable kin groups of a corporate nature. Thus, can we characterize the village as an aggregate of independent households whose preponderant link is with the market, as the small commodity production model implies?

On the morning of *Aidil-Fitri* after Ramadan, male villagers gather at the village mosque to pray, and, after prayers, they divide into a few neighbourhood groups who visit every household in their neighbourhood sections. They ask for a ceremonial pardon from elders of the families, take some confectionary and sing together for the prosperity of the families. Over the following days, there occur mutual visits to relatives and friends in the village. Not only resident villagers, but also family members returning from towns for this occasion, participate in this ritual of greeting. Another ritual occasion is that of the *kenduri*, a feast with Islamic rituals that is held quite often throughout the year. Hosting a *kenduri* is a social obligation for every family on the occasion of a

marriage, death, memorial day for deceased parents, serious accident, and for good luck. Relatives, friends and neighbours should all be invited to attend.

Close bilateral kin networks have formed among some of the second and third generation children of immigrants as some of the early settlers married their children to each other and marriages between cousins, close relatives, and neighbours were once frequent. Early settlers who first were strangers seemed to intentionally develop kin and affinity relations between each other.

These phenomena reveal that reciprocal relations and emotional bonds have important meanings in everyday interactions amongst the villagers. They are not atomised individuals whose lives are wholly dependent on the market, but rather they are social *persona* of which "relatedness" among family, kin, and neighbourhoods forms a crucial part. Carsten's (1995: 224) findings from her fieldwork on Malay villages in Langkawi island showed that "relatedness" through conception, birth, feeding, living in houses, and death is the substance of the Malay notion of personhood and kinship; this resonates with me in retrospect, though I did not delve into this point during my fieldwork. Modern subjectivity, which is the transformation of the notion of the "person" (*personne*) into "a category of indivisible self" (Mauss 1985: 20), cannot be fully applied to the notion of the personhood of Malay peasants even though they have been deeply involved in commodity exchange. Market relatedness, though powerful, is only a part of the complex relatedness that constitutes the social *persona* of Malay peasants whose lives are mediated, to a great extent, by gift exchanges in diverse forms. If modernity presupposes full commoditisation, and modern subjectivity means an indivisible self wholly dependent on contractual relations of market and civil society, then Malay rubber smallholders have never been modern in that sense; nor have Westerners (Latour 1993).

Notes

1. The term "small" is ambiguous as the size of cultivable area by family labor differs greatly depending on crop types, agricultural technology and natural environment. Southeast Asian family farms of a few acres, European family farms of tens of acres, and American family farms of hundreds of acres belong to the same category of small commodity production. It is certainly an awkward situation.
2. Here I use terms "the Malays" and "Javanese" interchangeably. Most current residents of Parit Yob are the second or third generation from Javanese

migrants. While they are aware of their Javanese origins, they are, to a great extent, "Malay-ised". That is, they consider themselves to be Malays, corresponding to the official ethnic categories in Malaysia after Independence, which recognized the main ethnic groups to be Malays, Chinese, Indian and Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. To be more precise, the villagers are Malays of Javanese origin.

3.   There were 81 cases of land sales in the 1920s, and 79 cases in the 1930s, which were recorded in the land titles of 207 lots examined (Oh 1993: 134). These statistics include cases in which the same lots were sold several times. Land sales between Malays were much more frequent in the 1920s, while land sales between Malays, Chinese and Indian *chetties* tended to increase in the 1930s.

4.   Both Islamic law and *adat* contain the principle of bilateral divisible inheritance. *Adat* prescribes equal distribution of parent's land between sons and daughters while they are alive or after their death. In contrast, Islamic inheritance law is in principle a regulation about the distribution of property left by a deceased person, with male inheritors receiving two times more than what female inheritors receive if they are the same distance in kin relations from the deceased. The British colonial government recognized only Islamic inheritance law as having legal effect, except in Negeri Sembilan. The Malaysian government after Independence has maintained this legal system of inheritance for Malays.

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Questioning Modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia

Edited by Wendy Mee and Joel S. Kahn

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

➡ For additional information about this book

Technology, Culture and Modernity in Malaysia

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The last decade has seen a number of studies on the popular and public representation of technology in Malaysia. Most of these studies have focused on information and communication technologies and have highlighted — amongst other things — the role of government investment/support in new technological infrastructure (Bunnell 2004; George 2005), the role of information technologists in the promotion of technology (Mee 1998, 2002; Uimonen 2001; Smeltzer 2004), the perspectives of everyday users of information technology in the workplace (Mee 1998; Ng and Munro-Kua 1994; Ng and Mohamad 1997; Ng 1999), and internet users' evaluation and use of online journalism (Wilson *et al.* 2003).[2] This academic interest is not surprising given the enormous financial and political investment in icons of technological progress in Malaysia. Not only is "building a progressive society" on the basis of science and technology part of the Declaration of National Unity, but over the years the government has committed resources to the exhibition and celebration of technological and scientific mastery. A common trope has been to chart the progress of Malaysia's national development with reference to local technological achievements. The so-called "national car" or Proton Saga was one of the first icons of Malaysian industrialisation. During the 1990s, information technology in particular came under the limelight, with telecommunications and multimedia positioned as the foundation of Malaysia's post-industrial future (Bunnell 2004; Mee 1999, 2002). In 2007, Malaysia's first "astronaut" to the international space station suggested to Malaysians that the sky was not in fact the limit.

