

THE INVENTION  
OF POLITICS IN  
COLONIAL MALAYA

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## *Preface*

Malaysia is today undeniably a political society. Questions have been asked, it is true, about how democratic it is. In fact, one commentator has referred to the development in Malaysia of “a repressive-responsive regime that can be called neither democratic nor authoritarian but contains elements of both”.<sup>1</sup> But although the Internal Security Act, Sedition Act and Official Secrets Act all place limits on political debate, and the government controls key elements in the media and has amended the electoral system in ways that assist the ruling coalition to retain power, the fact remains that Malaysia is extraordinary for the liveliness of its politics. Despite such authoritarian measures, Opposition groups are always audible, expressing their views in print and on the Internet. The juggling for influence between the main ethnic groupings – the Peninsular Malay majority of 57.5 percent, the Chinese 27 percent and the Indian 9 percent – and the clashes of interest and ideology inside ethnic groups are played out in a distinctly political process. Electoral struggles, competition for preselection of parliamentary seats, and the quest for high position in political parties are all the focus of intense public interest and speculation. Business, too, is often carried on within the political arena, as entrepreneurs offer political support for political patronage, and even those on the lowest rungs of the Malay economy can obtain land and product distribution rights as a reward for political loyalty. This is not mere underhand maneuvering, immoral ‘money politics’. Few in Malaysia assume that business should be free of politics.

Material benefit, however, seems not to be enough to explain the passion for politics. In the words of one senior politician, ‘politics’ is today ‘the game’ in Malaysia.<sup>2</sup> The relish with which Dr Mahathir Mohamad (Prime Minister since 1981) takes up a struggle against an opposing Party, the International Monetary Fund, a Prime Minister of

Australia, or perhaps a Malay sultan or a senior Islamic figure can convey the sense of political 'game'. Even the pious religious scholars of the Islamic Party admit (when interviewed) that they are politicians,<sup>3</sup> and the sultan who served as king at the time of the constitutional confrontation between Malay royalty and Prime Minister Mahathir in 1983 revealed in an interview that he had a powerful interest in politics. Amid a certain amount of laughter, so it was reported, he half agreed that he would enjoy being a politician.<sup>4</sup>

The present book is concerned with the origins of modern politics in Malaysia and focuses, in particular, on the experience of the majority Malay community. It traces the emergence of what was, for the Malays themselves, a new form of activity and a new mode of public discussion. In investigating this far-reaching transition in Malay society, however, I also seek to throw light on some of the particular features of present-day politics. The colonial and pre-colonial experience of the Malay people, it can be argued, helps to identify and even explain some of the divisions and competing values in Malay society, and also specific ways in which Malays interact in the political sphere.

To suggest history can explain the present would be misleading in the case of Malaysia and many other societies. The social and ideological reconfiguration that took place in the colonial period was so deep as to make it difficult to imagine some of the forms of human consciousness prevailing in earlier times. Yet even accepting this proviso, there are features of present-day political behaviour in Malaysia that make better sense if we know something of Malay society in the past, and of the particular manner in which that society responded to the challenges of a colonial modernity.

The colonial period, in spite of its deep-running injustices, was for certain Malays a time of ideological adventure. There was talk of a 'new generation', a 'new learning', and a new *sedar*, or 'awareness'. Some people felt as if they had for centuries been like "frogs beneath the coconut shell who believe the shell is the sky". Convinced they were now in possession of a manifest reality, these Malays began to engage in what they saw as a hard-headed analysis of their historical situation and of possible strategies for reforming their society. Government, in the past, had been the privilege of a royal elite; ordinary Malays themselves now took initiatives – political initiatives – and found the experience exhilarating.

Malaysia, like numerous other colonized countries, was transformed by the economic and power imperatives operating within European imperialism. In the following pages I indicate ways in which the colonial subject succumbed to these seemingly irresistible forces, but the focus of this book is not material processes. The aim is to explore that space

of human endeavour which existed even under colonialism. I am concerned with the longstanding historical issue – how did people experience and adapt to changing circumstance?

At one level, this book is an area study which seeks to reveal the radical character of ideological conflict in colonial Malaya. It re-examines the period which has tended to be seen as the seed time of Malay nationalism. In tracing the developing debate over community and identity in Malay society – the contest between different concepts of social or religious unity – it continues a story I began in an earlier volume about Malay political culture on the eve of British imperial intervention.<sup>5</sup> It shows how, in Malaya, as in other colonized countries, ‘tradition’ was placed “on trial” (to employ a phrase used by David Marr with respect to colonial Vietnam),<sup>6</sup> or, at least, brought into dialogue with new visions of the world.

The Malay experience, particularly their sense of having achieved a new *sedar*, possesses also a wider significance. The texts which I examine – and these texts and their authors are the heroes of my book – have operated beneath the surface of social debate in many colonized societies. It is the type of transformation of language as well as of ideas that is currently being explored in European studies.<sup>7</sup> The way in which Malays spoke to one another altered. The Malay chroniclers, editorialists, and essayists debated in a manner which suggests a profound change in ethos. To encapsulate this change as “the arrival of nationalism”, this book will argue, entails adopting too narrow a viewpoint on a period so ideologically busy. Indeed, I shall suggest that these energetic ideologues were engaged in what might rather be termed the “invention of politics”.

The book was written at the Australian National University and the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton. I am especially grateful to Anthony Reid and Clifford Geertz for making it possible for me to plan, read and write in the best possible conditions for academic work.

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From beginning to end I have discussed, and argued about, this book with Claire. I am indebted to her most of all.

### Notes

- 1 H. Crouch, *Government and Society in Malaysia* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 12.
- 2 Shariff Ahmad, *Menjunjung Kasih* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1983), 165.
- 3 Haji Abdul Hadi Awang, *Jika Islam Mentadbir* (Kuala Trenggan, 1984), 4. See also Yusof Harun, *Dialog Dengan Pemimpin* (Kuala Lumpur: Pena, 1986), chapter 9.
- 4 Rosnah Majid, *Koleksi Temuramah Khas Tokoh-Tokoh* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan, 1985), 242–3.
- 5 *Kerajaan, Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, Association of Asian Studies Monograph, 1982).
- 6 See David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
- 7 J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); James Tully (ed.), *Meaning & Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and other volumes in the Cambridge 'Ideas in Context' series.



Malaya



## INTRODUCTION

### *Colonialism, Nationalism and Contest*

The revolutions erupting through Eastern Europe late in 1989 raised questions as well as hopes, and one of these questions concerns the concept of 'politics'. Several commentators remarked that the people of post-communist states would need to learn not just about the art of democracy but also about the practice of politics.<sup>1</sup> 'Politics', it would seem, was viewed by such commentators as a preliminary step toward mastering that higher art. For many of us who read judgements of this type, however, the very notion of an absence of politics is puzzling.

We live in an age of politics. Just as the mediaeval European considered "every activity, every day" to be "saturated with religion" (thus making 'unbelief' inconceivable),<sup>2</sup> so we in the late twentieth century possess a fundamentally political outlook. We tend to attribute a political significance, often a political motivation, to virtually every action no matter in what type of society or in what period of history that action may have occurred. We take for granted, as the anthropologist Louis Dumont has complained, that all communities "have politics",<sup>3</sup> in the sense that they consist of individuals maximizing their advantages and manipulating their situations. We assume that each polity represents the sum total of the 'rational' political manoeuvrings of its individual citizens.

Possessing such assumptions it is easy to neglect that transition in European history when people began to see themselves as *homo politicus*.<sup>4</sup> Even in the study of 'political development', we tend to accept the concept 'political' as a given, rarely seeking to define or dissect it. Analysts of post-colonial societies, for instance, investigate the emergence of the state, of nationalism, and even of political systems but seldom the actual development of politics.<sup>5</sup> This neglect has implications not just for the depth of our understanding of the dynamics and

challenges of change within specific societies, whether they be post-colonial or post-communist. To investigate the 'inventing' of politics in specific situations, it might be argued, may also sharpen our understanding of politics generally as a practice and a discourse.

This book is concerned with the 'inventing' of politics in Malaysia. The Malays (who today make up a little over a half of the population of that country) have themselves alluded to this development and yet their comments have provoked little curiosity among scholars. Certain Malay writers have even remarked that until the late colonial period "no politics" existed among the Malays.<sup>6</sup> This comment seems to refer to the absence of more than just political institutions and political parties. There was in the Malay language no specific word for 'politics'. In the twentieth century, Malays have experimented with an Arabic term (*siasat*) as well as *politik*<sup>7</sup> and one author of the 1920s went so far as to refer to politics as a new *adat* or 'custom'.<sup>8</sup>

In the following chapters I shall develop the argument that the new *adat*, or perhaps, discourse of politics can be identified in the changing terms of ideological debate taking place in Malay society. These changes began to occur in the British colonial era (which commenced at the end of the eighteenth century) and they may be understood, in part, as a product of the administrative and ideological forces of imperialism. Malays themselves, however, were architects of the new politics and it is in this sense that we might speak of a creative or inventive process. What precisely was entailed in the process is a subject which I examine in some detail. In this matter, furthermore, the Malay experience possesses a wider, intercultural significance.

The project which led to the writing of this book, and determines to a large extent its scope and presentation, was not initially concerned with investigating politics as a discourse. My earlier intention, inspired by a desire to understand divisions in present-day Malay society as well as by a theoretical interest, was to examine the character of ideological change and conflict in Malay society during the years of British imperial power. (By 'ideology' I meant – and mean – no more than "that part of culture which is actually concerned with the establishment and defence of patterns of belief and value";<sup>9</sup> to focus on ideology rather than culture stresses the element of creativity and process in culture.) I was suspicious of analyses which stressed the dominating presence of colonialism to such an extent as to allow little agency to the colonial subject.

In the ideological and certain other spheres, I anticipated, many forms of colonialism, even apparently brutal forms, allowed their victims a vital degree of elbow room.<sup>10</sup> In the case of colonial Malay society (which suffered very little violent repression), we know that there occurred what has been termed a "passive revolution" or "war of

position” against the *ancien régime*.<sup>11</sup> A battle for ideological hegemony was fought between, on the one hand, the defenders of the old monarchical system which had dominated Malay society for some centuries before the arrival of the British, and, on the other, the exponents of new and subversive doctrines derived both from a resurgent Islam and from Enlightenment Europe. Although those engaged in this struggle responded in various ways to the threats and stimulation of colonialism, it is clear that the agenda and pace of the war of words were not governed merely by colonialist imperatives. In order to uncover that agenda and to determine the terms of the debate, I decided to examine a selection of written statements which seemed to possess a special strategic significance in Malay ideological writing. Although each of these statements is justificatory in style, the assumption can be made that ideologues came in a wide range of forms and professions. A school textbook or a coronation memento, for instance, might be treated as ‘ideology’.

An additional and perhaps obvious point ought to be made about my approach to these selected texts. In seeking to understand the operation of Malay ideology-making, I inevitably brought to bear my own late twentieth-century perspective. Previous investigators into Malay society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have tended to stress elements of unity, particularly those contributing to the development of nationalistic sentiment.<sup>12</sup> Because they wrote in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when nation-building in Malaya and many other parts of the colonial and post-colonial world influenced the writing of history,<sup>13</sup> such a preoccupation was understandable. When I commenced research, however, it seemed less important to understand the unities than the divisions in Malay society. In the 1970s and 1980s sharp rifts in that society became increasingly evident. There were signs not merely of developing class divisions but also of ideological confrontation over matters of religion, monarchy and nationalism. In recent years books have been written with such titles as *Dissension in the Malay Community*<sup>14</sup> and the dominant Malay, nationalist party (The United Malays National Organization, UMNO), which has governed the country since independence, has become radically divided. A discussion of the emergence of ideological division in colonial Malaya, therefore, has an immediate significance for students of current Malay history and politics. It possesses too a vital historiographical interest. In the case of a country noted for its lack of military confrontations, of wars of resistance or of rebellion, an ideological ‘war of position’ involving not only the subversion of a monarchical system but also the presence of contending perceptions of human association and human purpose, offers a historical theme of universal significance.

The structure and method of this book reflects in a number of ways these initial aspirations. To probe as closely as possible the perceptions and experience of the Malay colonial subject I take a long view. The historical records of the Malays, unlike those of many Pacific and African societies, allow such a view. In Malaysia and numerous other regions of Southeast Asia, indigenous writings (in the form of inscriptions and chronicles) survive from pre-colonial times and the existence of such documents permits us to attempt to construct indigenous perspectives from which to interpret the significance of the encounter with colonialism. In Southeast Asian studies, this concern with an indigenous point of view has been associated with an 'autonomous' historiography<sup>15</sup> which is sceptical of 'development' models. That is, it is suspicious of perceptions of the past which are structured around the fundamentals of modernity – the state, nationalism, capitalism, the human individual and so forth.

Although the following pages attempt to delineate indigenous categories and to avoid a 'development' approach, they also depart from the stress on cultural continuities which characterizes much 'autonomous' history. My strategy might be described as 'prospective'. In seeking to identify transition as well as continuity, I look forward rather than backward into the colonial period. From a prospective rather than a retrospective angle of vision, it is easier to perceive the uncertainties, the ruptures and the tensions in any social situation. Such an approach makes one wary of what have been termed master narratives,<sup>16</sup> whether 'developmental' or 'autonomous', which tend to subsume and conceal many of the disjunctions and contestations which characterize human experience. In the field of ideology it might be argued that a 'prospective' analysis is likely to be sensitive to the way in which indigenous perspectives are brought into dialogue with novel and sometimes threatening ideologies. Seeking to survey the landscape ahead rather than a journey accomplished, this strategy can bring into view a wide range of alternative outcomes. It may highlight, too, the distance between these alternatives. In a 'retrospective' approach, depending on the moment of recapitulation, all roads converge before the analytic eye.

The most influential, pioneering, study of Malay society in the colonial period is in one important sense a retrospective analysis. Written some thirty years ago, soon after Malaya had attained independence in 1957, W.R. Roff's *Origins of Malay Nationalism* is one of those works concerned to identify unifying elements and processes in colonial Malay society. Roff combed the surprisingly large body of indigenous Malay books, pamphlets and periodicals published between the late nineteenth century and the Japanese Occupation, in order to "trace the slow growth of communal, ethnic, and national feeling

among the peninsular Malays". In his analysis he distinguished a number of élite groups which offered "an implicit challenge to the traditional status quo ... in the interests of a specifically Malay nationalism"<sup>17</sup>. It is because Roff gave such prominence to nationalistic unity that it is likely to be profitable today to re-read the documentation of colonial Malay society. We need to tease out wherever possible elements not of cohesion and agreement but of division and debate. 'Nationalism' might best be perceived not as an analytical given but as a novel ideology which was only in the process of being defined. The present book is a record of such a prospective re-reading.

My scope, in a sense, is both modest and controversial. Although acknowledging the processes of power and economics which shaped colonial and post-colonial Malay society, this book focuses mainly on perceptions, that is, on the writings of Malays themselves. I also investigate in detail only a limited sample of these writings.

Textual studies have sometimes been derided in recent years as the flawed instrument of a reprehensible orientalism. But when Edward Said, for instance, condemns those who prefer the "schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human",<sup>18</sup> the reply involves not merely the observation that the subjects of many studies are no longer available for interview. It can also be argued that the reading of texts sometimes offers far more than a substitute for personal encounter. One may move around texts, scrutinizing them at leisure, reading them against one another and in terms of the evidence of their social context. Although unlikely to value texts above real people, textualists are, at the same time, conscious of the closure sometimes entailed in the notion of 'person'. We are wary, for instance, of the essential humanism which pervades Said's own writing. The 'text' as a conceptual entity requires no fixed theory of authorship or subjectivity. Interrogating texts rather than persons can thus give greater scope, greater free play, to the expression of autonomous perspectives.

Partly to facilitate this patient circumambulation the intention here is to interrogate, to use a fashionable expression, selected texts. They are not the 'hidden transcripts', the rare record of backstage communication of which James Scott has written,<sup>19</sup> but rather public documents. Yet it is my conviction that texts of this type can reveal a great deal of the substance and character of ideological struggle. Such texts, of course, require close reading. It is necessary to pay attention not only to the arguments presented but also to the vocabulary, the rhetoric, the idioms and the conventions employed. We need to be especially alert to the presence of innovation in language and style, a concern which has received remarkably little attention in the study of Asian societies.<sup>20</sup> Bringing public documents into dialogue with one another is one way

of assisting this type of analysis. In interrogating my chosen ideological texts 'intertextually', I aim, in particular, to give a sense of the movement, reconciliation, temporization, capitulation and other ideological commotion which have distinguished intellectual life in British Malaya and many other colonial situations.

The book begins with a consideration of certain notions concerning allegiance and identity held in the peninsular sultanates (the *kerajaan*) on the eve of colonial rule. My strategy is to read a nineteenth-century, Western-influenced, Malay critique of the 'traditional' polity in dialogue with certain 'traditional' documents. In the following chapters I investigate further challenges driven by Islamic as well as European ideology. The authors of these challenges were in intellectual correspondence and competition with one another. Most importantly, I also attempt to expose the different ways in which the spokesmen of the Malay royal courts responded to the provocations of both these types of critic and rival. The final text discussed in this book, a descriptive account of Malay society in the last years before the Japanese Occupation, enunciates the provocative doctrines of what today might be termed a socialistic nationalism. In my account of colonial Malaya, however, nationalism never achieves hegemony as a defined and widely acknowledged doctrine. Even in the last years of the British presence, the character and value of nationalism continued to be a matter of debate.

Each chapter of this book, therefore, revolves around one or several Malay texts. The discussion of these texts is concerned, first, with understanding exactly what is being said by the different Malay ideologues and how they disagree with one another. Attention is paid especially to their views about community and identity, about the foundations of social organization and the way in which the social individual is perceived. In the cacophony of competing claims and voices, I focus on three ideological orientations. These orientations promote allegiance, respectively, to three distinct forms of community in Malay society – the sultanate or *kerajaan*, the Islamic congregation or *umat* and the Malay race or *bangsa*. In the third orientation we encounter (in our prospective analysis) the postulating of doctrines often associated with nationalism. In some situations, I argue, the differences between these orientations are not merely concerned with claims or programs. They are differences of what has been termed a 'thematic' type,<sup>21</sup> that is to say, they entail disputes over the justificatory aspects of ideology, the underlying concepts of knowledge and reality upon which programmatic concerns are founded.

Having defined a range of Malay ideological positions, noting in particular their thematic reach, we proceed to examine ways in which the ideologues appear to respond to, and argue with, one another.<sup>22</sup> In

particular, I seek to identify elements of experimentation in ideology-making, moments, perhaps, when Malay writers sought to comprehend or reformulate alien doctrines. The resourcefulness and the creativity of these writers is given particular attention. At specific points in their dialogues and arguments it is also possible to detect a certain dialectical progress. Examined over an extended period, ideas sometimes appear to be bonded together in linked series or concatenations. Here we find evidence of independent momentum, of 'autonomy', yet it is the autonomy of processes rather than cultural continuities. In this particular type of 'long view', the power of 'tradition' is demonstrated, but not by its ability to retain ideological ascendancy or hegemony. What I stress is its capacity to contribute to processes of change, for instance, to influence in either a positive or a negative way the actual agenda of ideological debate.<sup>23</sup>

It is in the revising of both this agenda and the terms of the Malay debate that we encounter the 'invention' of politics. The reader will immediately observe that the three ideological orientations which I distinguish are in no sense fixed positions. They are each transformed in dialogue with one another and, what is more, the specific character of their interaction also alters during the colonial period. The struggle for ascendancy in the 1930s, it is evident, is fundamentally different from the contest of the early nineteenth century. Although the doctrines debated by the new community of journalists, pamphleteers and incipient politicians active on the eve of the Japanese Occupation are genealogically linked to those in dispute in the early British years, by the later period a fresh intellectual climate had emerged. This climate – what certain Malays spoke of as a new 'awareness' or new 'politics' – entailed the construction of a novel architecture of debate in Malay society. It involved changes not only in the topics addressed but also in the language, rhetoric and rules by which that debate was pursued. Although the struggle for ideological hegemony in Malay society was in no sense resolved by the 1940s (or even by the last decades of this century), it might be argued that the contest itself fostered the construction of a new discourse.

The concerns of this book go beyond describing this discursive transition. What, we shall ask, were its origins? In certain instances the new discourse seems to have been deliberately engineered; in other situations the changes seem unintentional. The latter, it will be seen, may be best understood as failed attempts to accomplish ideological repair (what de Certeau refers to as *bricolage*<sup>24</sup>), carried out perhaps in ignorance of long-term structural consequences. Examining the emergence of this new awareness inevitably clarifies our understanding of the dynamics of political tension in post-independence Malay society. It might also be argued that by attending to the appearance of 'politics'

in Malaya, and by investigating the way in which this development mediated ideological confrontation, we raise far-reaching conceptual questions about 'politics' and the 'invention' of politics in both post-colonial and post-communist states.

### Notes

- 1 See, for instance, *New York Times*, 3 February 1990; and *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 December 1989.
- 2 L. Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 343.
- 3 'Preface by Louis Dumont to the French edition of *The Nuer*', in J.H.M. Beattie and R.G. Lienhardt (eds), *Studies in Social Anthropology: Essays in Memory of E.E. Evans-Pritchard by his former Oxford Colleagues* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 337-9. I am grateful to Professor James Boon for drawing my attention to this essay.
- 4 For this transition see, in particular, J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
- 5 A recent example is Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987). For an intriguing comment on the origins of printing and propaganda, mass education and modern organization, see p. 162.
- 6 '... tidak ada politik'; Ibrahim Mahmood, *Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1981), 17. See also, W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 218 n. 16; 230 n. 51. See also chapter 9 below.
- 7 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 217; Mohd. Taib Osman, *The Language of the Editorials in Malay Vernacular Newspapers up to 1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966), 3, 13.
- 8 Lufti Effendi, 'Al-Marhum Mustafa Kamil' (orig. pub. 1926), in Zabedah Awang Ngah, *Renongan: Antologi Esai Melayu dalam tahun 1924-1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1964), 201.
- 9 James Fallows, quoted in C. Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 71-2. For a critical survey of the scholarly debate around the issue of ideology, see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology. An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991).
- 10 'If the victims of progress and empire are weak, they are seldom passive'; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 16. For analyses which in some respects exaggerate the dominating character of the colonial presence in Malaya, see Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *A Question of Class: Capital, the State, and Uneven Development in Malaya* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), see, for example, 284; C. Hirschman, 'Development and Inequality in Malaysia: From Putecheary to Mehmet', *Pacific Affairs*, 62, 1 (1989), 74; Yeo Kim Wah, *The Politics of Decentralization: Colonial Controversy in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 25.
- 11 On 'war of position' and 'passive revolution' see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, eds) (New York: International, 1980), 46, 57-60, 120; David Forgacs (ed.), *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935* (New York: Schocken, 1988), 224-30, 247-8. In his extensive discussions of Gramsci, James C. Scott draws attention to forms of tension and resistance within Malay society which do not entail a confrontation between competing ideologies: *Weapons of the Weak, Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), chapter 8.
- 12 See, in particular, Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, and Radin Soernarno, 'Malay Nationalism 1896-1941', *JSEAH*, 1, 1960, 1-29. It is true that Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origins and Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 1985) and Khoo Kay Kim, *Malay Society: Transformation and Democratization* (Petaling Jaya:



- Pelanduk, 1991) have put a greater stress on elements of disunity. Nevertheless, Firdaus Haji Abdullah describes the main division as between two types of nationalist – the “conservative nationalists” and the “radical nationalists” (3) – and takes satisfaction from the fact that many ideas formulated by the radicals were eventually adopted by the conservatives (163). Khoo Kay Kim suggests that in considering political developments in Malay society during the colonial period it is more useful to speak of a Malay “struggle” rather than of “Malay nationalism” (177–9), but he tends to assume the “struggle” was unitary in character. He speaks of “the development of this *perjuangan* [struggle]” (179).
- 13 See, for instance, the comments of S.J. Tambiah, in *Sri Lanka: ethnic diversity, fratricide and the dismantling of democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
  - 14 Abdul Razak Ayub, *Perpecahan Bangsa Melayu* (Shah Alam: Dewan Pustaka Fajar, 1985). *Perpecahan* seems stronger than ‘dissension’, it suggests ‘turmoil’ or ‘break-up’.
  - 15 See, in particular, J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1955); O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Religion in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982); J.D. Legge, ‘The Writing of Southeast Asian History’, in N. Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 27.
  - 16 Joan W. Scott, ‘History in Crisis? The Others’ Side of the Story’, *American Historical Review*, 94, 3 (1989), 680–92; R. Iletto, ‘Outlines of a Non-Linear Emplotment of Philippine History’ in Lim Teck Ghee (ed.) *Reflections on Development in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), 130–59. For discussion of ‘prospective’ analysis, see Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formulation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 14–15.
  - 17 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 248.
  - 18 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 93. Note further, Said’s ‘Islam, the Philological Vocation and French Culture: Renan and Massignon’ in Malcolm H. Kerr (ed.), *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems* (Malibu: Udena, 1980), 63.
  - 19 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).
  - 20 Important exceptions are H.M.J. Maier, *In the Center of Authority: the Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1988) and Jane Drakard: *A Malay Frontier: Unity and Duality in a Sumatran Kingdom* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1990). See also Greg Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People’s Army of Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989). Sensitivity to innovation in language is not a monopoly of literary criticism; see, for instance, J.G.A. Pocock *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); James Tully (ed.) *Meaning & Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
  - 21 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New York: Zed Books, 1986), ch. 2. In analysing these different orientations in Malay society I (like so many other scholars) have gained much from Clifford Geertz’s analysis of the religious sub-traditions of Java; see especially *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1969) and *The Religion of Java* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).
  - 22 For a discussion of ideology as process, see Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
  - 23 For a discussion of such processes, see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 4–5.
  - 24 *Bricolage*: ‘artisan-like inventiveness’. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xiii–xviii; see also the helpful discussion in James A. Boon, *Affinities and Extremes. Crisscrossing the Bittersweet Ethnology of East Indies History, Hindu-Balinese Culture, and Indo-European Allure* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 200 n. 3.

## CHAPTER 1

### *The Ancien Régime: Described and Condemned*

The threat presented by any type of colonialism, of course, is in part ideological. The *ancien régime* of the Malay world had much to fear from the new doctrines of liberal Europe and the attack was not merely to be delivered by European writers. One Malay author in particular – Munshi Abdullah – was active in undermining the Malay monarchies, or *kerajaan* proposing certain new principles around which Malay society in the future might be articulated. Moreover Abdullah's critique is presented in such a form as to offer insights into the social system which he sought to replace.

When the British imperial presence commenced with the acquisition of Penang in 1786, the Malay Peninsula was divided among several sultanates, some of which also exercised authority in the surrounding islands. These Muslim polities possessed systems of government owing something to pre-Islamic models. The principles and assumptions upon which they were administered differed sharply from those operating in post-Enlightenment Europe.

Although the British advanced gradually into the peninsula, taking control of all the sultanates by 1914, the introduction of novel ideas and education began to promote new division in Malay society even in the early nineteenth century. (We shall see that the *kerajaan* had long been under ideological attack from certain Islamic quarters.) This chapter and the next examine the writings of one of the earliest liberal Malay critics of the sultanate system. We consider first the precise way in which this critic – Abdullah Abdul Kadir or Munshi Abdullah (1797–1854), a language teacher to Europeans in the Straits Settlements – perceived the 'traditional' Malay polity.

Abdullah's writings immediately reveal both the potential for vigorous Malay debate and the pervasive influence of colonialism. They

demonstrate that the British assault on Malaya was not merely political and economic. The transformation of Malaya in the colonial period involved more than the introduction of new institutions, massive immigrant groups and powerful foreign economic interests. In the case of the indigenous Malay community, so Abdullah's writings suggest, the British colonial presence, through the purveying of liberal doctrines, also entailed the subversion of the Malay monarchy.

The challenge facing the *kerajaan*, as presented in Abdullah's writings, was not merely concerned with what we might today term new policies and objectives; it demanded change in the actual structure of Malay ideological dispute. We might call this change a process of 'politicization' although to do so requires some reconsideration of analytical categories. In examining the pre-colonial polity, we cannot assume the presence of 'politics'. It cannot be taken for granted that the ideologues at the end of the colonial period – journalists, pamphleteers, religious writers and spokesmen for the royal courts – engaged in the same type of ideological exchange which existed in the pre-colonial period. As Louis Dumont noted, not all societies "have politics". The term 'politics' carries assumptions about individualism and motivation which are not relevant to the practices of all communities.<sup>1</sup> Abdullah's writing suggests that, at the opening of the colonial period, the Malays formed what might be termed a 'pre-political' community and that, furthermore, Abdullah himself not merely argued a radically new view of society but also helped to initiate the process by which the Malays acquired a political discourse.

Munshi Abdullah ('Munshi' means 'language teacher')<sup>2</sup> was one of the earliest indigenous authors to draw from western-derived concepts to undermine the *kerajaan*. In fact, Abdullah's principal works, a travel account and an autobiography, offer two types of beginning for a study of Malay political thinking in the colonial period. On the one hand, his writings form a juncture in Malay literature, a point at which different traditions begin to interact with one another. Commencing with Abdullah there took place a process of experimentation and debate in which Malay ideologues drew upon Malay, European and Islamic philosophies in order to determine an appropriate political culture for the Malay people. The next chapter will consider in some detail Abdullah's philosophy and the programs which he advocated for the future of the Malays. We will examine his contribution to the creation of what became a new discourse of politics. In this chapter Abdullah's works are read from a different perspective. His critique of the *kerajaan* offers not only a point of departure in Malay ideological development but also a perceptive introduction to the pre-colonial polity itself. Abdullah's critique, we will see, is in certain ways surprisingly consistent with the

presentation of the Malay polity articulated in the writings of his courtly opponents. Read in dialogue with certain *kerajaan* texts, it is possible to identify in Abdullah's books what Ranajit Guha has referred to as "antonymies which speak for a rival consciousness."<sup>3</sup> The Munshi, that is, provides a type of gloss which can actually assist us today in the interpretation of the courtly literature.

Like many social critics, Abdullah was not an insider. Although he wrote in Malay and was well versed in what would later be called the classics of Malay literature, he was the subject not of a sultanate but of the British-governed Straits Settlements. He lived in what some might have considered hostile British enclaves in the Malay world of the early nineteenth century. Nor was Abdullah identified unambiguously or primarily as a member of the Malay community within the Settlements. He was described by a contemporary as a "Tamilian of Southern Hindustan" and was said to dress in the style of Malacca Tamils.<sup>4</sup> In making these observations, however, it should be noted that 'Malay' is a category which, as we shall see, was subject to redefinition. For centuries, people of foreign origin had been accepted into particular Malay communities. By changing oneself in such areas as language, dress, customs and religion, it was possible to 'become Malay'. In the context of the Straits Settlements and the British-protected Malay states, the notion of a 'Malay race' (*bangsa Melayu*) was, over time, given important new connotations and assumed a formidable potency. It became a less porous category. In retrospect, Abdullah's writings can be seen to have contributed to this new ethnicity, but it must be stressed that his own ethnic identity was formed in the earlier, more fluid, ethnic situation. Indeed the way Abdullah presented or defined himself changed. In his last writings – in 1849, for instance – Abdullah used the phrase 'we Malays' although a few years earlier he still spoke of "the Malays", apparently excluding himself from their number.<sup>5</sup>

Munshi Abdullah, his father and his grandfather all lived in the colonial settlement of Malacca. Of Indian and Arab background, the family had a reputation for Islamic learning, but both Abdullah and his father also devoted much of their lives to serving the European community. They acted as translators and language teachers to the Dutch and English.<sup>6</sup> During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both the British and the Dutch had established garrison entrepôts in the western archipelago: thus, the settlements of Bencoolen (West Sumatra), Malacca and Penang were governed by Europeans, possessed European institutions and became, in their way, small centres of European civilization.

In these enclaves (to which Singapore was added in 1819) European rule meant the sultans of the surrounding polities held little sway.

English or Dutch legal systems were in operation (though many of the elements of the Malay legal codes or *adat* were enforced); schools and missionary establishments spread European ideas; and immigrants entered freely from all parts of Asia. (By the mid nineteenth century, there were about a quarter of a million foreign Asians in Malacca, Penang and Singapore<sup>7</sup>.) Perhaps most important of all, both the locals and the immigrants found in the colonies an opportunity to engage in what today might be called social experiment. Malays or Chinese,<sup>8</sup> for instance, might follow certain religious or social teachings which had been discouraged or prohibited in the independent Malay sultanates or in China. Among the Malays (who numbered about half of the population of these three peninsular settlements) some religious doctrines propagated would have been considered dangerously seditious in neighbouring sultanates. Abdullah too was conscious of these freedoms. Although his writings are marked by obsequiousness toward his European patrons and masters, he also revelled in the freedom to denounce what he saw as the evils of Malay aristocratic rule.

In the Straits Settlements themselves, as Abdullah conveys with clarity, he was in no sense an outsider. Born in Malacca, he mixed with the Indian, Malay and European communities of that place. He studied Tamil, Arabic, Malay and English. He was acquainted not only with missionaries and other European men of learning but also with the prominent Islamic teachers of the period. He studied, too, with the learned Malays of Malacca, asking them earnestly about Malay words and proverbs, and "reading the *hikayat* of early times".<sup>9</sup> Even the renowned Thomas Stamford Raffles, founder of Singapore and an eloquent advocate of social revolution in Southeast Asia, was well known to the Munshi. As a young scribe, Abdullah had copied manuscripts for the great man. Later the Munshi enjoyed high repute among many members of the European community as a teacher, transcriber and translator of Malay<sup>10</sup> In assisting to facilitate trade and diplomacy and in translating Christian scriptures, Abdullah was in one sense a cog in the machinery of European imperialism. It might be argued, at the same time, that his credentials as a founder of the anti-colonial movement are equally convincing. In Malaysia today his reputation is certainly the subject of controversy.<sup>11</sup>

As an interpreter assisting European merchants, Abdullah sailed in 1837 up the east coast of the peninsula.<sup>12</sup> It is in his report on the journey entitled the *Voyage of Abdullah*, together with the lengthy anecdotal record he wrote of his life and times (the *Hikayat Abdullah* or 'The Account of Abdullah'<sup>13</sup>), that we find most of the Munshi's observations on the pre-colonial Malay polity. Both of these texts have been edited and translated into English in recent years. Each of them

contains a vast range of apparently rambling comment on matters other than the state of Malay society. In the next chapter we will examine with some care a specific section of the 'autobiography'. Abdullah's *Voyage* describes his visits to Pahang, Trengganu and Kelantan. It includes descriptions of each state, details of conversations with people he met and a good deal of sweeping comment on the Malay 'condition'. The fact that these states shared many features with one another and with other Malay polities in the region must have encouraged Abdullah in his tendency to generalize about 'the Malays'.

In religion, language, literature, manners, clothing, legal systems and the style of their political life, Malays gave numerous foreign visitors the impression they constituted a single community or what was sometimes called (in the old, looser sense of the word) a 'nation'.<sup>14</sup> These elements of unity, however, were apparently more obvious to outsiders than to Malays themselves. Abdullah's journal suggests that in the early nineteenth century, Malays were concerned primarily with their differences rather than their shared features. They did not consider themselves to belong to what we today would consider a single political unit and, as we shall observe, many Malays appear not to have been conscious of themselves as members of a common race. No supreme Malay sultanate existed. In the nineteenth century some Malay histories certainly told of a noble sultanate once based in Malacca on the west coast. Several of the nineteenth century rulers traced their genealogies back to that sultanate which had lost its capital city to a Portuguese force 300 years earlier. Johore (located in the south of the peninsula), the nearby Riau-Lingga archipelago, Perak (on the peninsula's west coast) and Pahang (on the east), were all, in different ways, offshoots of the old sultanate. On the other hand, states like Kelantan, Kedah (in the northeast) and Deli (on the coast of Sumatra) had no such connections but do not seem as a consequence to have been considered inferior in culture or tradition.

All these Malay polities were small by the standards of mainland Southeast Asia or Java. Some possessed a population of only a few thousand and their royal palaces, though perhaps possessing noble names and boasting occupants who claimed the greatest dignity, were frequently miserable structures. Abdullah illustrates well the humble character of at least some *kerajaan*. He found the dwelling of the ruler of Trengganu, for instance, to be made of stone, of some thirty foot frontage and built in Chinese style. The walls were "covered with dirt, spittle, betel juice and moss".<sup>15</sup> The housing of the common people was even more shabby. In Pahang their dwellings were made of thatch and Abdullah remarks that the piles of rubbish under them emitted a foul

odour which “filled one’s nose”.<sup>16</sup> Such states were not destined to impress sophisticated visitors from Europe or China.

What foreigners did find attractive about the little Malay polities was the opportunity to trade. Merchants sought to purchase jungle products, spices or gold, and to distribute opium or Indian textiles in the many villages and towns situated on rivers which often reach well into the interior. In certain periods a particular Malay state achieved a reputation as a relatively prosperous entrepôt, but the golden age was often short: Trengganu in the 1760s was described by a European ship’s captain as “large and very populous, abounding in good Provisions of All Sorts”.<sup>17</sup> Abdullah’s later account of the same place – with its dirt and spittle – is much less enthusiastic.<sup>18</sup> Pahang was seldom mentioned in the eighteenth century, yet by 1839 a visiting British military officer considered it “the best regulated and wealthiest of the Malayan states on the peninsula.”<sup>19</sup> Again, the praise was awarded only in relative terms. The phrase “best regulated” allowed for the fact that the town presented a “miserable appearance” and the gun battery at the palace was “in an almost unserviceable state.”<sup>20</sup>

Abdullah was clearly not alone in deprecating the circumstances of Malay life. What was unusual was the depth of his analysis of the causes of this condition. It is in this respect that the comparison between Abdullah’s writings – the ‘autobiography’ as well as the ‘journal’ – and those of the royal courts is revealing. In both his works Abdullah affirms, and even illuminates, the account of the Malay politics presented in certain *kerajaan* chronicles and legal treatises, texts which were often smugly despised by the type of European whom the Munshi respected.<sup>21</sup>

Abdullah lays the blame for the miserable condition of the Malay community on their rulers, and in doing so he implicitly acknowledges the centrality of the ruler, or *raja*, in Malay life. The main reason for the Malay situation, he suggests, is the “tyranny and injustice of the government of the rajas, especially towards their own subjects”.<sup>22</sup> Abdullah declares he would never wish to settle in the Malay territories which lay beyond the British settlements: “To live close to a raja is like making friends with a poisonous snake.”<sup>23</sup> Even after death, Abdullah relates, a *raja* does not lose his power. The people of Pahang, when he asked them why they would not change the *adat* or customs which (in Abdullah’s opinion) did them so much harm, explained to him that “anyone who alters or breaks [an ancient custom] will be punished by the magical power – the *daulat* – of the Rajas of old”.<sup>24</sup>

This type of stress on the ruler is also encountered in European reports of the region. In the words of two European observers, “no government, as we understand the word”<sup>25</sup> existed in the Malay territories.

Rather the people lived under “absolute and cynical autocracies”<sup>26</sup> and asked only one question: “What is the Raja’s order?”<sup>27</sup> It was noted that in discussions with foreigners, Malays tended to describe themselves not as members of a race or state but rather as subjects of a ruler. “I am the subject of the Raja of Lingga” (Riau-Lingga) was the reply of Malays questioned about their identity in 1836 during a British investigation into piracy.<sup>28</sup> It is in the literature of the sultanates, however, that the significance of the *raja* in Malay society is most powerfully expressed.<sup>29</sup>

The chronicles (or *hikayat*, when written in prose) of the courts are structured around royal genealogy and their subject matter is largely the activity and proceedings of rulers and of those who carry out royal orders. In these texts the *raja* is located at the hub of what we tend to call political and social life: he is the source of honour, the bestower of titles and gifts and the constant recipient of homage. If these chronicles were used for instruction – and that seems likely – their audiences would learn of the wider world always in the context of the *raja*. The past was structured around the royal genealogy and so were new lands and peoples introduced in courtly works through the agency of the ruler. It is because he or his envoys visited or fought in a certain country, for instance, that we encounter that country in the text. The geographical horizons of the community, no less than its social structure or the apparently potent events of its past, are presented through the prism of the *raja*.

Nothing conveys the centrality of the *raja* more clearly, however, than the manner in which royal texts discuss his absence. The capture and removal of a *raja*, for instance, is described in one chronicle in graphic terms which evoke the anarchy which must follow:

stiff with fear there is a din of cries and frightened shouting, a sound of wailing and weeping, all proclaiming that the *raja* has been captured. The din is heard in the market place. Then all is in disturbance.<sup>30</sup>

In another *hikayat*, a state which possesses no ruler is said to be in “utter confusion” (the Malay phrase is a powerful one):<sup>31</sup> “all the people suffer illness, and both customs and orders of procedure no longer exist.”<sup>32</sup> In these royal texts, therefore, there is the suggestion that the condition of being ‘*raja*-less’ is almost unimaginable. Under such circumstances the Malay term for polity, ‘*kerajaan*’, is not unexpected. The people, as presented in these texts, do not identify themselves primarily as members of territorial ‘states’ or of a ‘race’. It was only in the nineteenth century, in fact, that these terms were defined with some precision in Malay. Built on the Malay language *ke...an* construction, *kerajaan* has the literal meaning of the ‘condition of having a *raja*’;



similarly *ke...an* is used with the word *suka*, 'happy', to mean (the condition of) 'happiness' (*kesukaan*).

In this context, the answer given by certain Malays in 1836 that they were 'subjects' of the *raja* of Lingga asserts membership of a specific *kerajaan*. In later years, the respondents would face new religious and national claims on their loyalty: they might then describe themselves, in the first instance, as members of the Islamic community (*umat*) or Malay race (*bangsa*); in addition, Malays always have possessed strong family and local affinities.

But were the rulers as pivotal in Malay life on the eve of colonial rule as the royal texts suggest? What was the view from below? Here Abdullah's observations are of crucial importance. Because the production of written material in Malay polities was subject to royal censorship and patronage, it is difficult to obtain evidence for a subaltern perspective. The declarations of allegiance on the part of the Lingga people accused of piracy are relatively valuable instances of subaltern utterance. Such statements are rare in the documentation of the pre-colonial Malay world. It may be suggested that the potency of the *raja* among commoner Malays is evoked in conditions of war, in the capacity of an apparently ceremonial ruler to inspire political action. But here again there is room for varying interpretations.<sup>33</sup> Faced with such insubstantial documentation it is ironic that Abdullah, despite his antagonism toward the *kerajaan* leadership and values, provides real corroboration of their significance in Malay society. From a court perspective he was a seditious writer yet his criticisms, no less than the court texts, convey the implication that the *raja* was the dominant institution in the Malay territories.

In other matters, too, there is a correspondence in the way Abdullah and the court writers delineate the structure and preoccupations of the polity. In his reflections upon the relationship between *raja* and subject, for instance, the Munshi took pains to list the areas in which Malay rulers failed to provide services for their people. The rulers, he complains, did not maintain "law and order" in their lands, nor did they control opium smoking or gambling. Furthermore, neither the enforcement of cleanliness nor the provision of education received their official patronage. "What about the smoking of opium, which ruins mankind? What about all sorts of gambling that go on, customs learned from the Chinese; clearly these things destroy all of God's servants and yet they are not prohibited".<sup>34</sup> This criticism was made with equal disdain by European observers. The Sultan of Lingga (who eventually came under Dutch control) was not the only Malay ruler in the region who was described by Europeans as not willing to concern himself with "the real issues in his kingdom."<sup>35</sup>

Court writings do not deny such accusations. It is true that in an often-quoted incident in the chronicle of the Malacca sultanate, the *Malay Annals*, a Sultan took upon himself the task of bringing criminals to justice. Dressed as a thief, Sultan Ala'u'd-din of Malacca is said to have roamed the streets of his city in search of crime. Finding five men stealing a chest he kills two of them himself and retrieves the stolen property.<sup>36</sup> This incident, however, is exceptional. In general, the *kerajaan* texts suggest that the ruler did not interfere in such mundane matters. Even in war his role seems essentially ceremonial. It is revealing that one of the most vigorous Malay rulers of the nineteenth century, Sultan Ahmad of Pahang, when fighting the civil war which divided that state in the 1850s and 1860s, is applauded by a Pahang chronicler less for his fighting prowess or tactical skills than for his personal appearance. Ahmad

enters the fray, accompanied by soldiers, some to the front of him, some to the left and right of him, and some behind him. Ahmad wears the costume of a warrior captain. He is awe-inspiring: he wears short tight *Bugis* trousers, a sleeveless jacket, a decorated fez, and a sword. He carries a gun, which has the name 'the brass one'. This weapon is endowed with great luck, and whenever it is fired a cloud of smoke bellows forth.<sup>37</sup>

The text proceeds to relate that "the hearts of all are expanded with joy when the Raja watches the work of his people."<sup>38</sup> This quotation conveys the impression that the real concerns of a *raja* were ceremonial in character. After reading such descriptions, it is not unexpected to discover that the rulers' participation in ceremonial matters is literally termed 'work'.<sup>39</sup> Here again Abdullah presents this participation in the most pejorative terms. He describes the royal courts as being obsessed with petty regulations about the display of status. He reports that in Trengganu the 'head of customs' told him the "regulations of the country" were merely that when you pass the house of a *raja* "it is forbidden to put up an umbrella" and that you "must not wear shoes or yellow clothes or fine muslin." Such laws, proclaims Abdullah, were "foolish" and "useless". Why did the *rajahs*, he asks, not concern themselves with matters of importance 'to all mankind', matters such as the prevention of opium smoking.<sup>40</sup>

The Munshi had much more to say about these sumptuary laws, which were presented in the court texts also as a central concern of Malay 'government'. There were rules, explains Abdullah, which determined the house styles, personal dress and even boat decorations for different ranks in society. A commoner, for example, could not build a stone house or a finely decorated house. Not only shoes and umbrellas

but also brass objects were prohibited. "They are afraid even to keep fine clothing in their houses because it is said that such things are the prerequisites of royalty".<sup>41</sup> When a *raja* passed by on the road the commoner "was obligated to sit on the ground in the mud and filth".<sup>42</sup>