In Malaysia, the government has assumed a preeminent role in the popularisation of science and technology. Whether through the media or

the school system, the government has sought to capitalise on local technological achievements in order to garner support for its policies and ensure an adequate supply of skilled workers. It is little wonder then that when the words popular, public and technology are discussed in the Malaysian context, it is usually with reference to some government initiative. More problematic, however, is the passive, "empty vessel" conceptualisation of the public in many studies of technology in Malaysia, as well as the assumption that popularisation is in a large part necessary because science and technology are deeply aligned with the interests of political and economic elites. We see this in Sandra Smeltzer's (2004) otherwise thoughtful study, where popularisation of information technology in the form of myth-making is an elite activity. Yet what do we actually know about the relationship between state agents and corporate interests, on the one hand, and the broader audience of users and consumers in Malaysia, on the other? The general assumption is that government, corporate elites, scientists and technologists inhabit different worldviews from the ordinary user of technology. But can we say with any surety where presumed worldviews coincide and where they diverge? What still awaits serious discussion in the Malaysian context is whether non-specialist users of technology might also be active in bestowing meaning and legitimacy in Malaysia's public culture of technology.

This chapter attempts to contribute to such a discussion through an exploration of the positive evaluation of technology provided by a group of middle-class white-collar factory employees in Malaysia. I argue that their positive evaluation was in line with a characteristic tendency in Malaysia's public cultures of technology, that of technological populism. Their technological populism was the result of many factors, including technology's longstanding centrality in imaginings of an independent, developed Malaysia. The popularity of the then-Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and his vision of Malaysia as a fully-industrialised and united nation by the year 2020 were also important backdrops.[3] An additional factor may be also the type of technology under investigation. The frenetic promotion and consumption of "IT" in the 1990s not only familiarised my informants with a globalised discourse on an emerging "information age", but also demystified the view of computers as expert objects, requiring specialist qualifications, as consumers became more familiar with personal computers and other everyday computer-based technologies. Yet aside from these factors, I argue that their technological populism needs to be situated in their direct engagement with technology at work.

There is a great deal to be said for approaching the question of technological popularism through an examination of the popular worlds of work. From such a perspective, we can consider how understandings of technology, derived from people's active and direct engagement with technology, are co-constituents of popular and public cultures of technology. In the case of the white-collar factory employees discussed below, new computer technology was assessed positively not only for what it made possible, but also because it allowed employees to acquire new computer skills, which they felt enhanced their status as workers. These reasons combined to provide a material foundation for their endorsement of technological progress in general, and suggest that informants' technological populism was not merely derived from media and government representations but also drew on their personal experiences and aspirations.

Yet it is not necessary straightforward for social scientists to appreciate the relevance of people's own experience of technology to the constitution of public cultures of technology. One reason here is the strength of what Joel Kahn (2001) calls "exemplary models of modernity" in our analyses of the social world. Exemplary models are characterised by a "tendency to interrogate, criticise and build upon the modern" in a way that "pursues the emancipatory project of modernity" (Kahn 2001:18). In terms of such models, an authentic subject position is one that seeks to displace instrumentalism, rationalisation and materialism in favour of communicative rationality, the opening of cultural horizons, and the pursuit of autonomy. Exemplary models of modernity are also highly critical of popular forms of modernity, which are denigrated as superficial, anti-intellectual and reactionary, and seen to lack critical insight (Kahn 2001). This makes it difficult then to value more mixed or populist forms of being in the world, where instrumental rationality and technological mastery may be combined with people's version of their own project of autonomy. It also denies the extent to which populist forms can be critical, as well as creative, and — more to the point — influential in the emergence of broad modernist sensibilities.

A Word on the Cultural History of Science and Technology in Malaysia

Below is a selection of online comments over Dr Sheik Muszaphar Shukor's flight into space in October 2007.[4] Billed as "Malaysia's first astronaut", the project was conceived in 2003 when Russia agreed to send a Malaysian to the international space station as part of a billion-dollar

purchase of fighter jets. While some Malaysians scoffed at this "space tourist", others were clearly caught up in the excitement of it.

Malaysiakini: Space fever grips M'sia as launch nears

Space fever has gripped Malaysia as the nation prepares to watch its first astronaut blast off into space from a launch site in Kazakhstan tomorrow night. Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, a doctor and part-time model, is to take off for the International Space Station …

Launch parties and activities are being held across Malaysia to mark the country's first foray into space. Newspapers this week have been abuzz with news and comment about the mission, as citizens embraced the idea of having one of their own in space. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will be joined by some 280 students to watch a live broadcast of the launch of the Russian spacecraft scheduled at 9.20pm tomorrow. Abdullah will also hold a teleconference with Muszaphar once he is settled in the ISS ….

Muszaphar has attracted interest with a promise that, if possible, he will observe the fasting regime of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan while on the space station. Malaysian religious authorities have prepared guidelines on how to practice Islam in space. The station circles the Earth 16 times each calendar day, which would technically mean having to pray 80 times every 24 hours.

Posted: *Malaysiakini*, 9 October 2007, 5:11am

The Star Online: All the best to our Angkasawan

Yeoh CG, Taiping: Congratulations. You made us proud to be Malaysians. Wish you success all the way.

Mahmud Ismail, Shah Alam: Saya sangat berbangga dengan pencapaian saudara. Pencapaian saudara meransang semangat kami untuk berusaha memberikan sumbangan kepada negara kita yang tercinta. Semoga dapat berkongsi pengalaman saudara diangkasa lepas dengan kami semua rakyat Malaysia. Selamat berjaya!

Ann, Batu Pahat: You really make us proud Dr Sheikh Muszaphar, congratulations, may ALLAH bless you.

Rosy Fernandez, Subang Jaya: You made us all proud! A giant leap for Malaysians. May you continue to inspire the young to reach for the skies!

Suthan, Klang: hey man, ur d hero of malaysia ang making malaysia proud 4 itself … its does mean that malaysia has only 1 can fly … you have

a big responsible 2 make thousand and thousand malaysia 2 fly … and we will be proud of u man and d others … all d best …
my hero

<div align="right">

Posted: *The Star Online*, September 2007

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Littlespeck

Instead of raising national pride, Muszaphar's … space trip widens Malaysia's racial divide.

Michael Sun asked: "How does it improve our science and technology? Dr Sheikh Muszaphar is nothing more than a space tourist, except we have to pay for him"

<div align="right">

Posted: 14 October 2007

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The Malaysian

[H]ow many Malaysians are truly convinced that this "space journey" by one of our own is a unique or exceptional achievement? (Posted 11:59 AM MYT)

Fishtail: There are some people who will actually believe that we are so technologically advanced and able to join the Space Club, and that we did it out of our own expertise. (Posted 12:18 PM MYT)

Anon: It's nothing more than just an expensive taxi ride with a RM90 million fare. Yet the government has the cheek to say that it can ill afford to continue with the Text Book Subsidy scheme which benefits thousands of students from low income families! (Posted 3:22 PM MYT)

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Posted: *The Malaysian*, 4 October 2007

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What are we to make of the attention accorded Malaysia's first astronaut? One possible explanation is that expressions of admiration reflect the indoctrinating effect of incessant media hyperbole and the government's muzzling of alternative media, and that critical comments represent the limits of hegemony — the spaces in which people can see the cracks and withstand the seduction of the elite. Briefly, I would like to suggest an alternative reading which bears on the case study of factory workers I detail in the next section. This reading suggests that central to this debate is a deep-rooted belief in the importance of scientific and technological development in Malaysia. Far from the government simply manufacturing this enthusiasm in the case of Dr Sheik Muszaphar Shukor's space flight, the government was in fact seeking to trade on

it (this time, rather unsuccessfully). Looking again at the critics, their comments centred on what they saw as scientific hoax and the unconscionable waste of money that should have been spent on "real" science, technology and education. This draws our attention to what I see as a defining feature of Malaysia's public culture of science and technology, perhaps of Malaysia's public culture in general, and that is a deep-rooted belief in the importance of scientific and technological development. This feature does in part draw on the presumed relationship between scientific and societal progress that emerged during the Enlightenment, but not in any unmediated sense. This feature has been through countless fusions and revisions involving successive governments (colonialist and developmentalist); alternative histories of science, bureaucracy, technology, rationality and capitalism; the agendas of international (later multinational) corporations; and transnational intellectual and media flows (although, significantly, this feature has proven less responsive to critical analyses of science and technology). There are even good reasons to argue that this feature helped bind Malaysians to the leadership of Mahathir, just as it continues to provide a baseline for a set of "common" (that is, non-"racial") national interests. Viewed from this perspective, interpretations which see people's support as the consequence of government propaganda and/or a lack of alternative (i.e. critical) media, may tell us more about the public culture of science and technology (and of modernity) elsewhere, particularly those prevalent in the West, than they do about the public culture of science and technology in Malaysia.

Yet for all of this, I do not wish to suggest a radical disjuncture between Malaysia and the West, for example. The range of ideas and positions in relation to the discussion of science and technology discussed here — whether celebratory, populist or critical — are all firmly located in a modernist worldview, to which Malaysians can hardly be expected to provide a radical alternative. It is rather in the constitution of people's evaluation of science and technology — how they situate themselves in relation to the celebration, critique and populist enthusiasm for science and technology — that we may see some difference. For good historical and sociological reasons, we ought to expect differences here both within and across nations, although the focus of this discussion is squarely at the national level.

For those familiar with Malaysia, much of the language used and claims made regarding Malaysia's first astronaut reveals a remarkable level of continuity with Malay/Muslim writings from the early part of the twentieth century. Despite being a "developed underdeveloped" nation,[5]

earlier tropes of backwardness and poverty, of Malay/Muslim achieve-
ments as lagging behind those of others, still surface in the public culture
of science and technology. Life in British Malaya was defined as much by
an influx of new peoples as by the reflexive processes these triggered. An
accelerating awareness of other peoples, places and cultures resulted in an
unprecedented self-consciousness about who and what was "modern" and
the strengths and weaknesses of Malay/Muslim values and behaviour in
responding to the changed political and capitalist realities. Early twen-
tieth century Malaya saw the consolidation of a number of cultural orien-
tations that we now term "modern", such as rational and instrumental
approaches to government and business, the capitalisation of economic
production; the strategic importance of scientific and technological know-
ledge, and the routinisation of bureaucratised forms of individual and
collective identity (see Hirschman 1987; Maaruf 1988; Roff 1994; Milner
1994; Lee and Ackerman 1997).