Abdullah reports that the Malay subject was prevented in fact from possessing anything of value or doing "anything important."<sup>43</sup> The sumptuary laws were part of a system which discouraged the subject from bringing about change of any type. Malays could not, explains Abdullah, acquire knowledge or property and nor were they permitted to "... lift up their heads and enjoy themselves."<sup>44</sup> Abdullah considered that the Malay *raja* humiliated his subjects "as though he thought of them as animals."<sup>45</sup> In such words the Munshi expressed a view held also by contemporary European analysts of the Malay world that the Malay individual possessed "no rights either of person or of property."<sup>46</sup>

Abdullah's own discussion of the humiliation of the individual will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter. It is, in one sense puzzling, however, that Europeans could have considered sumptuary laws "stupid" and "useless". Such regulations had been in operation only recently in Europe. As late as the mid-eighteenth century, for instance, French women whose husbands were labourers were prohibited from dressing in the manner of women married to masters of a craft.<sup>47</sup> In both France and England, the statute books had contained complex and detailed sumptuary laws. The *ancien régime* in Europe gave much prominence to etiquette and ceremony.<sup>48</sup> It was by "precedence and rank" that the people "measure their respect and obedience" explained Louis XIV: "one cannot, without doing harm to the whole body of the state, deprive its head of the least mark of superiority distinguishing it from the limbs."<sup>49</sup> Why then were European observers of the nineteenth century so surprised that a Malay ruler's participation in seemingly festive occasions was dignified by the term 'work'?<sup>50</sup> Had the memory of 'court society' in Europe dimmed or did the Malay ruler's concern with ceremony seem particularly exaggerated? The latter appears possible. Western envoys to the Malay world, even in the eighteenth century, had recognized the need to respect ritual niceties in their negotiations with the local monarchs. Merely to place a seal in the wrong position on a letter would be regarded as a "gross insult" and the emphasis given to correct seating and correct behaviour at a royal audience was often remarked upon.<sup>51</sup>

Certainly no critical or embarrassed tone is employed when Malay *kerajaan* writings discuss these matters of ceremony and form. Regulations about dress and housing are treated as being of the greatest importance. In the *Malay Annals*, for example, they are said to be the first matters attended to in the creation of the new Muslim polity of

Malacca. When Sultan Muhammad Shah, it is related, embraced Islam and “commanded” every citizen of Malacca “whether of high or low degree” to convert also,<sup>52</sup> he bestowed titles on certain people and then established the arrangements of his polity. He is described as having “arranged his sovereignty.”<sup>53</sup> It was this Sultan Muhammad, the text proceeds to explain, who established the prohibitions on the use of the colour yellow. It was this ruler who introduced the royal privilege of possessing enclosed verandahs and metal coating on the sheath of a dagger (*keris*).<sup>54</sup> He also established ceremonies for the arrival and departure of envoys and for the seating and eating arrangements for different ranks at royal audiences. These were the customs (called *adat* or *istiadat*) of Malacca, the text proclaims. The account then concludes with the judgement that Sultan Muhammad was very just (*adil*) in caring for all his subjects. Strangers flocked to Malacca and the text seems to imply that this, in fact, was the result of royal, ceremonial justice.<sup>55</sup>

In the legal digests of the sultanates such prominence is again given to sumptuary regulations. The code known as the *undang-undang Melaka* commences with a section on “the Custom and Regulations and Attire of Rulers and all the Royal Prohibitions which are to be observed by the Subjects.” The section opens with the declaration: “Let it be known to you that you are not to wear, for example, [articles of] yellow colour, and even in the case of high dignitaries, the punishment [for this offence] is death.”<sup>56</sup> In a code said to come from Pahang the first section again notes that yellow curtains, yellow cushion covers and gold tassels are privileges reserved for royalty. Their unauthorized use by others is punished by confiscation or execution.<sup>57</sup> What these texts make clear is that such regulations were an integral aspect of the sultanate. The regulations were a part of the ceremonial structure, the *adat istiadat*, which is persistently presented as the first concern of the *raja*. It is warm praise to state – as does a Pahang chronicle – that the “arrangements” at a certain *raja*’s court are excellent and the ceremonial “fixed in the style of great *rajas*.”<sup>58</sup> Participation in royal ceremonies would seem to have been very much the ‘work’ of a *raja* and the perfect regulation of dress, house styles and social behaviour must indeed have indicated the presence of a just and successful ruler.<sup>59</sup> Here then is a positive perspective on the royal preoccupation with apparently frivolous matters which so disgusted Abdullah.

The Munshi was concerned essentially with the consequences of, and not the rationale behind, this preoccupation. In his account, the subject of a Malay Sultan is portrayed as being humiliated, treated as an animal rather than a human. Abdullah criticizes what he saw as the discouragement of individual initiative and achievement in Malay society. (In the next chapter we will examine more closely how Abdullah’s

assumptions about the individual underpinned both his antagonism toward *kerajaan* rule and his own social philosophy.)

Unlike the Munshi, the court writers present an internal, *kerajaan* point of view. They are unlikely to have considered that the sultanate demeaned the royal subject. They were less concerned about the individual than about status. In the Malay polity, the royal ideologues suggest, everyone held a rank and that rank was defined by a certain style of dress, accommodation, and behaviour. Many people possessed titles and these were often associated with particular insignia. It was the boast of a successful Malay court that every subject was treated according to his or her proper rank (*taraf*).<sup>60</sup> To address people by the correct title, to seat them in the proper place at an audience were requirements of good administration. A ruler had to know and respect the rank, the title, the 'reputation' of his subject. (The term *nama* was sometimes used to convey the status and reputation of an individual.)<sup>61</sup> In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that refined manners were considered to be of paramount importance for a successful ruler. Eulogistic texts often praise a *raja* not only for the excellence of his ceremonies but also for possessing a graceful or delicate personal style. It is frequently implied that, as a result, he was able to attract multitudes of new subjects to his well-ordered court.

The court texts, in their own very different way, agree with Abdullah on the qualities of government which are considered of paramount importance in the *kerajaan*. It is not a spectacular hygiene campaign, a modernizing educational program or a vigorous free-trade environment which sustains a successful sultanate. One text even boasts that in the sultanate of Bandjarmarsin in Borneo "no-one was allowed to plant more than a few pepper trees per head ... if more should be planted for the purpose of making money, this would bring misery."<sup>62</sup> Success for a sultan evidently entailed attracting large numbers of loyal subjects (and it was subjects rather than territory which they cared about), but the ruler offered ceremonial rather than material rewards to these people. Some *kerajaan* texts actually throw light on why Malays may have viewed royal "government" in this manner. In its perception of the Malay individual, this literature gives a particular significance to *nama*, that is, to reputation, title or name. The polity – the *kerajaan* – is presented in terms of its capacity to satisfy the requirements of *nama*. In particular it is described as giving definition to *nama*. How one was addressed, the clothes one wore, the type of *keris* one carried, and the position one assumed at court, were all regulated by the *kerajaan* and each was an indication, or demonstration, of *nama*.

To the modern reader, this type of concern for *nama* suggests a pre-occupation with externals, with the superficial. But we cannot assume

that *kerajaan* Malays saw *nama* in such a way. There is no evidence of the presence in pre-colonial Malay writings of the developed sense of interiority, of personal individuality, which is pivotal in modern societies. In reading traditional Malay works or investigating Malay society, there are no firm grounds upon which to privilege individualism or an individual perspective. The fact that Abdullah himself did privilege individualism may in large part explain his condemnation of the Malay polity. If we are today to attempt to appreciate the *kerajaan* perspective, it is necessary to be as cautious of the concept of 'individual' as we must be of 'race', 'state' or 'politics'. It might be recalled, for instance, that in a society without a strong sense of an individual consciousness lying beneath formal codes, rituals and signs, the significance of these codes must have been greatly enhanced.

In such a society of what Richard Sennett has referred to as 'Public Men',<sup>63</sup> the old Malay dictum that "life is contained within custom (*adat*)" would have possessed a profound significance. Transgressions of custom had to be deeply damaging. To be spoken to incorrectly would be understood as a profound insult likely to cause offence of a type analogous to what we might today consider psychological pain. This power of language can be seen, for instance, in the *Malay Annals* when the text describes what some modern readers have misleadingly called a 'contract' between the founder of the Malacca ruling line and his new subjects.<sup>64</sup> The latter swear never to be disloyal (*derhaka*) but also request (it is not a condition) that they themselves should never be "disgraced or reviled with evil words." In the case of a serious offence, the subjects submit, the sentence of death was preferable to punishment by 'evil words'.<sup>65</sup> To rank penalties in this way is understandable only when we recall the significance which Malay writings attribute to *nama* and the consequences this would have for all social interactions. Equally, when another text bases its praise of a particular polity on the ground that among all the ruler's subjects "no person's *nama* was wronged",<sup>66</sup> the statement again becomes more intelligible when we treat 'individualism' as a problematical category. To allow 'free play' to the category of *nama*, it is indeed necessary, in the words of Jacques Derrida, to "pass beyond man and humanism."<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore – and again this is not the impression given by Abdullah – what might be called the *nama* system cannot be assumed to have been static. In his stewardship of *nama*, the *raja* was not engaging in a status system held in equilibrium. Malay writings suggest that the subject could improve his *nama* through loyal service to the *raja* and that one of the signs of an enhanced *nama* was a new title. In this circular arrangement, an able *raja* who wished to enhance his own *nama* rewarded his loyal subjects by lifting their status (by giving them higher titles)

and, as a consequence, attracted large numbers of subjects to his court. The talented subject who possessed extraordinary physical or mental strength might find an outlet for this 'abundance of power' (this is the way 'talent' is sometimes imaged in Malay literature) in service to the *kerajaan*. The wise ruler knew how to harness an 'abundance of powers'. Through such mutuality, both subject and *raja* were able to improve their respective *namas*.<sup>68</sup>

A final characteristic of this potent term is that it possessed implications not only for life in this world but also for the hereafter. Those who wish to enter heaven, explains the hero of the renowned epic, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, must die with a good name (*nama yang baik*).<sup>69</sup> Similarly a Malay text from East Sumatra reminds its audience that rank in this world is "honoured in the next".<sup>70</sup> On the basis of such warnings, it is not unexpected to read in the *Malay Annals* that "the just *raja* and the Prophet of God are like two jewels in one ring." If one recalls the "world that endures after death", explains that text, it is wise to give devoted service not only to God but also to the *raja*.<sup>71</sup> (We shall see that such juxtaposing of kingship and Islam was viewed with abhorrence by many, but not all, Islamic writers.)

In the literature of the royal courts, therefore, *nama* is portrayed as generating action, and as doing so in ways which would eventually be condemned by certain Islamic and European-influenced writers. Again it is difficult to determine to what extent commoner Malays participated, and saw benefits, in this 'system'. We shall see that even before the British colonial period, there was articulate and trenchant opposition in certain quarters. In general, however, the emphasis which Munshi Abdullah places on the submission of the people seems typical.<sup>72</sup> A wary respect for a social order dominated by a royal élite is a theme, for instance, of numerous Malay folk sayings.<sup>73</sup> An indication of commoner complicity in *kerajaan* mechanisms of control and reward is hinted at, also, in a European 'intelligence report' of a royal audience in Trengganu. The 1875 report emphasizes that there was "no bustling or pushing ... everybody seems to be contented with the position he may have taken up."<sup>74</sup>

Europeans commented too on what they saw as a Malay passion for titles. One of the most perceptive officials of the early British colonial presence bemoaned the fact that Malay provincial chiefs were "never content with the reality of power ... they imperil it for the sake of empty titles."<sup>75</sup> Such statements suggest Malay subjects would not have agreed with Abdullah in describing the sumptuary laws (so necessary to the display of status) as "stupid", "useless" or "degrading". Regulations about behaviour, dress or accommodation would have been seen by these chiefs as integral parts of a status system. As the royal texts

explain, to punish severely the unauthorized wearing of yellow, the building of a stone house or the use of a parasol was essential to the protection and display of *nama*. Sensitive to their status, the chiefs who sought these titles would not only hope to be addressed correctly but would also perceive sumptuary laws as helping to safeguard their position in this world and the next.

What the court texts convey is that, at least from a *kerajaan* perspective, there was nothing empty about royal titles, nothing useless about dress and housing regulations and nothing frivolous about ceremony. In this sense, it may be misleading to talk of the Malay ceremonial polity as a 'theatre state'. From the point of view of Abdullah or certain European observers the Malay ceremonial polity would certainly have had a theatrical appearance. Looking at the Malay sultanate from an outsider's perspective, it might well have seemed, to use Clifford Geertz's words, that "power served pomp and not pomp power."<sup>76</sup> But such a stress on 'theatre' and 'pomp' runs the risk of suggesting that there was something hollow about the Malay polity.<sup>77</sup> Whatever the outsider's perception may have been, from within the *kerajaan*, 'pomp' itself is likely to have been understood in highly significant terms.

To appreciate the substance of this ceremonial polity, it is necessary to look behind or through the pomp to see what significance the ceremony and regulations of the *kerajaan* possessed for its royal subjects. (I say 'significance' because it makes the question as open as possible. To ask about the specifically political significance of pomp, for instance, immediately narrows the field of inquiry.) In particular, we need to ground the ceremonies as securely as possible in the royal ideology enunciated in the court texts. In this ideology the concept of *nama* is critical. When we consider the delineation of the individual in Malay court texts the urgent importance of ceremonial (*adat istiadat*) and of the 'condition of having a raja' is unmistakable.

In *kerajaan* ideology, royal subjects understand what we might call their identity and purpose in terms of rajaship. In describing the bonding relationships between ruler and subject in *kerajaan* ideology we must be cautious even of using language which assumes the subject's distinct and separate identity. The notion of lives "contained within custom" and the image of *namas* embedded in royal ceremonial structure suggest that, according to *kerajaan* ideology, individual Malays were seen almost as portions rather than subjects of kingship. In these circumstances the expression of anxiety about being 'raja-less', the fear of the 'utter confusion' which reigns in the absence of kingship, is understandable. It is equally important to examine the terms in which Malay texts make strong injunctions against treason (*derhaka*).



The act of treason is not only punished with dramatic severity but is often described with an abhorrence that suggests bewilderment, as well as condemnation. Even in a case of a royal official who learns that his sultan has slept with his wife, treason is described by the *Malay Annals* as unthinkable. The text states that at the time of his encounter with the sultan, the official had many supporters with him and could easily have killed the ruler. But because the official was a Malay subject, "he would not waiver in his loyalty to the *raja*."<sup>78</sup> In such injunctions against treason – injunctions, of course, which were not always obeyed – Malay ideologues seem to have been engaged in much more than the production of propaganda designed to protect their patron. They were perhaps alluding also to the possibility that destroying the *raja* entailed the destruction of one's own integrity. Treason would bring "utter confusion" simultaneously to both the community and the individual. It would radically affect one's position not only in this life but also the hereafter. It would entail a loss of identity. To continue to employ terms we might use today, treason would be perceived as a type of psychological and spiritual suicide.

The Malay ceremonial monarchy, therefore, was in no sense a frivolous institution. Nor does the stress on the role of pomp and theatre (which is found in all contemporary accounts of the *kerajaan*) mean that the monarch ignored the "struggles and processes"<sup>79</sup> of power in the polity. There was no opposition between power and pomp. The *kerajaan* ideology, as portrayed in court writings, informed the operations of power. We shall see that during the nineteenth century this ideology was only one of a number of competing ways of perceiving society and social action. The competing ideology advocated by Munshi Abdullah portrayed society very much in the type of liberal, political terms with which we are familiar today. Even the *kerajaan* doctrines, however, with their stress on ceremony and preparation for the afterlife, did not deny but rather gave meaning and direction to such mundane pursuits as commerce, war, and the struggle for preferment. In *kerajaan* texts, just as in the comments of Abdullah and other observers, Malay rulers are seen to be no less experienced in intrigue and as desirous of financial advantage as kings or presidents in other parts of the world.

Where the *kerajaan* concepts provided additional understanding, however, is in the light they throw on the reasons for engaging in commerce, war or any seemingly political action. They cast light, for instance, on such specific issues as why one ruler rather than another attracted followers and, as we shall see, on such phenomena as the royal persecution of wealthy merchants or the struggle which developed between *rajās* and religious scholars. In illuminating motivation in this

way the *kerajaan* concepts also draw attention in a general sense to the character of social action in pre-colonial society. They remind us, for instance, that this was a society in which 'politics', as we today understand the term, would be considered an alien phenomenon.

*Nama*, *adat istiadat* and *kerajaan*, as key terms in an ideology which shaped the thought and actions of at least some members of the pre-colonial Malay polities, suggest a 'political' culture very different from that of liberal Europe. Malays owed their primary allegiance not to a territorially defined state, or even an ethnic or religious unity, but rather to a royal personage. They defined themselves as subjects of a sultan. Indeed some Malay writings suggest that the royal subject's being, what we could call his individuality, was defined largely in terms of an official title and status in a royal hierarchy. The *kerajaan* polity, so Abdullah and the court writers suggest, was not perceived as an association of individuals, each seeking personal fulfilment ("lifting up their heads" and "doing something important") and each capable of contributing to the organization of the whole. The *kerajaan* in its structure and purposes gives the impression of reflecting long-standing and transcendent principles. (*Adat*, as Abdullah knew, could never be altered.) The *kerajaan* is not presented in Malay writings as the time-bound product of the rational manoeuvrings of its individual citizenry. In the ceremonial Malay polity there was no tradition of political engagement, of the individual participating actively in the creation and running of the administrative process. Indeed there is no specifically secular sphere in which such engagement might occur: though Malays would not have made such a distinction, the *kerajaan* might better be described as a religious sphere and system.

To apprehend a political culture informed by such concepts as *nama*, *adat istiadat* and *kerajaan*, and lacking critical modern notions relating to the state, ethnicity, the individual, government and politics, clearly requires on our part a degree of imagination. To understand the indigenous critique of this political culture, it is necessary to postulate an 'insider's' interpretation, and for this reason we seek to identify 'key terms' and speak of a *kerajaan* 'system'. Although tending to exaggerate the degree of ideological coherence or closure which is likely to have existed in the pre-colonial polity, this approach nevertheless helps to educe an image of a social formation very different from that of societies with which we are most familiar today. It provides keys to reconstructing the rationale lying behind the 'ceremonial polity' which was so roundly condemned by Abdullah.

A further way of making sense of the *kerajaan* entails investigating other political traditions in a comparative manner. Abdullah perhaps had not travelled or read widely enough to have access to comparative

knowledge; however, the Europeans who commented harshly on what they saw as a Malay preoccupation with ceremony might have found analogues of the Malay polity not only in published accounts of Burma, Thailand and other parts of Asia<sup>80</sup> but also in the *ancien régime* of Europe. In Versailles, as Norbert Elias has explained, the loss of 'honour' was greatly feared. French people too attended the royal court to ensure their "spiritual salvation, their prestige as court aristocrats, in short, their social existence and their personal identity".<sup>81</sup> Abdullah's descriptions and critique of Malay "court society" (to use Elias' phrase) could therefore be considered in the context of a wider, intercultural, analysis of social formations.

The subversion of the *kerajaan* (a process in which both Abdullah and others engaged) might also be examined against a broader background. To employ the mode of analysis adopted by Antonio Gramsci,<sup>82</sup> the *kerajaan* would have been perceived by its Malay opponents to be a hegemonic ideology. (Loyal subjects of the Malay rulers, of course, would view the monarchical system not in this way but in vastly less cynical terms.) Attempts at ideological subversion, at what Gramsci terms a 'passive revolution' or 'war of position', were in fact pursued from more than one direction. We shall see, for instance, that over a number of centuries, certain Islamic writers had both questioned the ontological foundations of the Malay polity and advocated alternative doctrines regarding the person and the community.

The concern of the next chapter, however, will be to examine in close detail Abdullah's attack on the *kerajaan*. We will pause to consider the intellectual foundations of his critique and also attempt to outline what might be termed the programs of reform which he advocated. The more closely we interrogate Abdullah's writings, the better we see the ideological turbulence developing behind the apparent inertia of colonial Malay society. British Malaya, it is true, was disturbed neither by large-scale rebellion nor mass protest movements, but the differences between the *kerajaan* and its ideological enemies were fundamental in character. Moreover, the ways in which these differences were both resolved and debated has an interest extending well beyond the Malay Peninsula.

### Notes

- 1 Louis Dumont, 'Preface to the French Edition of *The Nuer*', in J.H.M. Beattie and R.G. Lienhardt (eds), *Studies in Social Anthropology Essays in Memory of E.E. Evans-Pritchard by his former Oxford Colleagues*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 337.
- 2 A contemporary physical description is provided by J.T. Thomson, quoted in A.H. Hill, 'The Hikayat Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, 28, 3 (1955), 11.

- 3 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 17.
- 4 Hill, 'Hikayat Abdullah', 11; see also H.F.O'B. Traill, 'An Indian Protagonist of the Malay Language', *JMBRAS*, 52, 2 (1979), *passim*.
- 5 Although certain modern Malay authors refer to Abdullah as a 'Malay' (see, for instance, Kassim Ahmad's 'introduction' to *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1964), 1, and Anas Haji Ahmad, *Sastera Melayu Lama dan Baru* (Pinang: Sinaran, 1975), 13), H.F.O'B. Traill observes that Abdullah possessed 'no Malay blood'; see his 'Aspects of Munshi Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, LIV, 3 (1981), 46.  
As suggested in the text of this chapter, Traill may be employing a concept of 'race' which did not prevail in Abdullah's time. Nevertheless Traill has also taken pains to show how Abdullah describes himself in certain manuscripts as a Malay; see, for instance, 'The "Lost" Manuscript of Hikayat Abdullah Munshi', *JMBRAS*, LV, 2 (1982), 130; 'An Indian Protagonist of the Malay Language', *JMBRAS*, LII, 2 (1979), 69. Traill notes that, in addition, Abdullah's son Ibrahim, who also possessed 'no Malay blood', 'seems to have been fully integrated with the Malay community' ('Aspects of Munshi Abdullah', 46).
- On the process of 'becoming Malay', see A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan. Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: Association for Asian Studies Monograph No XL, 1982), ch v.
- 6 Hill, 'Hikayat Abdullah', 11–12.
- 7 J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1865), 149.
- 8 For the Malay, see chapter 6 below; the reference to the Chinese is suggested by J.R. Clammer, *Straits Chinese Society* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1980); Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation. Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981), 160–1. Mary F. Somers Heidhues, *Southeast Asia's Chinese Minorities* (Hawthorn, Vic.: Longman, 1974); and V. Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975) ch. 6.
- 9 R.A. Datoek Besar and R. Roolvink (eds), *Hikajat Abdullah* (Djakarta and Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1953), 41; see also Hill, 'Hikayat Abdullah', 5–33; H.F.O'B. Traill, 'Aspects', 45. On his relations with Islamic leaders, see Yusof A. Talib, 'Munshi Abdullah's Arab Teachers', *JMBRAS*, LXIII, 2 (1990), 27–34. Regarding his relations with Christian missionaries, see A.C. Milner, 'A Missionary Source for a Biography of Munshi Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, LIII, 1 (1980) 111–19.
- 10 Hill, 'Hikayat Abdullah', 5–33.
- 11 See chapter 2 below.
- 12 For a discussion of the journey, see C. Skinner, 'Abdullah's Voyage to the East Coast, Seen Through Contemporary Eyes', *JMBRAS*, 39, 2 (1966), 22–33. For the romanized text of the account, see Kassim Ahmad (ed.), *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah*. For an English translation, see A.E. Coope (ed. and trans.), *The Story of the Voyage of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1949).
- 13 For a romanized text, see R.A. Datoek Besar and R. Roolvink (eds), *Hikajat Abdullah* (Djakarta and Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1953). For an English translation, see Hill, 'Hikayat Abdullah'.
- 14 See A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan*, ch. 1.
- 15 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 50.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 17 Mark Francis (ed.), 'Captain Joseph Jackson's Report on Trengganu, 1764', *Journal of the Historical Society (University of Malaya)*, 8 (1969–70), 76.
- 18 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 50.
- 19 T.J. Newbold, *British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (1839) (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971), vol.2, 56.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 57–8.
- 21 See, for instance, John Crawford's discussion of the *Malay Annals* in John Crawford, *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands and Adjacent Countries* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1856), 250, 362.

- 22 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 419.
- 23 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 106.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 25 Hugh Clifford, British Agent to the state of Pahang in 1887, quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 8.
- 26 Hugh Clifford, writing at a much later date, quoted in *Ibid.*
- 27 Frank Swettenham, another British official, quoted in *Ibid.*
- 28 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 2.
- 29 I discuss this literature in *Ibid.*, 37ff, 64f, 81ff, 101f.
- 30 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 94.
- 31 *huru hara*; *Ibid.*, 109.
- 32 *Ibid.* This discussion of the centrality of the ruler in the Malay polity suggests continuities with earlier polities in various parts of Southeast Asia; see O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture and Region*, ch. 1.
- 33 Milner, *Kerajaan*, ch.4. See also J.M. Gullick, 'The Condition of having a Raja: A Review of *Kerajaan* by A.C. Milner' *RIMA*, 1 6/2, 1982, 109–29.
- 34 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 420, 426; Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 47; see also 36.
- 35 Quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 49.
- 36 R.O. Winstedt, 'The Malay Annals', *JMBRAS*, 16, 3 (1938), 140–1.
- 37 Quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 46–7.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 40 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 47. The Malay for 'foolish' is '*bodoh*', for 'useless', '*sia sia*'.
- 41 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 422; see also, Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 46.
- 42 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 419.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 422.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 *Ibid.*, 419.
- 46 Hugh Clifford, quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 8.
- 47 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 66.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 49 Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 117–18.
- 50 '*Kerja*', see H. Clifford comment, quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 49.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Winstedt, 'Malay Annals', 84.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 88. On the use of '*adat*' and '*istiadat*', see 86.
- 56 Liaw Yock Fang (ed.), *Undang Undang Melaka* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 64–5.
- 57 J.E. Kempe and R.O. Winstedt (eds), 'A Malay Legal Digest', *JMBRAS*, 21, 1 (1948), 4, 30.
- 58 The *Hikayat Pahang*, quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 46.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 46–7.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 61 See the discussion in *Ibid.*, 46, 52, 63, 72, 104ff. *Nama* possesses a relationship with *taraf*, *gelar*, and *pangkat*, all of which are related to status.
- 62 J.J. Ras (ed.), *Hikayat Banjar: A Study in Malay Historiography* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 443.
- 63 Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, *passim*.
- 64 Winstedt, 'Malay Annals', 56–7.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 66 From the *Hikayat Deli*, quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 96.
- 67 J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 292.

- 68 For fuller discussion see Milner, *Kerajaan*, ch. 6.
- 69 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 109.
- 70 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 107.
- 71 Winstedt, 'Malay Annals', 144.
- 72 See the discussion in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 49.
- 73 R.O. Winstedt, *Malay Proverbs* (London: John Murray, 1957), 46–9.
- 74 Quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 49. In this book I suggested that the concept of *malu*, shame, stands to some extent in opposition to *nama*. A person was expected to avoid *malu* with the same determination as one sought *nama*. *Ibid.*, 106–7.
- 75 R.J. Wilkinson, 'Notes on Negri Sembilan' (1911), reprinted in R.J. Wilkinson (ed.), *Papers on Malay Subjects* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971), 304.
- 76 Clifford Geertz, *Negara, The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13.
- 77 The term 'hollow' is used in precisely this way by Nicholas Dirks in his critique of Geertz's 'Theatre State'; *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3–5; also *ibid.*, ch. 14.
- 78 Winstedt, 'Malay Annals', 186.
- 79 Dirks stresses "political struggles and processes", *Hollow Crown*, 5. A recent study on Sumatra makes a major contribution to our understanding of the significance of pomp and theatre (particularly in respect to royal letter writing) in the Minangkabau polity; Jane Drakard, 'A Kingdom of Words: Minangkabau Sovereignty in Sumatran History', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1993.
- 80 See the discussion in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 156–7. On Burma, see my discussion in 'Malay Kingship in a Burmese Perspective', in I. Mabbett (ed.) *Patterns of Kingship and Authority in Traditional Asia* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), 158–83.
- 81 Elias, *Court Society*, 99. Parallels might also be investigated in relation to Spanish monarchy. For a discussion of the way service to the Spanish ruler was perceived, see J.H. Elliott, *The Revolt of the Catalans, A Study in the Decline of Spain, 1598–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 41, 67, 74.
- 82 See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith, eds) (New York: International, 1980); David Forgacs (ed.), *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935* (New York: Schocken, 1988); see above, Introduction, note 11.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Establishing a Liberal Critique*

How we assess Abdullah's writing and influence must affect our entire view of late nineteenth-century Malay society. This chapter suggests that his work forms a point of departure for a liberal critique of the *kerajaan*, a critique which proposed new ways of thinking about political life and urged the primacy of 'race' over *raja* as a focus of communal loyalty and identity. Much recent historiography plays down such indications of social dislocation in the first century of British involvement on the Malay Peninsula. Despite the fact that Penang had been under colonial administration since the 1780s and that vast economic, bureaucratic and communication changes had taken place during the 1800s, some scholars judge that only in the twentieth century did "accelerating processes of social change" develop in Malay society.<sup>1</sup> Abdullah's works are vital in judging such a conclusion, because it is certainly the case that no other writer of the period can rival Abdullah as a possible nineteenth-century founder of Malay modernism.

One reason given for denying Abdullah's importance as an exponent of passive revolution is the suggestion that he exercised his principal impact on only a "section of the European community."<sup>2</sup> His postulated audience is also sometimes described as having been "European not Malay"<sup>3</sup> and the Malays themselves are said, even today, to "have difficulty appreciating Abdullah".<sup>4</sup> He is accused of a lack of patriotism and of "disloyalty" to the Malays because of his "extreme Anglophilia"<sup>5</sup> and it is observed that he "left behind him no school of writers".<sup>6</sup> Against this view, certain Malay writers describe the Munshi as the "father of modern Malay literature".<sup>7</sup> Similarly his criticism of the sultanates is often presented as being unprecedented in Malay writing. One Malay literary specialist (who later became the leader of a prominent socialist party)<sup>8</sup> has even suggested that Abdullah's books

mark a “structural change” between the “feudal world” of the old court *hikayats* and the “broader and realist world of democracy.”<sup>9</sup> Our discussion of the Munshi’s account of the sultanate in the last chapter already provides support for placing him in the front line of the ideological revolution against the *kerajaan*. In the following pages we shall note a range of preoccupations in Abdullah’s writings, but they contain, in particular, certain liberal doctrines, components of a creed which helped to set both the agenda and the idiom of Malay political debate right up to the 1990s.

The contrast between perceptions of Abdullah as revolutionary, on the one hand, and disloyal Anglophile, on the other, may itself be less sharp than the rhetoric of academic disagreement suggests. No single voice, it might be argued, is univocal. In Abdullah’s case, however, it is precisely because he was radically opposed, or disloyal, to one group of Malays – the traditional élite – that he might be described as a revolutionary. Also his Anglophilia, which cannot be denied, was an integral part of that radicalism. It is true that Europeans read Abdullah’s works and translated them into English. As he himself anticipated,<sup>10</sup> they probably used his texts to practise their own Malay. They must also have found the contents of his writings attractive. In the ‘autobiography’, he provides one of the most detailed and lively accounts of the Straits Settlements – its government officials, missionaries and traders as well as many of the best-remembered events – during the early nineteenth century. Anyone able to offer, as Abdullah does, intimate pen sketches of such imperial heroes as Thomas Stamford Raffles could not fail to obtain a readership among the Europeans who continued to live in the shadow of that much esteemed man. Abdullah, however, addressed not just an English but also a Malay audience, and one in whom he placed hope for the future reform of the Malay community. The evidence for this view is found partly in his own rhetoric. It is true that there is little sign of a ‘school of writers’ surrounding Abdullah. Nevertheless he did have an immediate impact on a school of administrators and it is possible also to detect numerous lines of influence leading from Abdullah to the ideologues of the early twentieth century.

In what sense precisely was Abdullah an innovatory, revolutionary writer? His denunciation of the *rajās* and what he described as their oppressive customs and practices has a strongly seditious flavour. But Abdullah did not merely criticize the *rajās*. In their own way, his books also presented Malays with a scheme of reform. He presents what might be described as a positive program, the elements of which were anticipated in chapter 1. The sumptuary laws are described by Abdullah as suffocating the individual subject. Under Malay rule a person could do nothing of importance, nothing “important” (*besar*). If a man was “seen



to have property and a good livelihood”, Abdullah explains, “at once some charge or other is trumped up against him until he is ruined and his property exhausted.”<sup>11</sup> Where *rajas* ought to have been concerned about their subjects, according to the Munshi, was in matters of hygiene, the control of gambling and opium smoking, and, most importantly, in education. As it was, Abdullah found Malay rulers in general to be “ignorant” and “uneducated”.<sup>12</sup> Good government, he believed, would make Malays cleaner, healthier, better educated and more productive. In particular, they would be able to live in a society which rewarded rather than penalized “hard work”,<sup>13</sup> a society which also offered security of property. Abdullah’s ideal society would not be an aristocratic community with a hierarchy based on royal favour. The British-governed territories were Abdullah’s model, and in his assessment, they appear far more radical than the society of metropolitan Britain. In the colony, he explained, “we can sit with rajas, and if we are rich, we can build houses and wear clothes just like rajas.”<sup>14</sup>

Summed up in this way such social views, although familiar enough today, are utterly remote from the concerns of the *kerajaan*. Certain of the Munshi’s notions of the polity, of government, of economic life, and of education would indeed have been difficult for Malays to comprehend. In these matters and in his belief that government policies should foster the individual’s powers of reason, Abdullah’s views bear similarities with those of such European liberal thinkers as the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, Adam Smith.

The suggestion of a link with Adam Smith is not far-fetched. The Munshi was, for a period, in close contact with Stamford Raffles whom we know was much impressed by Smith.<sup>15</sup> But Adam Smith may be significant in a further sense. In examining his philosophical writing, Albert Hirschman has stressed the way in which the ideas of the *Wealth of Nations* emerge out of the discourse on human passions and interests in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. The debate about the control and counteracting of human passions is today largely forgotten because Smith established a new paradigm which collapsed all human passions into material self-interest and presented that interest not as threatening but as promoting the general welfare.<sup>16</sup> Just as the *Wealth of Nations* is grounded in a view of human nature, so it might be suggested that Abdullah’s perception of the individual holds a central position within his own particular ‘social philosophy’.

A new concept of ‘the individual’ is enunciated, for instance, in what might best be described as the ‘epilogue’ to the Munshi’s autobiography, the *Hikayat Abdullah*. In these few pages, Abdullah presents with clarity and brevity his views about Malay society. The ‘epilogue’, which is in fact called the ‘second volume’ of the book, was

apparently written after the main text was completed but is included in all printed editions of the *Hikayat*.<sup>17</sup> It presents something of a summation of the social observations made intermittently in the course of the earlier chapters. The 'autobiography' certainly benefits from having an epilogue. A large part of the first volume consists of detailed and sometimes repetitious accounts of the events which Abdullah witnessed during his lifetime. The most recent English translator and editor of the text, A.H. Hill, complains that the author "discusses unconnected topics in no logical order, returning again and again to his favourite themes..."<sup>18</sup> Although events are described in "roughly chronological sequence", observes Hill, the *Hikayat* "lacks formal development."<sup>19</sup>

The epilogue opens with the statement:

When I had finished the first volume of the book for some little time I gave myself up to thought, because I felt that the period of my lifetime had witnessed so many strange events and several great changes in the world. I saw customs and things which were never heard of or seen by our ancestors. These matters gave me cause for thought. I gave particularly serious thought to the circumstances of the Malays.<sup>20</sup>

We shall return to the matter of new customs and change. With such an introduction, however, one might indeed expect to find in the following pages some key to a more sensitive reading of the lengthy narration of the first volume. As Abdullah explains, the epilogue focuses on the mode of life of the Malay people – and the foregrounding of the Malay ethnic group in this manner demands careful attention.

The theme of the Malay condition, of Malay 'backwardness', was to continue for more than a century to preoccupy their leaders. In the epilogue, Abdullah remarks that he had found over the years that the Malay race, the *bangsa Melayu*, was becoming more and more "foolish".<sup>21</sup> As has been noted, he considered that the "principal reason" for this situation was "the cruel and unjust government of the Rajas toward their subjects." Through the following pages he repeats, in a relatively systematic fashion, the charges against the *kerajaan* system which are scattered throughout both his 'first volume' and his account of the voyage to the eastern peninsular states. In a few paragraphs of recapitulation he emphasizes the oppression of the *rajas*:

I have mentioned the injustices of the rajas because it is always the custom of the Malay ruler to despise his subjects, as though he thought of them as animals. Whenever a common man meets his ruler he is obliged to squat on the ground in the mud and filth ... The laws and punishments which he imposes on his subjects depend solely on his own private whim ... He keeps hundreds of debt-slaves, men who have brought ruin to the common folk, murdering people with no more compunction than killing an ant...<sup>22</sup>

In other passages he itemizes the rulers' failure to control their rapacious children, their refusal to encourage education, the ill effects of the sumptuary laws and many other old customs, and the consequences of discouraging individual enterprise and capital accumulation.

Abdullah advocates far-reaching changes. Look at the English, he says, they once "wore animal skins, lived in mud huts, daubed their arms and legs with blue paint and walked about with dishevelled hair." But in time, the English exchanged old customs for new ones: "If you say that your present customs are good ones and do not need to be changed then the English should return to painting their limbs blue and to discarding their present clothing in favour of animal skins."<sup>23</sup> The world is moving forward, he implies, but the Malays are becoming "like a piece of land trodden under foot by all those races of mankind which are on the move."<sup>24</sup> Again we meet here this notion of transition, of movement.

This epilogue to the *Hikayat* cannot easily be accused of lacking "formal development". The anecdotal style, which sometimes reminds us of the long-established *hikayat* style encountered in many court writings, is now abandoned. The way the argument is elaborated, in particular the frequent use of the conjunction 'because', and the use of subordinate clauses, gives the 'second volume' the character of an essay or treatise. (It also distinguishes Abdullah's writing from the predominantly paratactic style of most *hikayat* literature.<sup>25</sup>) Why, Abdullah asks, had Malays become "more and more stupid":

I considered the matter carefully in my mind and came to the conclusion that there were several reasons for this state of affairs, but that the main one was the oppression and tyranny of the Malay rulers, especially towards their own subjects.<sup>26</sup>

The point had been reached, Abdullah explains, "where Malay hearts had become like soil which no longer receives nourishment and therefore nothing at all can grow." In such hearts the "growth of industry, of education, of knowledge and of skill is not possible."<sup>27</sup>

Abdullah is arguing, and by means of metaphor. In the conclusion of the epilogue, he again draws a parallel with nature when he pleads for the education of Malay youth as a means of assisting the race. The statement is highly significant. "Intelligence" (*akal*) and "thought", he explains, should be able to flourish like a tree:

the growth of human beings (*manusia*) is to be compared with that of trees. Just as the young tree whose branches grow and multiply will later bear much fruit, so education of the young human produces fine benefits in later life.<sup>28</sup>

### Individualism

This presentation of the individual as the tree developing through time is central to Abdullah's philosophy. It underpins the argument of the epilogue; it lies behind both Abdullah's condemnation of the *kerajaan* and his program of education; and it is critical to understanding the idiom in which he wrote. Such a perception of individualism is certainly a far cry from the hierarchical *nama* identification elaborated in most *kerajaan* texts. The pre-colonial writings, it is true, did not portray humans as merely statuses: the size, the talents, the powers, and the passions of an individual might be mentioned but they are described almost in the same manner as the style of a person's costume. They are layered upon the person like items of clothing. What one does not encounter in the *kerajaan* literature is a sense of the individual as an interior self existing, developing and experiencing through time. The Malay community of 'Public Men' gives little indication of the existence of a private scale of values or a private self encountering the wider world. Although human passions are recognized they are not encouraged. The individual, the royal texts declare, must act in accordance with a seemingly immemorial Malay custom (*adat*), must not be arrogant or assertive, must not make himself or herself big (*membesarkan diri*).<sup>29</sup> What the Malay subject is encouraged to do is to consider and foster his or her *nama*. The avenue for the advancement of *nama*, so some court writings state, is through loyalty and service to the *raja*. It is significant also that such a perception of the individual is implicit in the literary style of those royal writings. To the modern reader these works present a lack of characterization; the dialogue often appears conventionalized and the authorial voice seems impersonal. There is no individual narrator, no unmistakable indication of a literary coherence grounded in a single perspective or mind.<sup>30</sup> As suggested in chapter 1, it is in the *raja*, or in a royal genealogical line, that the apparently diverse anecdotes which form the substance of most Malay texts find a unity.

The image of the human as a growing tree, shooting branches and bearing fruit, thus suggests a dimension of individuality apparently not yet explored in the *kerajaan* world. Not all aspects of the discussion of individuality, however, would have been incomprehensible to *kerajaan* Malays. In stressing the radical character of Abdullah's views, it is important not to discount the common ground that existed between him and a more conservative Malay audience. His rhetoric and language sometimes draw heavily on traditional Malay literary culture, and in doing so cast light not only on his own thinking but also on the type of audience for which he wrote. He employs terms, for instance, which had ideological potency in *kerajaan* writings and probably in the

minds of a good number of his readers. Thus, in writing of the individual, he acknowledges the significance of *nama* in Malay thinking by quoting the old adage that it is “better to die with a *nama* which is good than to live with a *nama* which is evil.”<sup>31</sup> He recognizes the power of the term again when pleading with the Malays to change certain aspects of their customs (*adat*): “If a man passes from ignorance to knowledge is it really possible,” he asks, “that his *nama* could be damaged?”<sup>32</sup> (The answer might well have been ‘yes’. We should not dismiss the possibility of an element of playfulness in Abdullah.) Despite the fact that the Malay concern for *nama* is encountered in Abdullah’s writing, however, what he does not do is link the word to the royal court. Royal preferment, in his works, is not the avenue for enhancement of *nama*: he certainly stresses the presence of the individual lying beneath *nama* and one immediately wonders what opportunities he saw for this individual in the context of the Straits Settlements or the Malay race.

A further area of common ground between the Munshi’s writing and Malay tradition appears to be the tree metaphor itself. Not surprisingly in a rural community, various Malay proverbs compare trees with humans or families.<sup>33</sup> Also, as Abdullah himself notes in his *Voyage*, when a child was born, sometimes a tree was planted so that in later years the adult would describe his age as the “age of the tree”.<sup>34</sup>

In grappling with the notion of the developing individual, therefore, Abdullah could be seen as applying a well-known trope to a new concept. By employing the image of the growing tree, he also explains a novel and potentially startling idea in terms with which his audience might have been familiar. Was this merely a rhetorical device or did it reflect Abdullah’s own intellectual debts to Malay culture? His early conversations in Malacca with learned Malays (discussed in the previous chapter), asking them about their language, and his “reading [of] the *hikayat* of early times”, would have helped form his thinking. *Nama*, after this experience, might well have become a potent concept for him. On the other hand, Abdullah’s talent for rhetoric is equally evident. There is at least an element of literary flourish, for instance, in the way he spells out one aspect of individualism by reversing an old maxim. The caution against arrogance or ‘making oneself great’ (*membesarkan diri*) is so common in traditional Malay writing that it is unlikely to be a coincidence when Abdullah uses the same word, *besar*, to the opposite purpose. When he actually deplores the fact that in Malay society the individual was deterred from doing things which are great (*besar*), the Munshi gives the impression that he is attempting to arrest the attention of his readers.

In such statements we see not only Abdullah's familiarity with Malay culture but the extent to which he addressed a specifically Malay readership. Just as with his frequent quoting of Malay sayings and his use of traditional Malay writing conventions, rhetoric of this type signals both a degree of cultural tension in Abdullah's encounter with new Western ideas, and a possible determination to influence a Malay audience. The latter is an aim he himself spells out at the end of the book when expressing the hope that the Malays will "take to heart the advice I have offered them."<sup>35</sup> It is revealed also in the "advice" paragraphs which are peppered throughout the work. These paragraphs, which tend to be located at the end of chapters, each commence with the word *nasehat* (advice), and contain exhortations to study hard, to rule justly, and to be prudent. In all but two cases the *nasehat* are directed explicitly at the Malay community.<sup>36</sup>

A degree of cultural or ideological tension in Abdullah's writing is to be expected even on the basis of his own narrative. The study of Malay tradition, as we have seen, was part of his education. The *Hikayat Abdullah* mentions that he had read widely in *kerajaan* literature and that at the feet of the "learned Malays", with whom he read the old *hikayat*, he learned "many Malay words, rare names, proverbs, sayings, and fine combinations of words."<sup>37</sup> Even in this statement, however, he seems to be suggesting, correctly or otherwise, that he treated Malay terminology and proverbs primarily as a rhetorical resource rather than a foundation for his understanding of the world.

Whereas the tree metaphor and the use of *nama* are resonant of traditional culture, elsewhere in Abdullah's writing his enunciation of individualism is as radical in its style as in the message itself. In the Munshi's mode of presentation, the idea of the developing and experiencing self is no less pervasive than the idea of the *raja* in court literature. It is evident, first, in Abdullah's persistent use of the strongly personal pronoun *aku* ('I'), which even today in Malay society is used in the family and among close friends. This is one of the most revolutionary features of his writing. Traditional Malay literary conventions not merely avoided the use of the first person pronoun but even encouraged anonymity of authorship.<sup>38</sup> There had admittedly been some sign of change before Abdullah's time. Early in the nineteenth century, the author of a Malay account of Bengal, a text which displays some of the characteristics of a modern travel diary and may have been read by Abdullah, stated his own name in opening the text.<sup>39</sup> As the modern editor of this Bengal account explains, however, the writer of the text "recedes rapidly into the background and it is only on rare occasions that we discern some break in his authorial anonymity"<sup>40</sup> There is no such hesitation in Abdullah's style. He opens

his *Voyage* with the announcement that “this is the story of the journey of Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munshi.”<sup>41</sup> He closes with several personal statements including the declaration that “I have not said a tenth of what I might have said about the differences between Malay and English customs, for if I were to tell everything then those responsible for the situation would be frantic.”<sup>42</sup>

The ‘autobiography’, too, commences with a personal statement. Abdullah makes the revealing admission that a European friend had “urged me strongly to give an account of my history and all the events of my life.”<sup>43</sup> But it is the actual title of this work which conveys most effectively the extraordinary nature of the project in relation to previous Malay writings. The title would have startled Malay readers. The term *hikayat* (‘story’ or ‘account’),<sup>44</sup> once reserved for works written in an impersonal voice – works which are often anonymous in authorship and generally focused on a particular *kerajaan* – was now coupled with the name of the individual author himself. Far from being anonymous or even politely reticent, the author is declared to be the explicit subject of his own composition. Anyone as familiar as Abdullah was with the *raja*-focused literature of the Malay courts would certainly have been aware of the aggressive, even seditious message conveyed by this title.