Evident in many of the Malay- and English-language newspapers,
journals and novels[6] of this period was a concern that Muslims/Malays
lacked the knowledge and cultural orientation to respond to the changing
world. In particular, it was felt that Malays here were disadvantaged in
relation to immigrant Chinese and Indian groups. Such writings wrestled
with questions over the nature and culture of the "modern" times, many
criticising the contemporary practice of Islam and Malay customs for
holding back the social advancement of Malays/Muslims. Secular and
scientific education was stressed in *Al Imam*, a Muslim reformist journal
published out of Singapore in the early years of the twentieth century.
According to *Al Imam*, it was Europe and Japan's superior scientific
and technical knowledge of the world that accounted for their imperial
successes (Milner 1994: 177). In particular, the journal appealed to the
ulama (religious teachers) to lead the Muslim community to face the
challenges of the "new world" through the study of science and "crafts-
manship" (Milner 1994: 175). The more secular Malay nationalist, Zainal
Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba), argued in his much-cited article *The Poverty
of the Malays* (1923) that the resources of Malaya were mainly exploited
by the more aggressive non-Malay communities, who were busily engaged
in the modern commercial sectors. In contrast to their success, he said
that Malays ended-up as "office-boys, errand-boys … or in positions not
requiring the use of the brain" (quoted in Maaruf 1988: 79). According
to Za'ba, the Malays were "poor in education and knowledge, poor
mentally and lacking in good values" (quoted in Maaruf 1988: 76). To
overcome this he stressed the importance of Malays gaining overseas

education in the "practical knowledge" of "surveying, electricity, engines and manufacturing, commerce and mining" as well as in professions such as "law, medicine and accountancy" (quoted in Maaruf 1988: 48).

The concern over Malay/Muslim disadvantage and the focus on education from this time still resonates in the affirmative action policies of the Malaysian government today.[7] While the government encourages all Malaysian students to pursue careers in science and technology, sciences streaming within schools and affirmative policies within the education system have sought to channel *Bumiputera* students in particular into scientific and technological fields. Since the late 1970s, the Malay-dominated government has established specialist schools, with better facilities and lower student-teacher ratios than regular schools, to prepare *Bumiputera* students for professional and technical fields. Other pathways for *Bumiputera* students who wish to pursue science and technology based courses at Malaysian universities include one-year matriculation and pre-university foundation courses offered by the Ministry of Education and universities (Joseph 2006: 60).

Continuity with the past is seen in the extent to which science and technology continue to be framed and judged in highly rational and instrumental ways. Science and the pursuit of knowledge may have been noble in their own right, but their promotion by the editors of *Al Imam* and Za'ba was explicitly tied to communalist and nationalist objectives such as economic development and the social advancement of Muslims and Malays. This does not rule out people's excitement over scientific achievement and technological mastery, as the pride felt over Malaysia's first astronaut suggests that the two often go together. As I discuss in the next section, employees' assessment of information technology combined enthusiasm and excitement, as well as more practical and instrumental reasons. Lagesen (2008) similarly found that the two most prominent aspects informing young women's decision to study computing at the University of Malaya were their enthusiasm for and fascination with computing on the one hand, and instrumental reasons such as the suitability of the work for women and prospects for future employment on the other.

Yet, despite continuities, Malaysians today cannot be said to occupy the same reflexive position as their forbearers. Malaysia is now an independent nation and its Malay-dominated coalition government (which has held power since Independence) has overseen the mass production and consumption of education, technology and science. It is difficult to imagine any political leader in Malaysia today banning the writings of

a contemporary Za'ba.[8] Overwhelmingly, the modernist and secularist[9] perspectives introduced by Za'ba and others have won the day, and while there is still special attention given to the needs of Malays (via affirmative action policies), a sense of the importance of education and progress through science and technology is found amongst all ethnic groups. There is in fact little difference in the attitudes of Malaysians from different ethnic backgrounds to science and technology, according to three surveys conducted by the Ministry of Science and Technology Information Centre (MASTIC 1994a; 1994b; 1994c). A more recent survey of students' attitudes to the Internet also concluded that there were no ethnic or gender differences in tertiary students' interest in learning how to use the Internet (Hong, Ridzuan and Kuek 2003; see also Lagesen 2008). What seems to characterise contemporary discussions of science and technology then is not a polemical insistence on their importance to Malays, but rather the *taken-for-grantedness* of their importance to all Malaysians.

Information Technology at Electronics Penang

This section draws on research I conducted in 1996 at a Japanese multinational factory in Penang that I have called "Electronics Penang". My purpose in this discussion is to draw on the interviews and surveys I conducted with 35 employees in order to gauge their evaluation of information technology both at work and more generally. Two features characterised their responses: firstly, the central importance they assigned to information technology to the improved performance of their jobs; and secondly, the strategic role they designated to science and technology within national development. Despite their individual differences what came through strongly in this study was the extent to which technology was inscribed upon their public identities as both middle class/white collar workers within Electronic Penang employees and as Malaysians.

The sample comprised 20 women and 15 men, with 31 respondents falling between the ages of 25 and 35 (the remaining 4 were older). Twenty-three respondents had prior experience of personal computers before they joined Electronics Penang, most commonly as tertiary students. The sample was in fact highly educated. Nineteen had university degrees, four from universities in Canada, Japan and United Kingdom. Fourteen of these degrees were in the field of business administration and commerce, with the remaining five spread across the fields of science and engineering. A further eight respondents held diplomas, including four in computer science and two in business studies or accounting. None of

my informants worked in the production areas, and only one informant, a 28-year-old Malay woman, Nor, had started work on the production line and worked her way up to the position of clerk.[10] All were located in stereotypical white collar clerical, administrative and middle management positions in areas such as procurement, shipment, finance, human resources and quality control.

The sample included 15 Chinese Malaysian women, 12 Chinese Malaysian men, 5 Malay women, 1 Malay man, an Indian Malaysian man, and a Eurasian man. The heavy weighting of Chinese Malaysians in the sample (27 out of 35) ruled out any possibility of analysing respondents' viewpoints on the basis of ethnicity. In any case, with such a small sample my observations could only be speculative. Nevertheless, no ethnic differences in attitude were discernable. Similarly, gender differences in terms of respondents' assessment of information technology were also hard to find. There was some discussion by respondents that men were less interested in the more routine tasks of systems support, such as data entry (and in my sample there were many more women performing these tasks). Yet there was little evidence of consistent or marked differences in women's and men's responses to information technology. This is consistent with Lagesen's (2008) findings that computing in Malaysia is not seen as "a boy thing" or alienating to women. Far from computing being considered masculine or "predominantly the culture of white American males" (Wajcman, cited in Lagesen 2008: 8), Lagesen found that female computer science students in Malaysia saw computing as something enjoyed equally by males and females and a path to a secure, well-paid job suitable for women.

The organisation of Electronics Penang was geared around three production lines, which assembled audio equipment. The computer system most critical to production was composed of three mainframe servers accessible from 150 terminals. While more and more staff used stand-alone personal computers, it was predominantly the mainframe system that enabled the sharing of information and the generation of reports critical to the production cycle. From my informants' point of view, the major benefit of the mainframe system was its replacement of manual methods, which had reduced their work loads, sped up their work processes, enabled them to handle large volumes of data, led to greater accuracy of information and improved planning. It had also facilitated prompt communication to and from the corporation's customer sale offices throughout the world and headquarters in Japan. There were however problems with the mainframe system. The major limitations for these users were

"down-times" (when the system was not functioning) and its slowness (usually at peak times). Most felt annoyed when the system would just "hang", and some wondered why technology had not improved the capacity of the system so as to avoid "computer jams". Users also complained that they experienced difficulties with screen design, excessive number of screens and unnecessary keying in of data. Another area of frustration related to the introduction of new systems that the staff believed did not assist them in their job but were imposed from above. Some like Lau (assistant manager), complained that Electronics Penang was at the "receiving end" of systems designed in Japan by out of touch IT experts to suit the parent company's needs.

In contrast, personal computers were seen as unproblematic. Respondents reported that personal computers were useful for writing reports, sorting and presenting data, formatting documents, and preparing labels. Personal computer-based applications were seen as easy to use and efficient compared with manual methods. They also reduced the need to repeat work. The only major limitations facing personal computers were, firstly, that there were not enough so people had to share, and secondly, the lack of electronic links between personal computers and the mainframe system resulted in a considerable amount of data re-entry.

Most respondents recalled feeling a level of stress when first learning to use the mainframe system. Comments such as "At first, I see stars, especially when I handle the mainframe" (Lee, female senior officer) and "I feel afraid of making mistakes" (Chong, female senior officer) were common. Staff were afraid of making a mistake which would have ramifications in other areas (particularly in the production areas). They were also stressed by the number and unfamiliarity of the screens on the mainframe system, and one common training hurdle was learning to concentrate when keying in. And yet despite their first time jitters, respondents said they were eager to enhance their computer skills. Some recalled feeling "excited", "very happy" and that "I couldn't wait" when they were told they were to be given the opportunity to use computers. Some commented that the exposure to computers was an attractive part of the job. Others felt confident that they would master the new information technology systems. Many felt, like Nor (female clerk), that "I want to learn, so I think I can".

A major factor behind their enthusiasm was an expectation that they needed computer skills to remain competitive in the work force. For example, Teh (male assistant manager) said that knowledge of computers was important for promotion as few middle-level managers could afford

not to have computer skills today. For female employees, it is worth remembering Malaysian constructions of white-collar "inside" "office jobs" as suitable for women (irrespective of their ethnic background), unlike male forms of employment like engineering and architecture which were "outside" and "exposed"(Lagesen 2008: 18). Other comments revealed how employee's current evaluation of information technology was tied to their day-to-day experience of the benefits of computers at work. These were by and large rational or efficiency type explanations, such as improvements in the speed and the accuracy of their work, and the reduction of manual work. For Chew (male senior officer) "computerisation offers more control and better control, and information more up-to-date", while Catherine (female assistant manager) said: "I am a very strong supporter of the [main frame] system. If the system can support me, it gives me time to do other things … It definitely eases the job."