A second way in which the new individualism is announced in Abdullah’s style involves his concern for characterization. Lengthy descriptions of prominent figures such as Raffles, Sultan Hussain of Singapore (“his small head and neck buried under so much fat that it looked as if he had no neck”<sup>45</sup>) or the Resident, John Crawfurd (“tight-fisted and gave himself airs”<sup>46</sup>) have led the translator, A. H. Hill, to remark that the “great value” of the text “lies not in the dry record of a period well served by the chronicler and the annalist, but in the intimate pen-pictures he gives of the personalities of his time.”<sup>47</sup> Few of the “great men of the day in Malacca and Singapore”, Hill concludes, possess “any more discerning appreciation of their character than that found in the pages of Abdullah’s life story.”<sup>48</sup>

Again this feature dramatically distances Abdullah’s work from traditional Malay writings. Although scholars have sometimes attempted to identify what they consider to be examples of successful characterization in *kerajaan* literature, the results are not convincing.<sup>49</sup> This central category of European literary criticism seems inapplicable to the Malay texts which lack what John Bastin has described as a “personality base”. The Malay works do indeed seem to provide, in Bastin’s words, no “real idea of what [the individuals they refer to] thought as distinct historical beings.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, they are written in a language which, as the distinguished Malay scholar, Za’ba, has

explained, possessed no exact equivalents for the modern English terms 'personal' and 'personality'.<sup>51</sup> In traditional Malay writings, we see little evidence in particular of the type of personal or character analysis in which Abdullah engaged when describing Raffles. "What I particularly noticed," observes Abdullah, "was that everything about [Raffles], his work, words, intelligence, deportment, and kindness unmistakably denoted that here was a man of ability and great discretion."<sup>52</sup>

Telling the story of his own life, his travels and his encounters, Abdullah writes persistently in the first person. It is his authorial presence which provides continuity and connectedness to the anecdotal material of both the *Hikayat* and the *Voyage*. This personal voice strengthens the sense of authenticity and realism so often noticed in his narratives. Certainly, there are passages of vivid description in earlier court writings: even the sardonic scholar-official, Sir Richard Winstedt, wrote glowingly of them in his *History of Classical Malay Literature*.<sup>53</sup> But Abdullah's accounts of events such as the dramatic demolition of the Malacca Fort in 1807 or of Raffles' departure for England, and his description of the life and work of the missionary training college and the social conditions of the east coast peninsular states, possess an immediacy, or a 'realism', not encountered in the traditional literature.

In arguing that Abdullah was "the first writer in Malay to bring realism to this art", the English translator of his autobiography accurately identifies the significance of the author's humanism. The Munshi was the first writer in Malay to "see events of everyday life from the standpoint of the common experience of mankind and not through the spectacles of legend and romance."<sup>54</sup> There is subtlety in Hill's analysis because he refrains from asserting a reality to which 'realistic representation' corresponds. He grounds Abdullah's realism in the author's individual, human perspective, and indeed the passages of personal observation and reaction are those which best convey the novelty of Abdullah's style.

To take two examples: it is, first of all, the Munshi's presence at the scene of the blowing up of the huge Malacca fort which characterizes his description of the event.

There was confused shouting and people said that four or five people had been killed by pieces of rock. Then everyone ran forward together. I too ran to see what had happened, because I had been warned by my mother to go at least half a mile away. When I reached the house, I found a Pulicat Indian named Abdul Satar who had been having a meal when he was struck and wounded on the temples by a rock. When I went inside I found Basir. I could see only his legs. His body was weighed down by rocks. Some were six feet, others four feet across.<sup>55</sup>



It is because he actually saw the event that we learn there was “confused shouting”, that people were killed by flying rocks, that an Indian having a meal was killed and that another man was buried by the rubble.

Secondly, when he met the missionary, William Milne, Abdullah explains: “I wished to see what an English padre looked like and in what style he lived.”<sup>56</sup> Abdullah was soon working for Milne and we learn not only about the way he taught Malay to the missionary, but also about the problems of translation, and the activities and disputes in the mission. Milne is warmly praised: his

bearing and manner, I noticed, showed him to be a man of fine character. He said anything he had to say in a gentle voice with a kind look on his face. Even when he was arguing his manner remained pleasant. If we taught him anything one month and asked him a question about it the next month he would give a correct answer.<sup>57</sup>

In Abdullah’s judgements about places, too, we encounter a style radically different from the impersonal voice found in traditional literature. In the Munshi’s books, authenticity, it would seem, is grounded in the author not the *kerajaan*. In Pahang, for instance, he remembers: “I saw that cultivation consisted primarily of coconut and betelnut trees: but at the time I was there coconuts had the [high price] of eight coconuts for a dollar.” At a further point he records: “I asked where they got the gold. The people told me that the place for gold was fifteen days inland at a place called Jelai.” Again: “Of the Chinese community in Pahang ... I heard all the children speak Chinese rather than Malay.”<sup>58</sup> After leaving Pahang, and sailing toward Trengganu, he declares: “I continued to give thought to Pahang: what is the reason for the poverty and desolation of a state which had in former times possessed a high reputation among important states.”<sup>59</sup>

In this manner Abdullah begins to ponder on the different factors which might account for Pahang’s problems and here his ‘individualism’ has the most far-reaching consequences. He discounts the possibility that piracy is responsible: “I have never heard of any great country losing its trade and wealth because of pirates.”<sup>60</sup> Nor can he find a satisfactory explanation in the poverty of the soil or the laziness of the inhabitants. “In my opinion,” Abdullah concludes, “the reason for the poverty of the country of Pahang is that people live in constant fear of the oppression and cruelty of the *rajās* and chiefs.”<sup>61</sup> In passages of this type, even more than in the matter-of-fact observations made in his incipient journalistic style, the presence of the author is strongly asserted. Such reasoned analyses affirm unmistakably the powerful presence of an individual perspective. When scholars of Malay

literature comment repeatedly on Abdullah's persistent use of the personal pronoun,<sup>62</sup> they are noting only the most obvious aspect of the radically new literary mode. The numerous 'I's which punctuate the Munshi's texts can be seen as synecdoches which draw attention to an entire genre of writing and thought.

The literary voice, the characterization, the title of his major work are all, therefore, in their different ways, practical expressions of the perception of the individual which Abdullah elaborates in the 'epilogue' to his 'autobiography'. And it is this perception, of course, which underlies not only the style and focus of his writing but also the analysis which Abdullah makes of society in the independent Malay states. Abdullah condemns *kerajaan* society essentially because it is in conflict with the view of the individual enunciated in the tree metaphor. On the basis of his understanding of the 'person' he blames the *rajas*' tyranny for a situation in which the hearts of Malay subjects can be compared with unfertilized soil. As a result of this tyranny the "growth of industry, of education, of knowledge and of skill is not possible."

Such a perception of the subject, necessarily perhaps, entails a concept not only of individualism but also of humanity *per se* which might have surprised a large portion of his Malay readers. It is important to emphasize that Abdullah does not focus attention merely on the Malay subject (*rakyat*) rather than the ruler (who stands in the foreground of most traditional Malay writing). Nor is his analysis limited to the broader category of race (*bangsa*) although, as I shall suggest, the use of this classification is highly significant in his writing. Abdullah is concerned also with the further seemingly universal category of 'humanity'. The rulers' followers, for instance, are described as not just bringing ruin to the subjects (*rakyat*). They also "kill humans (*manusia*) as if they were only ants."<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere, Abdullah remarks that the injustice and cruelty carried out by the *raja*'s children or family is so severe that it cannot be tolerated by mankind (*manusia*).<sup>64</sup>

The attributes and potential of 'man', of course, are addressed in Abdullah's tree metaphor, but they are elucidated in other ways as well. Thus, he explains that "man (*manusia*) is created by Allah in a complete form, with intelligence (*akal*) and thought and character."<sup>65</sup> In a later passage we are told that it is language which "makes intelligence possible for mankind (*manusia*)" and "increases our cleverness and knowledge."<sup>66</sup> What is evident is that in these passages Abdullah is discussing not merely the royal subject, nor even the Malay, but man in general. In *manusia* he is using a word of Sanskrit origin which had long been present in Malay but is seldom employed in the *kerajaan* literature. (I shall return in a later chapter to the question of its presence in

Islamic literature.) Although the substantial Malay–English dictionary of 1812, compiled by William Marsden,<sup>67</sup> explains that *manusia* was used to distinguish men from genie or animals, court literature (to my knowledge) was not concerned to explore the condition of mankind as such. From the perspective of this genre of literature, Abdullah can be perceived as giving a fresh emphasis to an old word.

### Ambition

In his perception of man as an economic being, Abdullah’s approach is revolutionary. It is in the novelty of Munshi’s humanism and individualism, and in the centrality of their role in his observations and philosophy, that the connection lies with Adam Smith. The new individualism had profound implications in the economic sphere. A concern about the potential inherent in each human individual underlies Abdullah’s anxiety about the damaging effects of the customs and regulations of the *kerajaan*. Rules and arrangements, which court literature suggests were designed for the display and protection of *nama*, seemed to Abdullah to be a barrier to the fulfilment of the person. More to the point, in terms of *laissez-faire* philosophy, under Malay rule people lived in perpetual fear of losing their property. A man “with property and money”, explains Abdullah, “is not safe in Malay territory.”<sup>68</sup> In such circumstances, it is clear that Malays could not enjoy the fruits of their labours: unlike the situation in the British colony, he observes, the “diligent worker”<sup>69</sup> was not valued and could not “build himself a finely decorated house.”<sup>70</sup>

The sultanate (which endorsed a perception of the individual as distant from the perception enunciated by Abdullah as that implied in the mediaeval “Great Chain of Being”) was able to justify suppression of this type partly on the ground that rich men were also powerful men. Material possessions had a significance in *kerajaan* culture which they did not possess for Abdullah. In the last chapter we saw how one royal text – a chronicle from Bandjarmarsin in Borneo – boasted that “no-one [in that country] was allowed to plant more than a few pepper trees per head.” The text explains that if people are allowed to plant more trees “for the purpose of making money”, then it would follow that “instructions from above would not be executed because the people would lack respect for the king.”<sup>71</sup> Wealth, one might conclude, was never politically neutral and, what is more, it also had immediate implications for the status system. It is significant that the word usually translated as ‘rich’, *kaya* (a word used by Abdullah), connotes ‘power’ as well as ‘property’; indeed in some Malay regions, the territorial chiefs were called *orang kaya*, ‘men who are *kaya*’.<sup>72</sup> In Malay writings we tend

not to encounter individuals who appear to be amassing wealth for its own sake.<sup>73</sup> It is not surprising to be told by a linguist at the end of the colonial period that the Malay language included no expression equivalent to 'financial' or 'economic'<sup>74</sup>.

The comments of foreign observers support the view that, for Malays, the possession of wealth was instinctively conceptualized in terms of what we today might term 'power'. To outsiders, Malays appeared to differ fundamentally from certain other peoples with whom they came into constant contact. In Sumatra, for instance, the Bataks were said to have "frugal habits" and a "desire of collecting money," but the "moment a Malay [became] possessed of a little money, he entertain[ed] as many attendants as he [could]."<sup>75</sup> In circumstances like this, it is no wonder that rulers were suspicious of wealth. They could not allow wealth to determine status independently of the *kerajaan* structure. A man with "property and money", as Abdullah put it, might rapidly become a rival or, at the very least, live in a style suggesting a social position beyond that bestowed by the *raja*. Wealth could threaten, therefore, not merely the position of the ruler but also the status of his subjects. To maintain the status system, to protect the *nama* of his people, of course, was one of the principal responsibilities of a Malay ruler.

Just as a specific conceptualization of wealth made rulers wary of men of property so there was another quite obvious reason why the *kerajaan* was not likely to foster the type of ambition for property which Abdullah praised in the British colony. Energy and industry might well result from the individual's desire for a "finely-decorated house" or a lifestyle "just like that of a raja" but such ambition was also proscribed by Malay custom. A parallel exists with St Augustine's condemnation of the lusts for money, sex and power and, more generally, with European thinking about 'the passions' until the century before Abdullah wrote. Malay proverbs or maxims persistently urged moderation and prudence. Quatrains, or *pantuns*, warned, for instance, that "worldly goods evince no greed, for when you're dead they follow not."<sup>76</sup> *Kerajaan* texts are invariably critical of people who succumb to their emotions or lusts (*hawa nafsu*), just as they condemn those who "make themselves big [or 'important']".<sup>77</sup>

Abdullah himself does not condone all unbridled passions. His promotion of individualism is closely bound to an insistence on the fostering of *akal*, of a sense of reason or judgement. But in the manner of Adam Smith (and of certain Islamic authors whom we shall meet in chapter 7 below), Abdullah sees the human individual's desire to do something 'great' as contributing to the welfare of the whole community. He does not use the words 'incentive' or 'motivation' but

there can be no doubt about his desire to counter the idleness which helped to retard the Malay community. Unlike the *rajahs*, he explains, the British “liked people who worked and who were determined to earn a living and become rich and trustworthy”; a country inhabited by such people was likely to become “populous and attract many traders.”<sup>78</sup> Abdullah wrote with the confidence and disdain of a fresh convert, but so too did contemporary European observers. Thus, in 1837, when the traveller, George Earl, complained that under Malay government the people could not “enjoy the fruits of their labour” (and that their “dissolute mode of life”<sup>79</sup> was therefore a result of their circumstances), he did not reveal how recently Europeans themselves had come to see egotism as “synonymous with the public good.”<sup>80</sup>

### Education

Although the consequences of the new ‘individualism’ for economic activity are far-reaching, this was only one area of social life which Abdullah aimed to reform with what he termed his ‘advice’ to the Malay community. Just as his preferred ‘social system’ would accommodate and exploit the material ambitions of the individual so it was also intended to encourage the individual’s educational development. In his view, of course, the *kerajaan* did precisely the opposite. Malays, to translate the Munshi literally, were “not allowed to change, or increase their intelligence (*akal*) and their knowledge (*ilmu*), or to produce anything new.”<sup>81</sup> Again, in Abdullah’s view, such a policy was opposed to the natural order. Allah had “made man (*manusia*) with intelligence (*akal*) and thought and moral judgement: is it not proper that this intelligence and thought should be used?”<sup>82</sup> What Malays do, however, is “kill”<sup>83</sup> these faculties and follow only their instincts (*hawa nafsu*) and the customs (*adat*) of their ancestors?

The potential inherent in the individual is once more Abdullah’s starting point. Through education the individual can grow “and bear fruit”. (We know that Abdullah was present when in 1822 Raffles made a much-quoted speech about English education “reviving the slumbering seeds of mind, and calling them to life from the winter of ignorance and oppression”.<sup>84</sup>) The *rajahs*, Abdullah explains, did not encourage education. In this sphere as in others, he suggests, they failed to provide the leadership necessary if the Malays were to catch up with those other races who were “on the move.”<sup>85</sup> What is the substance of this education which develops the individual? It appears to be, first of all, the study of language. “Other races in this world”, explains Abdullah,

have become great and clever because they are clever at reading and writing and understanding their language. They also foster their language. The Arabs and the Europeans, like the Chinese and Indians, have fostered and valued their languages so that day by day these people broaden their particular language, add to it, improve and beautify it.<sup>86</sup>

It is language, the Munshi suggests, which “brings into being” intelligence (*akal*) in mankind and “increases” our cleverness and knowledge. It enables men to carry out their work and improve themselves and to teach about other people.<sup>87</sup> In the case of “any great race (*bangsa*)” the language of the people is also great “because all matters of this world and the next are expressed in language. Every act that is carried out, everything that is given a name is expressed in language.”<sup>88</sup>

This understanding of language as a creative force which gives birth to intellect and expands knowledge is intriguing. It possesses some basis in Islamic perceptions of the language of the Koran as a shaper of minds (see chapter 7 below) and traditional Malay thinking. As Shelly Errington has suggested in a perceptive essay on Malay literature, “the idea that the world is real and words or language are artificial is reversed in traditional Malay where, if anything, *bahasa* (language) was real, solid, present, and almost palpable, while the world was something which would not endure.”<sup>89</sup> Where Abdullah’s analysis breaks new ground is in the self-conscious way it focuses on the individual intellect and on the process of change. In his writing, it is through the individual human that language plays its creative role, and here Abdullah’s thinking is consistent with the interpretation developed by Enlightenment philosophers in Europe. Rather in the manner of the traditional Malay texts (and in opposition to earlier European thinkers), influential eighteenth-century philosophers did not view language as a mere human invention, as a tool for expressing opinions or arguments which had already been formulated. They considered that language was necessary to thought, that it was a condition for the development of man’s intellect and knowledge.<sup>90</sup> To use Abdullah’s phraseology, the reforming of a race might be effected through the fostering of its language.

The notion of language as an instrument of change might also be seen in terms of Abdullah’s own literacy. He was analysing a largely oral/aural culture, in which only a small percentage of males was literate and where listening was more common than reading. In such a society one expects relatively closed patterns of thought and language. To quote Amin Sweeney’s far-reaching study of orality in the Malay world, these are “schematic, paratactic patterns” and are employed by a

people who, “unaccustomed to reifying speech, cannot detach themselves from what they know but rather identify with it.”<sup>91</sup> As a literate himself, Abdullah was insistent that Malays should not be content with oral skills, even when these skills were highly developed. The Malay spoken in Pahang, for instance, he describes as “elegant and correct”<sup>92</sup> but he is “grieved” that the country was not “full of people who knew how to read and write.”<sup>93</sup> Successful races, he notes, are always able to “read and write.”<sup>94</sup> The people of such races were those who tended to broaden, add to and beautify their languages.

The link between literacy and worldly success is never fully explained by Abdullah, but he implies that writing and reading are a precondition for the reform of language and perhaps of other aspects of life. He may have concluded this partly on the basis of experience. In the next chapter it will be noted that Abdullah lived during, and contributed to, the founding stages of a vigorous print industry in the Straits Settlements. He would have observed at first hand the consequences of an expansion of literacy. At the very least the skill must have influenced his own thinking. In fact, recent theoretical writings<sup>95</sup> indicate literacy gives a person a critical distance from both language and culture. Abdullah’s own ability to read and write would have encouraged the type of reflection on society that characterizes much of his writing.

A concern for reforming language, of course, is necessarily a commitment to change. It implies a sympathy for novelty and this predisposition is integral to a second aspect of Abdullah’s education program. He urges Malays to question the inherited knowledge and customs (*adat*) of their ancestors and to obtain new knowledge and skills. He describes many of the hallowed old customs as “stupid” and “useless”. He reminds his readers of the new inventions of their age, of steam power for instance, and asks how anyone could refuse to recognize such changes.<sup>96</sup> Malays, he writes, were like “frogs beneath the coconut shell who believe the shell is the sky.”<sup>97</sup> For a people whose lives were “contained within custom” and who dared not alter custom for fear of invoking the wrath of dead *rajas*, these were radical sentiments. Abdullah was calling for what amounted to a policy of Baconian scepticism. Like Francis Bacon, he was warning that we must “begin anew from the very foundations.” In the words of the seventeenth-century English philosopher, there seemed no possibility of gaining knowledge from “the childish notions we at first imbibed.”<sup>98</sup>

The Munshi does not detail the new customs and knowledge which Malays had to learn. He merely alludes to the “great changes in the world,”<sup>99</sup> to the “many new and wonderful matters, the works of man that are a source of amazement and profit and happiness to all

mankind.”<sup>100</sup> What such statements suggest, however, is the possession of a sense of movement in the affairs of mankind, an incipient notion of progress. The reference to other races being “on the move” also conveys this notion and with a sense of foreboding.

The way in which the idea of ‘progress’ crystallized in the works of later Malay authors is examined in a future chapter. The idea, of course, had a powerful impact in many parts of the colonized world outside of Malaya. It is not unexpected, however, to encounter a suggestion of historical process alongside Abdullah’s concern with the linear development of the individual person. In regard to both individualism and process, the contrast between Abdullah’s writing and *hikayat* literature is marked. It is characteristic of the court texts to offer little indication of the passage of time in the sense of one event leading to another. One event may certainly give the impression of following another in time, especially in a genealogy-based text, but there is no sense of progressive causality. The stories and descriptive passages contained in such documents – although often appropriated by modern historians in their construction of historical narrative – are not in the *kerajaan* writings themselves emplotted within a linear process.<sup>101</sup>

Equally far removed from the culture of the sultanates was the concept of education which Abdullah employed. Malays in the independent states were certainly taught about custom and religion: apart from the presence of Koranic schools, we know, for instance, that *hikayats* were sometimes read aloud in order to present to listeners a “mirror of fashion” and a “pattern of good form”.<sup>102</sup> But Abdullah’s concern is not the general dissemination of community lore but rather the education and development of the individual child. The distinction is important for it must be recalled that childhood itself is not a universal concept. In traditional Malay literature the process of ‘growing up’ is given little significance. One *hikayat* is typical in summing up the transition to adulthood of a principal protagonist by the phrase *sudah besar*, that is, having previously discussed him as a child, later in the text it is merely announced that the person concerned was now “already big (or adult)”.<sup>103</sup> As was the case in mediaeval Europe, Malays appear to have depicted the child as a “man on a smaller scale”.<sup>104</sup> In the spirit of the Enlightenment, however, Abdullah explicitly presents education in terms of the development of the child. Childhood is treated as a special period. “When is the time for study?” the Munshi asks, “is it not appropriate that this time should be the period of childhood and youth.”<sup>105</sup> It is in their youth that the branches of trees grow and multiply. “Such is the human condition: the child who is given education when young will obtain benefits when older.”<sup>106</sup> Although Abdullah makes clear that these benefits are going



to be to the advantage of the entire Malay people, it is specified that the means to this end entails the education of the individual intellect.

The intellect itself, *akal*, is a dynamic component in Abdullah's analysis. It is central to the process of education and to his perception of the person. *Akal* is presented by Abdullah as being in opposition both to *hawa nafsu* ('lust' or 'instinctual desire' or 'passion') and to the *adat* ('customs') of old. He bemoans the fact that Malays have "killed" their *akal* and follow only their instincts and their custom.<sup>107</sup> There is an implication here that in Abdullah's thinking the ambitions which inspire men to work hard for material gain are tempered by, or even a product of, *akal*. They are certainly not portrayed as being in conflict with *akal* in the manner, for instance, of *hawa nafsu* (passion). The *kerajaan* writers, too, disapproved of *hawa nafsu* as a principle of action but the 'customs of old' appear in their texts as a restraint on human passion rather than as a competing evil.<sup>108</sup> In Abdullah's work, it is *akal* which acts as the restraining force and the fostering of *akal* is thus a key to what we would call social control.