The emphasis on practical considerations and efficiency came through most strongly when asked what advice they would give to new staff in relation to the use of information technology at work. Typical of the comments given was the advice of Fatimah (female assistant manager) — "to realise that you can't do without the system" — and Catherine — "to do your job you have to know the system first". For very practical reasons, most felt that the volume of production and information handling was too great for manual methods. Azizan (female officer) made this point when she said that she would tell her replacement that she is now doing the job of three to four people. Chew claimed that computers were his area's most important tool as it allowed them to keep track of the progress of the production lines. According to Wee (male officer), the superiority of computers over manual methods would be obvious to newcomers: "They'll realise for themselves the benefits", he said. Lau (male assistant manager) argued that "When you think of computers, you think of flexibility", while Lee (female senior officer) thought it would be "ideal" to remove all manual methods. Lawrence (male manager) compared the efficiency of computers over manual methods with the efficiency of aeroplanes over bicycles. As he said, "it's like learning to ride a bike as compared with flying a plane. Riding a bike is easy, but not efficient; flying a plane is harder, but more efficient …."

Many respondents said they would advise new staff to learn the "very basics", and to learn each application thoroughly by studying the different screens, using them as often as possible, and linking them with other related screens. Wee, an officer in the Finance Group, warned

against not knowing the system when he spoke of the dangers of using computers "blindly": people need to "understand" the system in order to handle problems when they arise. Respondents frequently said that it was important for new staff members to gain a comprehensive understanding of the mainframe system, not only from their own perspective but also from the perspective of other departments. Teoh (female officer) stressed the interrelatedness and interdependence of the computer systems. While the systems' interrelatedness had brought advantages, she said it also carried responsibilities for staff who needed to be aware "that whatever you update … other departments access".

Even in the face of such instrumental and calculable advice, another side to people's evaluation of technology came through. For Norma (female senior officer), she would tell new staff that computers "are your friend, not your enemy". It is worth noting that a third of the respondents said they would also tell the new staff member about the enjoyment they had experienced when first introduced to computers. They recalled how "interesting" it was and how "very happy" and "excited" they were when they first got the "touch of these computers". Some would mention that computers not only made the work easier and less tedious, but they also allowed them to do new things. Azizan said she would tell her replacement that "you're very lucky" to have missed the earlier, manual methods. Others like Jane (female assistant manager) would explain how it now felt "very inconvenient" to have to do something manually. Fatimah said she would describe how it is "such a thrill just to look into the system": "You don't need to walk around if you know the system" to track documents, know the daily and future production levels, or find out what happened last week.

Technology and Public Identities

In addition to interviewing, I also administered a survey to thirty four of my respondents, which contained a number of general statements on science and technology.[11] These statements did not necessarily link to people's particular experiences at work. Rather, they were designed to draw out Malaysians' general attitudes towards science and technology. Here I consider three statements: "Science and technology make our lives healthier, easier and more comfortable"; "There are harmful consequences of technological development"; and "Information technology is vital to Malaysia's development".

Nearly 80 per cent of respondents strongly agreed that "science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier and more comfortable". Norma and Ganesh (male assistant manager) both said "definitely". Seven respondents mildly agreed, expressing some disagreement with the word "healthier" in the statement, with people noting their concern over pollution, the ozone layer, toxic chemicals[12] and the potential of technology to make people lazy. However, most respondents saw these as the unavoidable costs of Malaysia's industrialisation. According to Kenneth (male manager), "[t]o advance Malaysia has to industrialise and therefore there are some chemical wastes, pollution and trees cut down, [but] later we [Malaysia] can strike a balance" between industrialisation and environmental and other concerns.

A similar evaluation came through in responses to the statement "there are harmful consequences of technological developments". While around 20 per cent strongly agreed and 68 per cent mildly agreed with this statement, most thought like Lawrence that this "shouldn't put us off". People's examples of harmful consequences concentrated on health, pollution and criminal fraud. Chen (female officer) mildly agreed because she was worried about the impact of television on children, who she thought tended to absorb uncritically everything they see on television. Jane worried that children could no longer enjoy their childhood but had to fill their school holidays with tuition classes and computer courses. Some drew on the situation at Electronics Penang to provide examples. For example, Ganesh, Woo (female assistant manager), Wong (male senior officer) and Azizan worried that people would become too dependent on the system and no longer be able to function without it. Loh was concerned that automation might lead to job losses. No one, however, felt that the possibility of harmful consequences should impede Malaysia's pursuit of technological development, and most would have agreed with Lim who argued that people needed greater exposure to technology and to the direction of technological progress, in order to counter any possible harmful effects.

Finally, 33 out of 34 respondents strongly agreed with the statement "information technology is vital to Malaysia's development", with three respondents supporting this statement with reference to *Vision 2020* (respondents Loh, Chen and Lau). The one respondent who mildly agreed wanted to make the point that other technologies such as biotechnology were also important. Many of the arguments given in support of this statement situated Malaysia in a global race, where information technology was "very important for Malaysia in order to compete with others"

(Chen), to "keep pace with the top developed countries like Japan and America" (Hew, female officer), and enable Malaysia "to increase productivity" and "to move very fast" in response to the need "to be ahead" (Lucy, female assistant manager). For Catherine, "we [Malaysians] need information technology to support us [now that] we are moving into the computer age and everything we do is by computers now …. Information has become a way of life." Many respondents drew on their experiences at Electronics Penang to reply to this statement. Azizan, for example, said that without information technology businesses cannot make the "fast decisions" they need to in order to remain competitive. She said that information technology had changed our expectations of the immediacy of information and communication. Teoh drew a comparison between Electronics Penang and Malaysia, arguing that just as Electronics Penang needed to make decisions on the basis of information from around the world, so too did Malaysia.