The word *akal* was not a recent addition to Malay vocabulary, but there are indications that its use changed over time partly as a result of influences from the West. Borrowed from Arabic, *akal* had long been used in Malay to suggest (in the words of an eighteenth-century dictionary) "acuteness, cunning, understanding, judgement".<sup>109</sup> A person who was considered insane had "lost his *akal*".<sup>110</sup> If we examine the Arabic language of the Koran, the noun is not employed but the verb *'aql* is repeatedly used to convey 'understand'.<sup>111</sup> Particularly in the nineteenth century the noun seems to have been used with growing frequency and with the sense of 'rationality'. It has been observed, for instance, that during this period, 'reason' was cited increasingly in Koranic interpretation.<sup>112</sup>

The details are not essential for the present purpose, but recent scholarship suggests Islamic writings produced in the Malay world of the nineteenth century (or at least available and circulating there) were influenced by this development.<sup>113</sup> The various Islamic teachers who instructed Abdullah as a boy may have been inspired by this growing concern for rationality. When the Munshi reflects on his early training in the *Hikayat Abdullah*, for instance, it might be more than a coincidence that he remembers one Arab Syed for having promoted in him 'good thoughts' and *akal*.<sup>114</sup> Was the term *akal* perhaps deliberately chosen to convey the type and style of teaching offered by that Arab scholar? Certainly the way Abdullah discusses *akal* is consistent not with its use in *kerajaan* literature but rather with the connotation of rationalism which tended to be attributed to the word in some contemporary Islamic writings.

Although in traditional writings a person might be said to possess 'understanding' or 'judgement', the new signification involved an assertion of the primacy of individual reason and judgement. The fostering of *akal* might now be seen as the key to reading the Holy Book or to the control of human passion in society. It is a shift in emphasis which is unlikely to have been generated entirely from within Islamic philosophy. The argument has been made that the 'rationality' of the nineteenth-century Middle Eastern thinkers was stimulated by an encounter with the writings of the European Enlightenment.<sup>115</sup> More immediately, Abdullah himself was reacting not only to the religious instruction of his earliest years but also to the powerful European element in the intellectual climate of the Straits Settlements. In writing of reason no less than of other aspects of the new individualism, Abdullah's position is consistent with that held by such local exponents of liberal thought as Thomas Stamford Raffles. As the next chapters suggest, the Munshi's understanding of 'reason' is also likely to have been stimulated by his long encounter with the missionaries of the rival creed, Protestantism, who were active during the early 1800s in the colonial enclaves.

### Race

Whatever the origins of Abdullah's views may have been, his contribution to a new Malay language or discourse of social thought is undeniable. His discussion of the individual – of *aku* ('I') and *akal* ('reason') – no less than his depiction of economic life, education and the process of change, assisted in the formation of a new idiom within which Malays could begin to develop an alternative view of themselves and their community. A further and powerful component in this developing conceptual armoury involved the notion of community itself. The community whose future Abdullah contemplated, the community he wished to reform, was not the *kerajaan*, not one or any number of sultanates, but the Malay race in general.

The word *kerajaan*, a potent signifier in Malay culture, is not even used by Abdullah. As a student of Malay literature and culture he cannot have been unaware of its value, so the absence of the word in his writing must be a silence worthy of note. Could it have been the case that to have used the powerful word *kerajaan* would have seemed to constitute too significant a compromise with the court and its culture? The word Abdullah did use to describe the individual Malay polities on the Malay Peninsula was *negeri*, a rather prosaic term (at least in the Malay language)<sup>116</sup> conveying 'settlement' or 'territory'.<sup>117</sup> It suggests

the territorial aspect of the polity, an aspect of relatively little significance in traditional Malay culture but one which was to gain in importance later in the century. The *kerajaan*, as has been noted, represented an object of loyalty, but *negeri* was a word having no such power and that may well have been why it was employed by Abdullah. For him, the race (*bangsa*) was the primary community.

Abdullah seems to have divided what he described as humanity (*manusia*) into *bangsas* rather than kingdoms or religions. It is true that at one point in the 'epilogue', when complaining of the way rulers treated their subjects, he writes of Malays as members of the Islamic community, as "servants of Allah".<sup>118</sup> This could have had a rhetorical purpose in that it drew attention to the fact that the rulers' behaviour contravened even the injunctions of their own religion. Nevertheless, the persistent subject of his critique and analysis is the Malay race. Thus, he is worried about the way the Malay community was always governed by other *bangsa*; he complains that the Malay *bangsa* does not foster its language, that the Malays are becoming more and more stupid, and that they are ruled by oppressive and ignorant *rajās*. It is his hope that the Malay *bangsa* will, following his advice, become "great" and "clever".<sup>119</sup>

The novelty of the term *bangsa* as used by Abdullah needs to be underlined. Reading Abdullah reminds one that Malay ethnicity cannot be viewed as a mere primordial attachment. As the anthropologist, John Comaroff, has observed recently, "ethnicity always has its genesis in specific historical forces".<sup>120</sup> Thus, although *bangsa* became a critical concept in Malay political culture during the twentieth century, it might be argued that it possessed no such significance in Abdullah's time. The word comes from the Sanscrit *vamsa*, which means "genealogy, lineage, race, family".<sup>121</sup> In *kerajaan* texts, *bangsa* was generally used to refer to 'descent' and, even in so-called transitional writings of the early nineteenth century, it is, to quote Cyril Skinner, "difficult to separate from the idea of 'caste'".<sup>122</sup> One reads of *bangsa syed* (the 'caste' of *syeds*) or of a person being considered to be of *bangsa kechil*, of "low birth".<sup>123</sup> By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, *bangsa* increasingly seems to have been used to refer to 'race'. We find the phrases *bangsa India*, *bangsa Bugis* and *bangsa Melayu*.<sup>124</sup> It seems also to be in this period that the term *Melayu* came to be used more frequently in its modern sense. In earlier times, *Melayu* referred specifically to the descendants of the Malaccan/Palembang dynasty.<sup>125</sup> Gradually during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in Malay, Chinese and European writings, the term *Melayu* was used to describe both royalty and their subjects not just in Malacca but in many regions of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and the surrounding islands.<sup>126</sup>

Why did this distinct consciousness of 'Malayness' arise? Was it merely that similarities in the style of behaviour and experience became numerous enough to encourage Malays scattered over a region as large as the Indian subcontinent to apply to themselves the name *Melayu*? Could it also be that from the seventeenth century there occurred such an influx of foreign peoples to the Malay regions as to "heighten the local sense of group identity"?<sup>127</sup> It is significant that some texts which give prominence to the terms *Melayu* and *bangsa* reflect at the same time the growing presence in the Malay world of the Bugis people of Sulawesi. The enormous increase of Chinese immigrants in the early nineteenth century is likely to have sharpened even more intensely the Malay sense of both identity and crisis. The mere use by Chinese, or, for that matter, British, of the term 'Malay' as a general classification in the multi-ethnic context of nineteenth-century Malaya added force to the growing sense of Malayness.

Abdullah's preoccupation with the 'Malay race', therefore, is best examined in the context of the growing currency of the phrase at the time he wrote. He himself added to its significance. It is not just that his frequent use of the term *bangsa Melayu* tended to underscore and enhance its significance. He also stimulated the process by which the concept began to assume a powerful emotive value. In retrospect, Abdullah's concern for the 'greatness' of the Malay race may have contributed to what became the myth of *bangsa* as an object of loyalty which might compete with the *kerajaan*. Again, his views were in line with current European thinking. It was increasingly common in Abdullah's time to discuss mankind in terms of its division into races (though not yet in a biological sense).<sup>128</sup> We will see in the next chapter that at the time Abdullah wrote, the concept of race was used quite systematically by Europeans with whom Abdullah worked closely. What is more, it will be noted that an English pride of race was actually declared in the Malay language (in a book which the Munshi may have helped to compile) during the 1850s.

A further link with European thought is suggested in the way Abdullah's discussion of race carries certain implications about social structure. In his preoccupation with the Malay *bangsa* Abdullah often refers to the condition of the "common people" (*rakyat*). He advocates, of course, a situation in which ordinary Malays could work hard and "live like rajas". In such statements it is evident that Abdullah's concern about the condition of the race is a concern not for an aristocratic élite but rather an entire community. The frequent association of *bangsa* with the interests of the common people tends to imply that the concept of 'race' – unlike that of *kerajaan* – possessed egalitarian overtones. The *bangsa* is, at times, presented as an appropriate form of social unity

for a people possessing an individualistic and anti-aristocratic ethos. Such people, it can be argued, are also likely to have made up an important section of Abdullah's readership.

The writings of another traveller of the 1830s indicate that certain European thinkers of the time drew a connection between race and this form of ethos in far more explicit terms. Alexis de Tocqueville postulated that aristocracy had "made a chain of all members of the community, from the peasant to the king; democracy breaks that chain and severs every link of it." Under aristocratic institutions men would "often sacrifice themselves for other men"; in the case of "democracy", the "duties of each individual to the race are far more clear".<sup>129</sup> As individualism and egalitarianism develop, so de Tocqueville appears to be arguing, a sense of obligation to 'race' may be enhanced. That is, those people whom Louis Dumont has referred to as *homo hierarchicus* may participate comfortably in systems such as that of the *kerajaan*. Race, however, possesses no necessary hierarchical implications and there may even be a reinforcing reciprocity in the relation between this type of social unity and the concept of *homo aequalis*.

In hinting at a complementarity between race and an egalitarian, individualistic ethos, Abdullah pressed well beyond the loose notions of a *bangsa Melayu* which were emerging in Malay society in the early nineteenth century. He also demonstrated how dangerous the concept of 'race' could be to the interests of the *kerajaan*. Indeed, in many respects his discussion of the person and the community contributed to a vocabulary of concepts about the individual, society and social change which was fundamentally different from the cultural vocabulary of the *kerajaan*. The far-reaching character of Abdullah's ideological radicalism is becoming increasingly clear. In presenting a new vision of society, he introduced a new language, new key concepts, as well as a novel, matter-of-fact style of writing. He was engaged in what Antonio Gramsci referred to as the "reform of consciousness".<sup>130</sup>

The differences between Abdullah and his court opponents, it is evident, were not just concerned with ideological programs. A recent book on Indian nationalist thought by Partha Chatterjee makes a distinction which is useful in considering this aspect of the 'War of Position' waged by Abdullah. The distinction will be employed again when we examine Islamic critiques of the *kerajaan*. Chatterjee identifies two aspects of social ideology: the problematic and the thematic. The problematic concerns merely the claims of an ideology, the concrete statements about possibilities and programs. The thematic consists of the "justificatory statements" of the ideology. It involves also the "rules of inference," the "ethical principles" and the "epistemological principles" which an ideology uses to demonstrate the feasibility of its claims.

Chatterjee employs the distinction between problematic and thematic to argue that, despite the stated aims of Indian nationalist thought, despite its apparent opposition to Western colonialism, the epistemological and ethical system which underlies that nationalism is the same as that of post-Enlightenment Western culture.<sup>131</sup> In examining colonial Malaya one encounters a number of thematic oppositions as well as agreements. To perceive the ideological distance which lies between the *kerajaan* and the post-Enlightenment Abdullah as possessing a thematic rather than merely problematic character draws attention to the sharpness of the conflict. Such a perception also raises further questions.

The existence of such radical writing in the mid-nineteenth century, even before the British and Dutch had subjected the neighbouring sultanates to imperial control, immediately leads one to enquire about the ideological and intellectual context in which this writing was produced. To what extent was Abdullah's an isolated voice in that period? To which Malays precisely did he offer his "advice" – at one point he actually claims to be addressing a "new generation"<sup>132</sup> – and what impact did he have on later generations of Malay thinkers? In the next chapter we examine an apparently commonplace school textbook of the 1850s which suggests a possible approach to answering these questions.

### Notes

- 1 John Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1. W.R. Roff suggests that 1900 marks "the first intrusion of indigenous modernizing forces upon the Malay scene..."; *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), xv.
- 2 Amin Sweeney, *Reputations Live On: An Early Malay Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 14.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 14. See also Omar Mohamed Hashim, 'Perkembangan Cherpen Melayu Sebelum Perang,' *Dewan Bahasa*, 5 (1961), 344; Amin Sweeney, *Authors and Audiences in Traditional Malay Literature* (Berkeley: Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series no. 20, 1980), 7. W.R. Roff admits the literary significance of Abdullah's writing but gives him very little attention, *Origins*, 46; see also Tan Chin Kwang, 'The "Missing Link" in Modern Malay Literary History: A Study of the Influence of Social and Educational Backgrounds to Literary Development', *Archipel*, 31 (1986), 106.
- 7 Introduction to Kassim Ahmad (ed.), *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1964), 11; Mohd. Taib Osman, *An Introduction to the Development of Modern Malay Language and Literature* (Singapore: Times Book International, 1986), 21; Wan Shamsuddin Mohd. Yusoff, *Sejarah Sastra Melayu Moden* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1978), 63; Annas Haji Ahmad, *Sastra Melayu Lama Dan Baru* (Penang: Sinaran, 1975), 13.

- 8 Kassim Ahmad, who was the leader of the Malayan People's Socialist Party.
- 9 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 11.
- 10 R.A. Datoek Besar and R. Roolvink (eds), *Hikajat Abdullah* (Djakarta and Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1953), 289.
- 11 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 124–5. 'Important' (*besar*) is used in Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 422.
- 12 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 421.
- 13 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 124.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 104.
- 15 C.E. Wurtzburg, *Raffles of the Eastern Seas* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954), 18.
- 16 Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), esp. part 2.
- 17 Hill, 'The Hikayat Abdullah,' *JMBRAS*, 28, 3 (1955) 332.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 418; see also Hill, 'Hikayat', 269. I have not always followed Hill's translation.
- 21 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 419.
- 22 Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), esp. part 2.
- 23 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 424.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 426.
- 25 See the discussion in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 42.
- 26 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 419.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, 429.
- 29 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 106.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 37ff., 64ff., 81ff., 101ff.; S. Errington, 'Some Comments on Style in the Meanings of the Past,' *JAS*, 38, 2 (1979), 231–44 *passim*.
- 31 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 258.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 150; see also 40, 230, 420.
- 33 See, for instance, the proverbs printed in R.O. Winstedt, *Malay Proverbs* (London: John Murray, 1957), 7, 26, 27, 48, 49.
- 34 Kassim Ahmed, *Pelayaran*, 76. See also, R.J. Wilkinson, 'Papers on Malay Customs and Beliefs' (1906), *JMBRAS*, 30, 4 (1957), 15.
- 35 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 429. It is made clear on p. 426 that Abdullah is referring to "the Malays". See also p. 417: the "first object" in "writing this book" was so the "younger generation may learn about the events of the past".
- 36 The two exceptions are *ibid.*, 299 and 331. Other *nasehat* are on 13, 20, 22, 46, 138, 188, 258, 367. Sweeney notes that in employing the practice of inserting *nasehat* (advice) passages in his text, Abdullah may well have been influenced by his reading of the Persian work, *Taju's-salatin*, translated into Malay in the seventeenth century. See Amin Sweeney, 'Some Observations on the Nature of Malay Autobiography', *Indonesia Circle*, 51 (1990), 30.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 38 See note 30 above.
- 39 C. Skinner, ed. and trans., *Ahmad Rijaluddin's Hikayat Perintah Negeri Bengkulu* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 26–7. He refers to himself also with the rather formal pronoun, *senda* ('Your humble servant').
- 40 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 41 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 23.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 43 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 4.
- 44 For a discussion of the meaning of *hikayat*, see Milner, *Kerajaan*, 38.
- 45 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 289.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 297.
- 47 Hill, 'Hikayat', 33.
- 48 *Ibid.*

- 49 See, for instance, Kassim Ahmad, *Characterisation in Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1986).
- 50 J. Bastin, 'Problems of Personality in the Reinterpretation of Modern Malaysian History', in J. Bastin and R. Roolvink (eds), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies, Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on His Eighty-fifth Birthday* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 152.
- 51 Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, 'Malay Journalism in Malaya', *JMBRAS*, 19, 2 (1991), 249.
- 52 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 78.
- 53 R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969), 161.
- 54 Hill, 'Hikayat', 32. For the relation between humanism and realism, see Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), 46.
- 55 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 56.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 127-8.
- 58 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 33-5.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 See, for example, Mohd. Taib Osman, *An Introduction to the Development of Modern Malay Language and Literature* (Singapore: Times Books, 1986), 29; Amin Sweeney, *Reputations Live On*, 14.
- 63 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 420.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*, 425.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 427.
- 67 William Marsden, *A Dictionary of the Malayan Language* (London: Cox and Bayliss, 1812), 318. See also J. Gonda, *Sanskrit in Indonesia* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1973), 101.
- 68 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 88.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 423.
- 71 See chapter 1, note 62 above.
- 72 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 24ff. For Abdullah's use of the word, see Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 88.
- 73 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 24ff.
- 74 Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, 'Malay Journalism in Malaysia', *JMBRAS*, xix, 2, 249.
- 75 J. Anderson, *Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra, etc.* (Edinburgh: 1826), 61. See also Milner, *Kerajaan*, 27, 131.
- 76 A.W. Hamilton, *Malay Pantuns* (Sydney: Australian Publishing, 1944), 92; see also C.C. Brown, *Malay Sayings* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 78-9, 118, 143, 173-4.
- 77 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 43, 106; B.W. Andaya and V. Matheson, 'Islamic Thought and Malay Tradition: The Writings of Raja Ali Haji of Riau (ca. 1809-ca. 1870)' *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, in A.J.S. Reid and D.G. Marr (eds) (Singapore: Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1977), 123.
- 78 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 124.
- 79 George Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (1837) (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971), 374.
- 80 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 172.
- 81 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 423.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 425.
- 83 *Ibid.* The word used is *dimatikannya*.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 229-30. The speech is discussed in Wurtzburg, *Raffles*, 634.
- 85 The phrase is *bangsa manusia larian*, Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 426.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 427.
- 87 *Ibid.*



- 88 *Ibid.*
- 89 Errington, 'Some Comments on Style in the Meanings of the Past', *JAS*, xxxviii, 2, 242.
- 90 Étienne de Condilla is one example; see the discussion in R.H. Robins, *A Short History of Linguistics* (London: Longmans, 1967), 150-1.
- 91 Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 141.
- 92 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 36.
- 93 *Ibid.*
- 94 *Ibid.*
- 95 See, for instance, Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983); J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- 96 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 425.
- 97 *Ibid.*, 428.
- 98 Quoted in M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), 15-16.
- 99 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 418.
- 100 *Ibid.*
- 101 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 64-5, 81, 102; Errington, 'Some Comments on Style', *passim*.
- 102 R.J. Wilkinson, 'Romance, History and Poetry', in *Papers on Malay Subjects* (Kuala Lumpur: First Series, Part 1, 1907), 14.
- 103 See Milner, *Kerajaan*, 101.
- 104 P. Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 8.
- 105 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 429.
- 106 *Ibid.*
- 107 See note 83 above.
- 108 See note 77 above.
- 109 Marsden, *Dictionary*, 204.
- 110 *Ibid.*
- 111 I am grateful to Professor A.H. Johns for this observation: private communication, 19 Dec. 1986.
- 112 J.B.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslum Koran Interpretation 1880-1960* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 21. I am grateful to Professor A.H. Johns for this reference.
- 113 A.H. Johns 'Quranic Exegesis in the Malay World: In Search of a Profile', in Andrew Rippin (ed.) *Interpretation of the Qur'an*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 257-87; A.H. Johns, 'Enriching the Language of the Tribe: Aspects of the Transmission of Islamic Teaching from Arabia to Sumatra, 17th to 19th Centuries', typescript n.d. See also, Andaya and Matheson, "Raja Ali Haji", 115-16, 118; V. Matheson and B.W. Andaya (eds and trans.), *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al Nafis)* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 274, 400.
- 114 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 45.
- 115 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chapter VI.
- 116 See Gonda, *Sanskrit*, 122, 139, 629, 640.
- 117 *Negeri* is discussed further in chapter 4 below.
- 118 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 422. See also Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 124.
- 119 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 427; also 419.
- 120 John L. Comaroff, 'Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality', *Ethnos*, 52, 3-4 (1987), 302.
- 121 Gonda, *Sanskrit*, 149.
- 122 Skinner, *Ahmad Rijalludin*, 158. On the use of *bangsa* in *kerajaan* literature see V. Matheson, 'Concepts of Malay Ethos in Indigenous Malay Writings', *JSEAS*, 10, 2 (1979), 366.
- 123 Skinner, *Ahmad Rijalludin*, 38; Raja Ali Al-Haji, *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (Singapore: Malaysia Publications, 1965), 152; Mohd. Fadzil Othman (ed.), *Kisah Pelayaran Muhammad Ibrahim Munsyi* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980), 109.

- 124 Matheson, 'Concepts of Malay Ethos', 366–7; Marsden, *Dictionary*, 41.
- 125 Matheson, 'Concepts of Malay Ethos', 360.
- 126 J.W. Cushman and A.C. Milner, 'Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Chinese Accounts of the Malay Peninsula', *JMBRAS*, 52, 1 (1979); Milner, *Kerajaan*, 9–10. On the concept of *Melayu*, see also Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, 'Takkan Melayu Hilang de Dunia: Suatu Sorotan Tentang Nasionalisme Melayu' in R. Suntharalingam and Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail (eds), *Nasionalisme: Satu Tinjauan Sejarah* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1985), 36–63.
- 127 Matheson, 'Concepts of Malay Ethos', 369. On the Chinese influence on the history of the concept of *Melayu*, see also Wang Gungwu, 'The Melayu in *Hai-kuo, wen-chien hi*' in *Community and Nation. Essays on Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981), 108–17.
- 128 D.A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 13; M.D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 106–7. I am grateful to Professor Donald Denoon for these references; also see Michael Banton, *Racial Consciousness* (London: Longman, 1988), 20, 21.
- 129 Quoted in L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (London: Paladin, 1972), 52–3.
- 130 David Forgacs (ed.), *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935* (New York: Schocken, 1988), 192.
- 131 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New York: Zed, 1986), 38.
- 132 *orang yang baru baru*; Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 417.

## CHAPTER 3

### *A Description of the Real World: Expanding Vocabularies*

Culture is not always distilled or conveyed in magisterial texts. Abdullah's books, although often treated as isolated achievements, are classics in Malay literary development. They are works of vision and at the same time products of literary and conceptual experimentation. They feature prominently in every library of modern Malay writing. It is possible, however, to learn something more of the intellectual milieu which fostered the Munshi's radical critique of *kerajaan* society from a school geography book, the contents of which may seem to a modern reader to be unremarkable. If this textbook is examined from a *kerajaan* perspective, and if we pause to consider not just its subject matter but the concepts and rhetoric employed, it offers a glimpse of the ideological face of European expansionism. For those who were on the receiving end of imperialism, this type of work had the potential to represent a challenge as potent as the Gatling gun. It was a challenge to which Abdullah and his successors responded in more than one way.

The geography, the *Hikayat Dunia*, was published in 1855 at Bukit Zion, a Singapore printing and teaching establishment run by one of the most active Protestant missionaries, Benjamin Keasberry.<sup>1</sup> Abdullah taught Malay to Keasberry (the son of an Indian army colonel who served with Raffles in Java) and assisted him in translating numerous textbooks into Malay.<sup>2</sup> Abdullah probably helped produce the *Hikayat Dunia* although I cannot discern whether it was a translation of an English book or written largely by Keasberry himself.

The missionaries have rarely been portrayed as men of influence in the Malay communities and they certainly could claim few converts to Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The geography, however, is a reminder that the missionary impact cannot be understood merely in terms of conversion. To appreciate the possible significance of this text we must consider how it

would have been read by an audience imbued with the culture of the Malay sultanates. What is the scope of the knowledge offered in the geography and how might it have seemed to differ from the presentation of the world in court literature?

The copy of the *Hikayat Dunia* kept in the British Library is sixty-nine pages in length and is divided into four sections (*fasal*). Although the title page promises a coverage of 'Asia and Africa together with the Malay Archipelago' the text covers only certain regions of what today are called Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia.

### The geography in summary

On pedagogic principles which today we would generally consider sound, the *Hikayat Dunia* begins with the familiar, that is with the Malays. In beginning in this way the text also proclaims what might be called its methodology. It immediately and explicitly establishes an epistemological standpoint outside *kerajaan* literature. It denigrates the *Malay Annals* and by implication, other *hikayats* which enunciate the institutions and values of the *kerajaan*. The *Hikayat Dunia* acknowledges the fame of the *Annals*, but notes that the work tells of a *raja* who "comes down from the heavens." Such statements, declares the *Hikayat*, cannot be believed by people who possess intelligence (*akal*) and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Here again in this opening section of the geography we encounter *akal* as arbiter. As in Abdullah's writing, it is placed in opposition to the *kerajaan* culture. The 'methodology' which the *Hikayat Dunia* recommends is that of 'investigating' all types of knowledge and *hikayats*, and also "things as they are in the world."<sup>5</sup> That is, the geography asserts in blunt and explicit terms the "realism", the concern for the "events of everyday life", which is so often observed by scholars to be present in Abdullah's writing. The wording of this declaration is similar to that used by Abdullah himself in 1843 when he praised an earlier author for writing about "real occurrences that actually happened."<sup>6</sup>

Having declared in its brief and schoolmasterly manner a theory of knowledge, the *Hikayat Dunia* proceeds to examine the origins of the Malay race (*bangsa Melayu*) and then to tell the story of how the European races came to the region. Unlike the *kerajaan* writings, therefore, this text focuses on race rather than royalty. It also places the entire investigation in the context of the expansion of Europe. Even the data are presented in this context. That is, despite the *Hikayat Dunia*'s methodological promises, and the occasional use of linguistic and archaeological evidence, the truth of its empirical content seems ultimately to be endorsed by the power of a confident imperialism. The rhetoric

of the geography often implies that, just as factuality once flowed downwards from the royal court, so now it emanates from a powerful, if ill-defined, European 'authority'.

Another prominent feature of the geography's account of the Malays is the sense it conveys of historical movement. There is a particular emphasis on phases of cultural influence. The Malays are said to pass through a Hindu period, then there is the entry of Islam which brings not only a new religion but a new alphabet. Significantly, little else is said of the Islamic contribution. More attention is given to the coming of the Portuguese and the Dutch. The most detailed treatment is reserved for recent history such as the entry of the British into the region and particularly the occupation of Java by Raffles. This first section of the *Hikayat Dunia* ends with a list of places subject to European power.

The second section deals with the 'lands' of Java and Sumatra. The word for 'land', *tanah*, suggests physical rather than political geography. *Tanah* can refer to 'earth, soil, land (and) territory'<sup>7</sup> and it is important to note that the geography discusses both islands in terms of their size, fertility, products and people:

Java is a very impressive island between other islands. It is on the West of the island of Brunei), to the South of the island of Sumatra: Java's length is 650 miles and it is 130 miles broad, almost the size of England. Its soil is very fine.<sup>8</sup>

The Javanese are described as being a 'branch' of the Malay race. The impressive archaeological remains of Java are considered by the text to be an indication that the people in the past must have been 'clever'. Again an historical overview is presented: the coming of Islam, its mixture with Hindu customs, the British conquest and the return to Dutch hands. The Dutch, who were rivals of the English in some parts of the archipelago during the mid-nineteenth century, are portrayed unfavourably. The Dutch government behaves "like a merchant". Neither the ordinary people nor the traders are content under its rule. The city of Batavia (Jakarta) is even a centre for slavery. The British, by contrast, are to be admired. When they take control in Java they abolish all the evil customs, the *adat*, of the Dutch and they free the people. In fact in all English territories the people are said to be free and to live in peace. The geography uses two words to imply freedom, *bebas* and *merdeheka*. Abdullah, of course, persistently asserts or implies the presence of 'freedom' in the Straits Settlements.<sup>9</sup> It will be seen that the contrast between his relatively comprehensive discussion of freedom and its preconditions, on the one hand, and the cursory treatment of

freedom in the *Hikayat Dunia*, on the other, reveals much about Abdullah's purposes.

The next observation made in the geography is certainly familiar. Enjoying such freedom, the people are diligent and industrious in their work. Not surprisingly in these circumstances, the 'name' of the English race becomes famous and yet they rule in Java for only five years. When the Dutch return, much that the British have done is abolished and the Dutch introduce their own customs and laws which (according to the geography) the people cannot tolerate. Soon the Dipanagara uprising (1825–30) occurs. "These days," the *Hikayat* declares (presumably in reference to the 1840s and 1850s) "the Dutch rule is less harsh but the Javanese continue to long for the British to return."<sup>10</sup>

The *Hikayat* now shifts the focus to Sumatra which is also examined in terms of its physical features, products and history. Again warnings are issued against trusting in traditional literature. In his accusations, the author of the geography engages his readers in a manner remarkable for its directness. "Whoever reads my *hikayat* I remind you to think! Other foolish *hikayats* are only the products of the Malay mind, they are not established in truth."<sup>11</sup> (Here indeed is the voice of modernity.) The text now proceeds to discuss the different territories (*negeri*) of Sumatra. It notes that each has a *raja* and discusses the differences between the Malay race and the other races with which the Malays come into contact. The geography caters to its primarily local readership when it makes the Malay Peninsula a reference point in this discussion of Sumatra. It notes that such peoples as the Rejang and Batak in Sumatra have customs similar to those of the Jakun of Malaya. The Malays' own customs are treated with no more respect than that displayed by Abdullah. They are once again described as the customs of a "foolish race".<sup>12</sup>

The *Hikayat Dunia* now concludes the account of Sumatra with a discussion of the Dutch and English. Here too Raffles is praised. In 1817 he had been appointed Lieutenant Governor of Bencoolen in West Sumatra. Finding the place in ruin, with evil customs prevailing, Raffles summons all the *rajaks* and chiefs of the area. He "wins all their hearts" and "improves the *negeri* (settlement)".<sup>13</sup> He acts, we are told, in a manner which will give fame to the name (*nama*) of the English (East India) company. It is in this spirit also that he desires to build up trade and to make a settlement in Singapore. In discussing the British colony, the geography explains the strengths of the island as an entrepôt and also notes its underpopulated condition at the time of Raffles' first visit. In the field of education, too, Raffles is presented as taking initiatives in Singapore. After consultations with Malay and European leaders, a decision is made to establish a place of study. It is designed not only for

the sons of chiefs but also for the servants of the English *Kompani* (East India Company). In the new institution European students are able to learn languages and discover the “secrets” in the books of the ‘peoples below the wind’ (a phrase alluding to much of what we today call Southeast Asia).

Singapore prospers, increasing in both population and trade, and the geography provides suitable statistics. The text then turns to the Malay lands in the vicinity of Singapore commencing with the closest, Johore. This place is given special attention in the *Hikayat Dunia*, a fact which may help to identify at least a part of the audience for which the text was written. The perspective in the account of Johore is once more historical. The Sultan of Malacca comes to Johore after the conquest of his city by the Portuguese. Archaeological remains are cited in the text to support the claim that Johore was itself once a great state; indeed, the geography relates incorrectly that “all Malays had been subject to the Sultan of Johore”.<sup>14</sup>

In fact (as discussed in chapter 8), Johore’s later history is also far more complex than the *Hikayat Dunia* indicates. It is a history, too, which is likely to have been relatively well known to many readers of the geography. Indeed members of the Johore ruling family and aristocratic élite actually attended Keasberry’s school; a few even appear to have studied with Abdullah.<sup>15</sup> In these circumstances it is not surprising that the *Hikayat Dunia* treats the ruler of Johore (who held the title ‘Temenggong’) with particular respect, giving his full title and noting that he had built a settlement on the Johore river. By contrast, all we are told of the states further up the coast – Pahang, Trengganu and Kelantan – is that “their rajas and people are exceedingly stupid and lazy”.<sup>16</sup>

The geography now proceeds to describe other races (*bangsa*) of the Malay lands (*tanah Melayu*) such as the aborigines (*Jakun*). In so doing, it reveals an important literary connection by quoting from “the *hikayat* which Munshi Abdullah has written”.<sup>17</sup>

The ‘island of Brunei’ (Borneo) is dealt with next. It is “approximately 700 miles long” and the country of Brunei, called the “head of the land” (*kepala tanah*), is said to be “under the government of a Malay Sultan.” The “secrets” of Borneo, it is explained, have not yet been investigated “because the land has not been traversed by Europeans”. The different races are now briefly described, comparisons again being made with the aborigines of the peninsula. The Dayaks, “who do not know Allah”, are praised for being diligent in making fields and gardens. The Dayaks are sincere and do not engage in cheating and trickery “in the manner of the Malays.” The Malays, it is explained, had come to Brunei some 550 years earlier, had traded there and formed settlements and villages to serve as entrepôts. The report on Brunei

concludes with the information, likely to be of genuine importance for a Malay trader, that the current Sultan of Brunei "is the twenty-ninth of the line of Malay sultans" of that place.<sup>18</sup>

The small British entrepôt of Labuan is then introduced, and in terms of the now predictable "size, features and products". As always, the products mentioned – in this case coal and rattan – have a commercial significance. The next country, Sarawak, as is well known, is subject not to the 'English Raja', or to other *rajas*, but rather to the government of 'Tuan Brooke' (known in many European writings as the 'White Rajah') The account of Borneo concludes with the severe judgement that although the products of the "land (*tanah*) of Borneo" are plentiful and valuable, under the government of the Malay race they will bring no benefit to the people. "The Malays, with all their rajas and ministers and warrior leaders are lazy." Only the European will turn the land into a "garden": "Because of their diligence, their skill and their freedom [the Europeans] will bring very great benefits to all the races below the wind".<sup>19</sup> The propaganda of imperialism is evident in this claim, and it expresses a sentiment which is essentially different from that conveyed in Abdullah's writing.

The *Hikayat Dunia* now deals with the land of the Bugis (Sulawesi) and with Bali. A narrative is given of the warfare in the state of Makassar in the south-west of the island and it is noted that the confusion discourages commerce in this fertile land. At last the Dutch are given some credit but only because they adopt British policies. In order to win the hearts of the Bugis, and increase the industry of the people, the Dutch allow trade to take place without tax. They also encourage education: "I hear the news that the Dutch Resident in Macassar wants to set up schools in the villages so that all the children may be able to obtain education, and that he has sent to Singapore to obtain children's books in the Malay language."<sup>20</sup> Had the resident actually appealed to Mr Keasberry for this assistance? The discussion of Bali focuses on the sins of the *rajas* who indulge in opium, alcohol and cock fighting. Brief mention is made next of Lombok and Sumbawa and then, finally, the geography turns to "an island which is larger than all those islands mentioned above: Australia".<sup>21</sup>

In the treatment of Australia we find an instructive tale of white settlement and Aboriginal decline. The possible fates of a people become almost caricatures. The Europeans establish cities, graze sheep and seek gold. They exploit the country and, as their success becomes known, thousands of new immigrants follow. Especially with the discovery of gold, it is possible for ordinary people in Australia to become (in a phrase with which readers of Abdullah are familiar) "rich like rajas". News of the gold discoveries arrives at the Straits Settlements, and the



geography gives the Australian section some additional local interest and significance by explaining that “to rent a house the size of a Malay house costs fifty to eighty dollars per month.” There are problems of “law and order” in Australia (after all, the Scottish Enlightenment itself had difficulty reconciling personal drives and the need for fellow feeling between human beings)<sup>22</sup> but the impression is conveyed that these settlements (*negeri*) offer fine opportunities, at least for the European. The Aborigines, who are compared (predictably by now) with the Jakun of Malaya, have very different prospects. The whites attempted to improve their *akal manusia* (human mental faculties), but the Aborigines returned to their original ways. They were ignorant of religion. They plundered European farms and were hunted in return. Now they are seldom seen in the settlements. When given clothes, they sell them for alcohol. The Australian Aborigines, according to this text, are “extremely dirty, lazy and stupid.”

The *Hikayat Dunia* concludes with a brief description of New Guinea.

### Propaganda for empire

At first glance the lengthy Australian section seems out of place. The tale of white exploitation of that relatively empty continent seems uncomfortable in a study devoted primarily to the lands and peoples of island Southeast Asia. Yet, in a sense, the account of Australia is a recapitulation of the principal themes of the text. Australia provides both an apt demonstration of the English economic achievement and an example of what befalls races which fail to move forward with the times. The fate of the Aborigines shows what happens to those who do not develop their intellect, their *akal*, and do not exploit the resources of their country.

The *Hikayat Dunia* clearly cannot be dismissed as a mere school text, though even as a compilation of ‘raw’ geographical data it would have altered the horizons of many Malay readers. The ideological purposes of this work are unmistakable. It would be difficult to ignore the element of imperial propaganda in the persistent praise of English achievements in Bencoolen, Java, Singapore, Sarawak and even Labuan. The Dutch are also generally denigrated, except in Sulawesi where they are presented as borrowing British methods. Similarly, Islam’s real contribution to Malay culture is given relatively little attention. What the author perceives to be the weaknesses in the religion are spelled out in the discussion of the Dayaks. A connection is suggested here between the Dayak’s admirable features – industriousness, peacefulness, and honesty – and the fact that they “do not know Allah”. In general the Muslim Malays (with the exception of those of Johore) are

given short shrift. Even the Malay achievement in Borneo is denied – the Malays are merely awarded the doubtful honour of being able to trick Dayaks. Although the products of Borneo are valuable, the geography suggests that the island can only be successfully exploited under English rule.

Despite the thoroughgoing imperialism of the text, however, it contains no assertion of an inevitable English racial superiority. Only later in the century did the commitment to racial thinking begin to involve notions of biological determinism. In the geography, the English are portrayed as being successful only because of the policies they follow. The text identifies these policies and in this sense discloses English secrets. According to the geography, in the English territories (even those like Java which were ruled briefly by the English) the people are encouraged to be industrious, and are able to reap the rewards of their efforts. They have freedom. Ordinary people can become as “rich as rajas”. The theme is familiar. Here and elsewhere the content of the *Hikayat* suggests that Keasberry and the other Protestant missionaries are likely to have been at least as important as Raffles in influencing Abdullah.

The geography would have challenged its Malay readers, inviting them both to follow the ways of the English and to discard their own customs. In announcing its ‘methodology’, in dismissing the apparently magical world of the old *hikayats* and insisting on “investigating things as they are in the world”, the text proclaims a new epistemology. It has been argued that only with the publication in 1918 of Richard Winstedt’s *Tawarikh Melayu (History of the Malays)* were the eyes of the “average Malay” opened to “the meaning of history as distinct from legend”. In earlier years, we are told, “there had been no distinction in the Malay mind between fact and fiction”.<sup>23</sup> The *Hikayat Dunia* suggests that at least six decades earlier some Malays were brought into contact with the Enlightenment concern for interpretation based on ‘hard observable facts’ and what was claimed to be a ruthlessly critical approach to existing authorities.<sup>24</sup> It was a concern which had also long governed European reactions to the *kerajaan* world.

The positivistic certainty, the sense that the world was precisely as they saw it, and the intolerance of matters which they considered to be irrational, had governed numerous British responses to Malay literature and culture in the early nineteenth century. Thus the Scottish Orientalist and colonial administrator, John Crawfurd, referred in the 1850s to the *Malay Annals* as “worthless” and a “wild tissue of fable”.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Raffles hoped to distinguish in Malay literature the “mixture of mythological fable” from what he considered to be “matter of fact”.<sup>26</sup> Comments of this type draw attention to the deep rift which lies

between the *episteme* of the *kerajaan*, on the one hand, and that of Crawford, Raffles and the *Hikayat Dunia* on the other. The discontinuity should not be underestimated. As Michel Foucault has argued in relation to the emergence in Europe of Enlightenment forms of knowledge, the transition from the *kerajaan* to the *Hikayat Dunia* cannot be described merely in terms of a "slight increase in the objectivity of knowledge, in the precision of observation, in the rigour of our reasoning, in the organization of scientific research and information".<sup>27</sup> Such texts as the *Hikayat Dunia* demanded not an increasing, but an entirely new understanding of, 'objectivity' and 'precision'.

In his encounter with the scholar officials and missionaries, Abdullah, of course, would have become aware of this new manner of knowing. Reading the geography, he and others are likely to have detected not just a new compilation of data and a political ideology but also some of the fundamental categories of the new knowledge. Geographical concepts themselves would constitute some of these categories. Although today they seem commonplace these concepts were in some cases quite alien to *kerajaan* thinking. The word *kerajaan* is itself displaced in the geography by what we might term other units of analysis. Traditional Malay writing is usually concerned with particular *kerajaan*. All polities are presented as being focused on a *raja* and possessing a similar structure and purpose. Even foreign states, such as the great Ottoman empire, are described by Malay texts as if they too were *kerajaan*.<sup>28</sup> It is not that these Malay writers knew of only a single social formation. They recognized, of course, the existence of smaller communities, such as the village or the town, and in some cases acknowledged the presence of a wider Malay cultural unity which extended beyond particular *kerajaan*. Some writers were also aware of a broad Muslim community reaching to Turkey and to such remote cities as Bokhara and Samarkand in Central Asia.<sup>29</sup> As we have seen, however, the social unity to which the *hikayats* generally attributed meaning and significance was the *kerajaan*. From the *hikayat*'s perspective, the world could not be presented in more different terms from those employed in the *Hikayat Dunia*. In that text the world is one of physical and racial unities, of *tanah* and of *bangsa*.

Territorial definition appears to have played very little part in the idea of *kerajaan*. Malay literature suggests as much when, for instance, it presents the loss of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511 as having curiously little impact on the 'history' of the Sultanate. The ruler, having lost one 'capital' moves to new locations and the narrative of his *kerajaan* (the *Malay Annals*) seems to falter only slightly during these moves. European observers in Malaya sometimes noted that Malays of the pre-colonial period possessed extremely vague notions about

physical geography. A nineteenth-century Sultan of Trengganu, for instance, did not know where his boundary ran.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, in the geography it is precisely the natural unities which are most often highlighted. Although some attention is given to locating particular polities – we learn how many days journey it is from Pahang to Johore or Trengganu – the text is less concerned with the physical characteristics of particular states than with those of geographical entities. Thus, the island of Java is located in relation to other islands; its length and breadth are given in miles, its physical characteristics are described, including the quality of the soil, and finally a list of the products of the island is provided. This order of analysis is followed, more or less, in the case of each island described.

How would these apparently mundane conceptual elements of geographical analysis have been perceived by Malay readers? For some they would have the appearance of potent signifiers in a new world view, key concepts in a new way of perceiving and classifying one's immediate and distant surroundings. The vocabulary of geography with its emphasis on the soil (*tanah*), its products (*hasil*) and its quality (in the case of Java, very fertile or *subur*), tends to systematize and valorize the type of practical knowledge which must always have informed the trading system of the archipelago. Certain islands or regions were well known for their valuable products but the geography perceives a locality, any locality, primarily in these terms. What is more, it praises or chastises the inhabitants (remember that the probable author was a teacher) on the basis of whether they had been lazy or had effectively exploited the land. That is to say, the text not only propounds some of the central tenets of the discipline of geography but also grounds them in an economic ideology which emphasizes the benefits and morality of the efficient utilization of natural resources.

The people who lived upon and exploited (or failed to exploit) these lands are invariably categorized by the *Hikayat Dunia* in terms of race, or *bangsa*. Humanity (*manusia*) is divided into races just as it is in Abdullah's writing. But the geography, not surprisingly in terms of its particular didactic purpose, is more systematic. It opens with an examination of the 'origins' of the Malay race (so different, for instance, from the Malay Annals which are concerned about the origins of a ruling family) and it is in this context that the author ruthlessly dismisses the speculations and methodology of *kerajaan* literature. The relationships between the Malays and other races is noted: the Javanese are described as a 'branch' of the Malay race; assessments are made of the differences between the Malays and other *bangsa*, such as the Dayaks or Bataks. When human characteristics are identified, it is in racial terms: thus the Dayaks are said not to be 'addicted to' cheating in

the manner of the Malays (who are also lazy). Because races are in general described in terms of their customs (*adat*) and religion, there is an implication that it would be possible to change one's race. Finally, *bangsa* – in particular the English *bangsa* – is presented as a form of community which can inspire loyalty and pride. Using a phrase which would have possessed powerful resonances for most Malays, the geography announces that the great deeds of the English had made famous “the name (*nama*) of the English race”. That is, the text exploits the old concern for *nama* in the Malay community; but in this case it is the *nama* not of a ruler or a royal subject which is being promoted, but that of a race.

In identifying land and race as the principal categories employed by the *Hikayat Dunia*, I am not suggesting that the text ignores the existence of the sultanates. Some royal families are certainly mentioned – that of Johore and Brunei, for instance – but, just as in Abdullah's writing, the ‘states’ themselves are referred to merely as *negeri*, as settlements or population centres. The several *negeri* of Borneo are also identified, as are the different *negeri* of the eastern Malay Peninsula. The states, however, are not described in any detail. Individual sultanates are not foregrounded in the text and the classification, *negeri*, is clearly of secondary importance in its analytical structure. Even a glance at the *Hikayat Dunia* confirms that its dominant concerns are not with the apparently petty political divisions of the region but with the large geographical entities and the broad racial formations which inhabit them.

The elements of the ‘new discourse’ which we encountered in Abdullah's writing are coming clearly into view. The sense of history, as change over time, is a further prominent feature in the *Hikayat Dunia*'s presentation. Not unexpectedly in such an explicitly didactic work, it is conveyed in a more rigorous framework than that offered by Abdullah. The Malay race, for instance, is systematically discussed in the geography in terms of its origins, development, and future. The *hikayat* literature of the courts had not only been concerned with *rajas* rather than races but had also given relatively little sense of the passing of time, of one event leading to another. Although this traditional literature uses material from the past, even the distant past, the episodes it relates are not presented as linked, causal elements in an unfolding story. Nor do they convey the impression that specific periods in the past are in any sense fundamentally different and alien worlds. In *kerajaan* texts, the past – in the sense perhaps of surviving community memory – is organized or emplotted around the royal genealogy. Incidents of note are located in particular reigns and these reigns are displayed on a flat canvas. There is no imagined viewing eye

from which some incidents are distant and others close. It is an almost two-dimensional presentation which, unlike that of the geography, entails no layering of the past, no organization around a concept of process.<sup>31</sup> The presentation of the past in the *Hikayat Dunia* is indeed dramatically different. Whether describing the expansion and prospects of the Malay race or the advance of Europe, it is permeated by a sense of historical movement.