Several informants thought that information technology had a privileged position in line with the goal of Malaysia to achieve "developed nation status" (as Ganesh expressed it). Kenneth was of the opinion that "definitely, IT is *the* most vital" technology. He said that information technology was vital to "information flow" and that Malaysia had to move towards computer-based information flows in the future. As he said, "information must flow faster for us to make faster decisions". Lau saw information technology as the key technology in reaching the goals of *Vision 2020*. When I asked him whether he thought Malaysia would be successful here he laughed saying "yes but I'll be an old man by then". The majority, however, thought all technologies were important and that Malaysia, as a "developing country" (Woo), needed to develop expertise across the widest possible range of technologies so that "we are able to improve [and] make life better" (Chew).

There is not the scope to fully explain the attitudes towards information technology in any detail. There were a number of local factors that help to account for the high approval of technology at Electronics Penang. Firstly, staff's own sense that computers were now part of the work place and the execution of the job; as they said, they could no longer perform the work manually, and neither would they want to. The expectation that their future career prospects would in part depend on their computer skills was also firmly entrenched in their view of middle class/white collar employment. Perhaps the fact that they worked for a transnational corporation also played a role, given the importance placed on export oriented industrialisation since the late 1960s to assist technology transfer to Malaysia. Despite differences of social class, this group of

lower- and middle-class users of information technology are reminiscent of Malay entrepreneurs in Sloane's (1999) study, who tended to legitimise what was good for them (in their case, in terms of personal business success) and for Malay(sian)s in general.

My informants' evaluations of information technology were embedded in national and global contexts as well. One of the most remarked upon contexts here was Malaysia's ongoing struggle to catch up, to become a developed nation. This was seen clearly in respondents' general perception that Malaysia needed to challenge the negative view of Malaysia as "developing" and technologically backward. Here the issue of technology was critical. From their perspective, scientific knowledge and technological capability were both cause and effect of the developed world's wealth and power, and by the same logic, Malaysia's continuing dependence and backwardness (see also Smeltzer 2004). It is interesting to contrast the assessments offered by Azizan and Kenneth here because their very different backgrounds might lead one to expect a difference of perspective. Azizan was a 31-year-old Malay woman and a graduate of Business Administration from the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur. Kenneth was a 41-year-old Eurasian, who had completed his higher school certificate and started his career as a clerk in an accounting firm. Both acknowledged harmful effects from science and technology. Azizan mildly agreed that science and technology could be harmful if they were used inappropriately or if the technology was unreliable, while Kenneth strongly agreed that there had been "costs" to Malaysia's industrialisation. However, both were adamant that Malaysia needed to embrace science and technology. Azizan saw technology as vital to Malaysia's competitiveness and in the race "to keep pace with other countries". She believed that Malaysia could not afford to be less technologically advanced than other countries, arguing that "we must catch up". For Kenneth the pace of change created by science "should be faster". He said Malaysia should not be held back by the unavoidable costs of development, such as environmental harm. He argued that "later we [Malaysia] can strike a balance" but for the moment technology and development were vital to Malaysia. He predicted that if Malaysia did not adopt information technology at a fast enough rate "we [Malaysia] won't be able to achieve progress".

This theme of Malaysia's relative disadvantage appears to strike a note with early modernist and post-Independence discussions of the need for science and technology to guarantee Malay(sian)s' success in the world. Here one can see most clearly how my informant's public identity

as Malaysian was inscribed in and through a particular cultural orientation to science and technology. The lack of significant ethnic and gender differences in respondents' endorsement of science and technology also suggests how calls for scientific and technological progress are components of Malaysians' nationalistic identification. This is not to deny that science and technology opportunities have been partisan in their distribution (such as support of *Bumiputeras* to study maths and science subjects and the selection of an ethnic Malay/Muslim as Malaysia's first astronaut — both of which are sources of resentment) but to show science and technology's central place as measures of modernity and development, and as privileged markers of global comparisons and distinctions.

It is with reference to Malaysia's historico-political context that we can best appreciate why technology at work could generate excitement for users and not merely appreciation (for completing a task efficiently, for example). Science and technology are in some sense national heroes in Malaysia (as cosmonauts are celebrities). Yet this should not obscure other evaluations and considerations of particular scientific and technological endeavours. Users of information technology at Electronics Penang were not blind to the problems of their systems; nor were they blind to the problems wrought by technological development at large or ignorant of the fact that technology changed their way of life — sometimes detrimentally. Yet, on the whole they were positive and expectant that the benefits would outweigh the detriments.

Conclusion

The above discussion suggests that we take seriously the proposition that the public cultures of technology in Malaysia may differ in important respects from their constitution elsewhere. The excitement over technology in Malaysia is akin to Lee and Ackerman's discussion of religious rationalisation in Malaysia: that is, as "the fusion of systematic ideas about salvation and scientific attitudes towards the world" (1997: 5). Only here salvation is squarely centered on worldly pursuits. Although my informants agreed with the government "stressing on IT", they were not reliant on the government-controlled media to tell them this was a good idea. Their own experiences reinforced what they apprehended as fact, that of the connection between technology and national development.

Overall, the notion of technological progress fares much better in Malaysia than in Australia, the country I know best. (For an interesting contrast, see some recent Australian-based evaluations of nanotechnology

in Katz *et al.* 2009.) While the Malaysians I met had a reflexive and critical dimension to their evaluations of technology, this had not led to a censoring of, or cynicism towards, the notion of technological progress. I find this difference intriguing and suspect it tells us something about the conditions of modernity in Malaysia and possibly other "developing", postcolonial nation-states. The relevance of science and technology to the study of modernity has long been recognised. Many have pointed to the iconic status of science and technology in representations of the modern (Macdonald 1995). Bruno Latour (1993) has pushed this argument further to posit scientific rationality and its offspring, the divide between the natural and social worlds, as central to the "modern constitution". Few would deny the massive economic value and military importance of global flows of science and technology. We have even coined new terms to try to capture the impact of the time and space compressing technologies of our age, such as flexible capitalism, informational economy, post industrialism and network sociality. Yet while science and technology are deemed central to the condition of modernity, their cultural and social production in the modernities of "the periphery" have received surprisingly little attention.

This may simply be a case of neglect but it could also be that the perceptions of many Malaysians simply do not fit the lens of an authentic modern subjectivity, as defined by models of exemplary modernism (Kahn 2001: 18). What Cooter and Pumfrey suggest for historians of science may also apply here. In a different context they argued that the lack of interest in the study of popular cultures of science (what they term "popular science") is directly linked to "the less-than-holy image of modern science" and, consequently, "few have wanted to identify uncritically with its popularization" (1994: 246). Yet our failure to consider popular expressions of the relation between science, technology and culture can lead us to overlook important constitutive elements of modernity, that is, those found in more popular forms.

Technological populism in Malaysia is undoubtedly more complex and contingent than I have been able to explore here. Just as there are different publics and public identities in Malaysia (as in any modern civic space), we can assume that there are also an array of public cultures, including public cultures of technology. Nevertheless, I want to argue here that a longstanding form of technological populism is a marked feature of Malaysia's public cultures of technology. Some Malaysians scoffed at the media attention over Sheik Muszaphar Shukor, who they considered neither astronaut nor scientist, but rather a waste of money or

an exercise in Malay chauvinism. Yet their cynicism did not negate their support for real astronauts, proper scientific quests or national development based on technology; quite the contrary. Similarly, Fatimah at Electronics Penang was concerned about the illegal dumping of toxic chemicals and only mildly agreed that science and technology made her life healthier. Yet in relation to her own experience with technology at work described how it was "such a thrill just to look into the system", knowing that she no longer needed "to walk around if you know the system". To misrecognise such support for technology as naive or without import would be to doubly disenfranchise the Malaysians in my study. Not only are they less "modern" in terms of Malaysia's relative technological standing, but they are also less (post) "modern" in that they continue to see a link between technology and progress. In addition to failing to capture the range of modern subjective positions, such misrecognition also dismisses the relevance of technological populism in the contemporary constitution of modernity. At the very least, the case of Malaysia suggests we need to account for higher levels of technological popularism than are often acknowledged.

Notes

1. My thanks to Evie Katz and Frank Formosa for their helpful comments on this chapter.
2. One exception is Mellström's (2002) lively analysis of the relationship between technology, learned dispositions and masculinity amongst motor mechanics in Penang.
3. It has been argued that Mahathir's constant reworking of the themes of capitalist growth, nationalism, Islam and alternative modernity, coupled with continued economic growth during the boom years of the 1980s and 1990s, resulted in a remarkable level of political consensus, "placating the middle class and offsetting the demand for democratic reform" (Hilley 2001: 36). See also Munro-Kua (1996) and Hilley (2001: chapter 3) for an overview of *Vision 2020*.
4. All were accessed on 3 Mar. 2008.
5. My thanks to Zureen Zahari for this encapsulation of how many Malaysians view the relative position of Malaysia.
6. See Virginia Hooker (2000) for a discussion of the promotion of education, rational interpretations of Islam, and a Protestantised work ethic in the new Malay *Hikayat* from the 1920s on.
7. *Bumiputera* (literally "son of the soil") is the collective term for Malaysians who have been classified as indigenous. Affirmative action policies designed

to achieve equity amongst the different ethnic groups in Malaysia have been thoroughly institutionalised in education, employment, property and investment since the 1970s. The Malays constitute around 80 percent of *Bumiputras*, which tends to make the distinction *Bumiputera*/non-*Bumiputera* synonymous with Malay/non-Malay.

8. As was done by the Sultan of Perak who banned Za'ba's philosophical treatise on self-reliance (*Falsafah Takdir*) "on account of its alleged modernism and disrespect for received opinions" (Zakaria Ali, *Merdeka 50: A Celebration of Malaysian Art*. Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia and Perdana Leadership Foundation, 2007).

9. I use Lee and Ackerman's definition of secularisation as emphasising the plausibility of differing religious and nonreligious worldviews, rather than the decline of religion *per se* (1997: 5).

10. It is important to note at the outset that my respondents were not the industrial process workers studied by Ong (1987) and Daud (1985). The experiences of these typically female workers in the workplace would presumably be quite different to the experiences of my middle-class informants, who used different forms of technology, exercised more autonomy at work, and received greater recognition of their skills.

11. These statements were drawn from a list of eleven statements in the MASTIC (1994b) survey noted earlier.

12. Just prior to interviewing at Electronics Penang there had been an incident of toxic chemical dumping on Pangkor Island. This dumping received a lot of media coverage and caused some concern for the people of Penang when it was alleged that the chemicals were dumped by a Penang firm.

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Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

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