One feature quickly recognizable in this unfolding canvas of the *Hikayat Dunia*, a feature critical to the presentation of English imperial achievement and Australian Aboriginal failure, is the development and triumph of Reason. The emphasis on European, and especially English, success in Asia is not packaged in crudely racial or imperialistic terms. The triumph is viewed rather as that of a particular mode of thinking. Raffles is clearly an exemplary exponent of that mode, but the elements of his philosophy are spelled out in a manner which suggests they are transferable. Some Dutch officials are said to learn from Raffles; there is also an implication that Malays and other Asians might do so. The geography itself embodies these Enlightenment values in numerous ways. They are evident, for instance, in the fact that the text gives so little attention to the pre-European period. In the Enlightenment tradition the author (like so many later historians of the Malay world) seems to be interested in history only "at the point where it [begins] to be the history of a modern spirit akin to his own, a scientific spirit".<sup>32</sup> Earlier periods and earlier cultures seem to be dismissed, as *hikayat* literature certainly is, as products of an irrational age. The *Hikayat Dunia* is concerned above all with a new age of which the Europeans, and especially the English, are heralds. The text does not use the word 'progress' (usually translated as *maju* or *kemajuan* in later years) but in the unfolding of history which it relates there is a strong sense of optimism. The question an Asian reader might have asked (and there are reasons to believe Abdullah did so) is whether indigenous peoples such as the Malays had cause to share that optimism.

What is missing among the components of modernism in the *Hikayat Dunia* is some enunciation of individualism. There is no tree metaphor here. Yet in a sense the individual's rational mind permeates the whole text, just as it does in Abdullah's 'epilogue'. When the author of the geography addresses his readers, demanding that "whoever reads this *hikayat* I remind you to think!" he reveals his hand. Far from the anonymity of the court *hikayat*, the reader encounters in the geography an individual voice and mind apparently compiling, sorting and ordering material and also explaining the principles of investigation employed. In the tone of that voice, moreover, in the way it lectures readers of the book, there is a strong suggestion of the interpersonal

relations of the classroom. In such ways individualism, if not enunciated and explained, is certainly proclaimed.

The similarities between the geography and Abdullah's writing are instructive. They draw attention to the type of doctrines and concepts to which Abdullah and others were exposed in the Straits Settlements. By reading his work and the *Hikayat Dunia* intertextually, by drawing them into dialogue, it is also possible to discern significant differences in emphasis and perspective. They are differences which give a more precise idea of how Abdullah responded to what we today might see as the ideological assault of the Europeans in the Malay world.

Before considering the impact of the *Hikayat Dunia*, however, it is useful to know more about the way work of this type was generated and about the audience to which it was addressed. Indeed, the very existence of the geography, with its confident instructional tone, raises further questions about the intellectual climate in which Abdullah wrote. The text seems to be rather more than the product of the tentative first steps of a missionary program. The clear Malay-peninsular focus – the attempt to examine other races and other lands with reference to Malaya and its people – together with occasional quotations from Abdullah's work give the impression that the geography was the product of a relatively well-established educational program in the Straits Settlements. After reading this text, it is a surprise to find that the standard modern account of the Straits Settlements dismisses “educational development” in the mid-nineteenth century as a story of “indifference and failure”;<sup>33</sup> or that William Roff, in his search for the origins of nationalism and modernism among the Malays, treats this period as one of very limited significance.<sup>34</sup> In fact, relatively little has been written on education in these years. To obtain a sense of the intellectual circumstances in which the *Hikayat Dunia* was produced, it is necessary to examine in a little detail the English-language documentation relating to Keasberry and the other missionaries. By the mid-nineteenth century these Europeans had made considerable headway in their efforts to propagate new philosophies in the Malay world.

### Education and audience

Abdullah himself wrote of a cluster of educational initiatives taking place in the Straits Settlements during his lifetime. He frequently mentions the missionaries who worked with the Malays – Claudius Thomsen, Thomas Beighton, Alfred North, as well as Benjamin Keasberry. He hints that they influenced his own thinking.<sup>35</sup> For these reasons alone, it is curious that the missionary campaign among the Malays, although failing to obtain conversions,<sup>36</sup> has never been

investigated in any depth. Similarly, we cannot assume that the separate, non-missionary, educational initiatives carried out by the colonial government had no far-reaching effects. It is true that the most ambitious educational hopes of the early nineteenth century were not fulfilled, but when Raffles described British education in the 1820s as a “gale of spring reviving the slumbering seeds of [oriental minds]”,<sup>37</sup> he certainly inspired some of his administrative successors.

At least in the 1820s and 1830s relatively systematic efforts were made to provoke Malay interest in education. In Malacca (where Abdullah grew up), Claudius Thomsen of the London Missionary Society (LMS) opened a Malay school in 1820 with the “sole object” of teaching the children “to read and then to understand, as far as possible, the N[ew] Testament”.<sup>38</sup> He found it prudent to use Muslim teachers so as not to arouse the suspicions of the Malays: “to teach Mohammedans is like shooting birds; if there is any noise they disperse”.<sup>39</sup> The next year he organized Malay and English evening classes. Many Malays, he admitted, came only to learn English, but in doing so “several hundreds of poor lads” had “been brought to read the N[ew] T[estament]”.<sup>40</sup> (One imagines the boys were reading the Gospels in the Malay language.) Thomsen and others appear to have had some genuine success because by 1832 an American missionary declared that Malacca was “celebrated for the number of its native schools” and estimated that at that time a single LMS missionary was alone responsible for between 250 and 300 pupils.<sup>41</sup> A few years later the non-missionary Malacca Free School (‘free’ in the sense of being non-sectarian) opened a Malay Branch school. The teacher, Abubakar, was “of Arab descent”. His father, who was described as a “bigoted Mussulman”, “used all his influence, but without effect, to detach [his son] from the school”.<sup>42</sup> By 1855, when an official report was written on education in the Straits Settlements, Malacca was described as the best Settlement for Malay schooling.<sup>43</sup>

In Penang in 1819 another LMS missionary, Thomas Beighton, also started a small Malay school. With government financial support, it taught both Malay and Arabic: the latter language, which possessed great religious significance, was considered necessary to ensure student (or parent) interest.<sup>44</sup> Within three years there were five missionary schools with 122 boys and 45 girls.<sup>45</sup> From 1823 the Penang Free School (the earliest European school in the Settlements) also maintained a Malay School at the village of Glugor. Several other Branch Malay Schools lasted much shorter periods and they too taught pupils to read and write Malay.<sup>46</sup> The missionary, Beighton, described one of his schools as “the largest Malay school I ever saw”.<sup>47</sup> It contained 60 students, including thirteen girls. Twelve of the students could read the New Testament fluently. Five years later, in 1833, he reported the



existence of four schools with 122 students.<sup>48</sup> By 1842, when Beighton was seriously ill and not long before his death, there were still three Malay schools. Like those of the 1820s, each is likely to have had a Muslim teacher.<sup>49</sup>

In Singapore also there were several missionary educational programs. The first government administrator of the island wrote in 1820 that the "school for Chinese and Malays is getting on extremely well".<sup>50</sup> Three years later Raffles reported that Claudius Thomsen, who had moved to Singapore from Malacca, had commenced an establishment for twenty to thirty pupils.<sup>51</sup> Thomsen was soon appointed 'professor' of Malay Language in the high-sounding 'Singapore Institution' which Raffles was planning.<sup>52</sup> Although never living up to its founder's ideals, the Institution ran five Malay classes for a time in the 1830s.<sup>53</sup> It was, however, only with the arrival of Benjamin Keasberry, the publisher and possible author of the *Hikayat Dunia*, that a vigorous educational campaign among the Malays began in Singapore.

In 1840 Keasberry opened at Mt Zion a boarding school which so impressed the Singapore governor that he persuaded the Temenggong of Johore to send two of his sons there.<sup>54</sup> In Abdullah's words (and he was for a time a teacher at the school), the news of the Temenggong's decision soon spread everywhere, both "above and below the winds".<sup>55</sup> A government report of 1855 enthusiastically praised the school as a "highly interesting Institution" and described Keasberry as having "overcome in a great measure the extraordinary apathy, indifference and prejudice of the Malay to education".<sup>56</sup> In the opinion of the Governor, Edmund Blundell, the Keasberry school was at that time the "sole foundation on which we can hope to rouse the gradual emancipation of the Malayan race from their present state of ignorance, apathy and barbarism." The Governor hoped to see established "a separate dormitory and mess for the sons of Malayan Rajahs and men of rank." The Temenggong, he reported, had promised to send two more of his sons and the "Rajah of Keddah agreed to send his two younger brothers." Blundell anticipated that in the future the sons of other "neighbouring Malayan Rajahs" would come to the school. This aristocratic group would be "brought up with a perfect knowledge of their own language, and some degree of insight into European knowledge and science and probably with a fair acquaintance with the English language".<sup>57</sup>

Blundell was optimistic and clearly with some justification, though Keasberry's school was not the only important Malay educational institution in operation at that time. We shall see that two other Malay schools opened in Singapore in 1856 – one at Telok Belanga, the other at Kampong Gelam – were to play a significant role in the "modernization" of the Malays.<sup>58</sup> Surveying colonial educational

initiatives in this way, it is obvious that the publishing of such texts as the *Hikayat Dunia* and Abdullah's writings formed only one component in a new educational push. It was, however, a vital component.

Printing, of course, was central to the Protestant missionary enterprise with its emphasis on the written Word of God. Schooling, Preaching, Printing – these are the topics of the missionary reports which are preserved in the archives of the LMS. The missionaries were pioneers of printing in Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia. The British administration exploited them, using their “small portable press” for the preparation of official government documents.<sup>59</sup> Thomsen, Keasberry and the American missionary, Alfred North (in the Straits Settlements from 1836 to 1843), were the three missionaries most closely engaged in printing. Their main concerns were certainly religious, producing Malay translations of scriptures, didactic tracts and such Protestant classics as *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Nevertheless, the *Hikayat Dunia* was only one of many secular works which they printed. Others included dictionaries, grammars and even an arithmetic textbook.<sup>60</sup> Thomsen, a Danish grocer whose suspect financial dealings and philandery finally achieved for him a grim notoriety, commenced a *Malay Magazine* in 1821. It contained articles of an educational nature on religious, historical and philosophical topics but lasted only a brief time. The magazine, Thomsen explained, was sent to “neighbouring Malay princes”.<sup>61</sup>

One of Alfred North's publications was Abdullah's *Voyage*. He also printed what was described as a “small work on natural history” and another “consisting of a variety of facts concerning the arts and institutions of Europe, and on natural theology.” The object of the latter book, he said, was to “present to the minds of the boys such ideas as are to them new and striking, but simple and easily apprehended.” A third book, still in manuscript form in 1841, made comparisons between “the opinions and habits of Europeans, and those of the Malays”.<sup>62</sup> Although North's period in Singapore overlapped with that of Keasberry, the latter remained there for a further three decades until his death – he died in the pulpit – in 1875. This was a long tour of duty for a missionary. Keasberry saw himself as the successor to poor Thomsen. He wrote generously that he hoped to “follow up Mr Thomsen's lengthened labour”.<sup>63</sup> Abdullah, who had worked earlier for both Thomsen and North, recorded that he had translated into Malay many books for Keasberry. They included ‘story books’ and works about astrology and the creation. They may also have included the *Hikayat Dunia*.

Some information exists about the distribution of these publications and even of their reception. They were certainly used in schools, and not merely those of the missionaries. In a detailed government report

on education in 1873, a glowing account of Keasberry's school includes the information that the Mission Press associated with the school – the press which produced the *Hikayat Dunia* and Abdullah's 'auto-biography' – "has provided almost the only educational works there are in the [Malay] language".<sup>64</sup> The observation is substantiated, for instance, in the Singapore Free School report for 1853 which observes that Abdullah's writing was used in Malay classes. Keasberry himself is described as the examiner and it is noted that the boys "read two or three pages in the Malay Annals, and Abdullah's journal".<sup>65</sup>

The distribution of printed materials was not limited to the Straits Settlements. In 1849 the Governor in Singapore brought twelve copies of the *Hikayat Abdullah* – written, he explained, by "one of the most accomplished Native Malayan Scholars in the Straits," and a "protégé of the Great Statesman Sir Stamford Raffles" – and sent six of them to "the Chieftains of the adjacent Malay States".<sup>66</sup> The missionaries themselves attempted to distribute religious writings as widely as possible. In Penang, during two decades, Beighton recorded in almost feverish tones the production and circulation of religious propaganda. He took "Malay testaments" to Kedah, for instance, and also asked Malay merchants to deliver gifts of Christian works to various states in the region.<sup>67</sup> From Malacca, Thomsen reported that he sent books to "most of the Malayan countries around us".<sup>68</sup> When he moved to Singapore in 1822 he made use of the many trading vessels in the entrepôt to distribute religious materials throughout the archipelago: "I visited in one day six prows from six different Malay countries".<sup>69</sup> Again: "thousands of Books are conveyed from this place annually, far and wide, and can we admit the thought that all this seed will perish".<sup>70</sup>

Just how much of the seed did perish is difficult to determine. Although the British official establishment – which tended to be socially superior to the missionaries – alluded disdainfully to missionary failure, there are indications that missionary writings were taken seriously by Muslim Malays. Some Christian tracts antagonized (in an apparently deliberate manner) the Muslim community. In Penang, committees of learned Muslims were formed with the aim of defending Islam against Thomas Beighton.<sup>71</sup> In 1840, Beighton received a "large Malay letter" in reply to a tract he had written comparing Christ and Mohammed: "It contains extracts from 4 [Christian] tracts ... these tracts are commented upon and the work appears to be a combined effort".<sup>72</sup> On another occasion Beighton was visited by a certain "Lord Sayyid Abbas" – with whom he talked or argued for two hours: "On the table was the sacred scriptures Koran etc. – I found they had been examining the scriptures and tracts I had previously given them".<sup>73</sup>

In the sultanates, too, there is evidence that the religious materials were read. Beighton was told by a "Malay correspondent" that some of his tracts had been sent to the "King of Purlis [located across the northern border of Kedah] and that my name is known in all the Malay countries roundabout".<sup>74</sup> Beighton had been welcomed at the court of Kedah itself and when that state was conquered by the Thais, the Sultan maintained contact with his missionary acquaintance throughout his period of exile. The ruler's motives were probably at least partly political but the two men had numerous conversations covering not only the "size of our ships; number of guns etc." but also the "nature of the wind." After reading a Christian tract, the Sultan declared that it revealed "the secret of Mohommedanism." Beighton wondered: "does he mean the mystery of iniquity is revealed or the concealed Pearl of great Price. I cannot say what he means".<sup>75</sup>

This was probably the closest relationship established between a missionary and a Malay ruler. Yet the account of a journey up the east coast of the peninsula in the 1820s by a further LMS missionary, W. H. Medhurst, also refers to extended conversations with Malay rulers. He discussed with them Christianity, Islam, and what one ruler contemptuously described as Chinese ignorance of religious matters. They also discussed "the judgement day, and the world to come".<sup>76</sup> Medhurst found at the court of Trengganu a Malay Bible which had been sent by "Mr Thomsen of Singapore". Medhurst "rejoiced to find that the books circulated by our missionary brethren at their stations, find their way to Mohammedan countries and Mohammedan courts . . . and that the books, when thus dispersed, are not destroyed or thrown away, but preserved with care." The Bible at the Trengganu court had clearly been read because "they said, that they considered it a good book, and observed many things which it contained".<sup>77</sup> At the Pahang court, too, Medhurst found a Malay Bible and was told "it contained the Law and the Gospels, and various stories about the kings of old times".<sup>78</sup>

These reports from Malay courts help to provide a context, for instance, for the decision of the Temenggong of Johore in the 1840s to send two of his sons to Keasberry's school. They encourage us to wonder how the courts may have received other types of communication from the Straits Settlements. Were Thomsen's *Malay Magazines* or the governor's gifts of the *Hikayat Abdullah* carefully read? Was the *Hikayat Dunia* also distributed and studied?

Although the missionaries sometimes expressed disappointment at their failure to achieve conversions – it will be seen that a number of them were even convinced that their campaign had provoked an Islamic "revival" – their aims were not crudely religious. Several missionaries took the view that a questioning, sceptical, spirit had to be

aroused among the Malays to draw them away from old customs and modes of thought. Thomsen wrote that before learning anything else the Malays had to be taught “how to think”.<sup>79</sup> Beighton declared his hope that a “spirit of inquiry” had been “erected among the Mohammetans”.<sup>80</sup> North, as already noted, prepared a book which made general comparisons between the “opinions and habits” of Europeans and those of Malays. He also attempted to put before Malays ideas which they might find “new and striking”. Such comments are further evidence of the type of epistemological assault which was entailed in the geography’s condemnation of *hikayat* literature. The author of that text also urged Malays “to think”. Abdullah, despite the fact that he never converted to Christianity, was precisely the sort of pupil the missionaries liked. In one of the very few personal comments ever made about Abdullah, Thomsen found him “steady, inquisitive, communicative, oblidging [sic], teachable”.<sup>81</sup> Whatever Thomsen’s moral and missionary limitations may have been, he certainly had the measure of Abdullah.

Not all of the stimulation offered by missionary teachers may have been intentional. Just as their publication of the *Hikayat Dunia* supported the inculcation of many elements of a modern, secular, world view, so their particular non-conformist brand of Christianity may have had unexpected implications. Thus, the disdain they proclaimed for “outward rites and ceremonies”, although directed primarily at Roman Catholicism, might well have been understood to imply criticism of Malay custom and etiquette.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, it is valuable to speculate on the possible impact of the missionaries’ preoccupation with personal spiritual salvation. A perceptive European observer from outside the missionary community wrote of Abdullah as a “native” who had been able to learn from the LMS brethren a “freedom of thought” and an “independent tone not often found in the southern Asiatics”.<sup>83</sup> One way in which the missionaries stimulated such independence and, in general, a more developed sense of personhood was through their translation into Malay of the seventeenth-century *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In this book, Malay readers would have encountered not only a powerful Christian message but also one of the most influential texts in the emergence of the Western concept of the individual.<sup>84</sup> Abdullah, it is known, read a translation prepared in Penang and the work had an influence on his own writing style: “Gambling is the mother of vice,” declares the Munshi in a passage which must owe a great deal to Bunyan, “and of her three children the eldest is named Mr. Liar, the second Mr. Thief and the third Mr. Thug”.<sup>85</sup> We can only speculate as to whether reading the *Pilgrim’s Progress* also assisted in forming Abdullah’s notion of an individual life journey.

The very act of reading, although from the missionary perspective merely a preparation for the digestion of Christian dogma, had far-reaching cultural and intellectual consequences. We have noticed Abdullah apparently groping to understand and explain these consequences. Much has been written in recent years about the impact of literacy not only on language itself but also in 'restructuring consciousness'.<sup>86</sup> In Europe the mass printing of the Bible is considered to have had far more than religious significance. The growth of literacy, "the habit of private reading and meditation",<sup>87</sup> itself stimulated the Puritan preoccupation with personal salvation which, in turn, was one of the forces promoting modern individualistic thinking. Jean-Jacques Rousseau made the point with particular eloquence when he recorded that it was from the moment of his "first readings" that he could "date without interruption my consciousness of myself".<sup>88</sup> It was, in fact, from the "absorption in reading and the talks to which it gave rise between my father and me" that Rousseau "developed that free and republican spirit, that proved an indomitable character, so incompatible with subjection and servitude. . .".<sup>89</sup>

Although Rousseau exhibited a degree of introspection beyond anything we encounter in Abdullah, their respective experiences of reading may not have been dissimilar. It would be not merely the content of the *Pilgrim's Progress* but the very act of reading this or any other book which might promote the sense of a separate, independent self. Considered in this light, Thomsen's mention of "several hundreds of poor lads" having learned to read the New Testament, has an added significance. When missionaries note that a "spirit of reading has been spreading far and wide",<sup>90</sup> or that "frequent applications" have arrived for books and that there exists "a spirit of inquiry" among the "Mohammetans",<sup>91</sup> we must recall that they were engaged in a literacy campaign which would have far reaching intellectual consequences.

A further implication of the educational programs directed at the Malays by missionaries and other Europeans in the early nineteenth century arises from their democratic character. Printing itself had egalitarian implications: the replication of written materials no longer depended upon the scribe and, as a result, the possibility existed of a far broader reading audience than had been the case in the past. To some extent, the missionaries openly sought to undermine existing social hierarchy. Thomsen complained about what he saw as the absence in Malay society of a "middle or independent poor" and considered "all the common people" to be in a "state of wretched dependence on the chiefs and others about them, who have it in their power to keep them in that state of ignorance".<sup>92</sup> In his education plans,

he urged that “poor lads” as well as the aristocracy be taught to write and read. The very notion of a ‘free school’ – that is, a school which was presumably free both from restrictions relating to creed and from those of race and colour,<sup>93</sup> – was also a revolutionary concept from a Malay perspective. Just how revolutionary these ideas were is suggested by the determination with which the Malay aristocracy of the colonial period opposed a democratic emphasis in the colonial education system. In 1923, for instance, the Sultan of Perak insisted that “only boys of good birth, i.e., the sons of Rajas, Chiefs, and *Penghulus* (headmen) of good family” should be admitted to the leading Malay college of the period.<sup>94</sup>

The actual and precise impact of European schooling and printing on the Malay community of the early and mid-nineteenth century must be primarily a matter of speculation. Abdullah was prolific but how many other Malays responded to the new influences is difficult to determine. It has been argued that until the twentieth century the new education created no new class of graduates: no clerks, interpreters or translators.<sup>95</sup> Abdullah tends to be presented as an isolated figure possessing no Malay following or even a Malay audience.<sup>96</sup> Yet it is curious that Abdullah himself actually claimed to be addressing a “new generation,” and that he expressed the hope that Malays would “take to heart the advice I offer them”.<sup>97</sup> In the next chapters we will see that there was indeed a “new generation” which read Abdullah, the *Hikayat Dunia* and other publications of the Mission Press. Even in the mid-nineteenth century this generation could be described as being divided into at least two groups, both of which were to influence radically the development of Malay political culture.

The first group is hinted at in the government report of 1855 which spoke of Keasberry’s students “earning a comfortable livelihood in various occupations”<sup>98</sup>. A further report on the same school some eighteen years later noted that its former students had become “Clerks, Interpreters, and Printers with good salaries”.<sup>99</sup> A portrait of at least one section of this emerging, educated, middle class is presented in a contemporary account of Penang published in the 1850s. The young Malays there, some of whom had been “educated by Europeans”, are described as having adopted the “trousers, socks, shirts, and boots of their teachers, and to show that they are not completely converted, they wear the *kebaya*, a rather loose Arab cloak and turban”.<sup>100</sup> What special appeal, we may ask, did the notions of freedom, of reward for endeavour, and of a society where ordinary people could become “as rich as rajas”, have for these smart young men? (Many of them presumably hoped to follow their predecessors in the European-run schools into jobs “with good salaries”.) These new middle-class people

would certainly have found in the *Hikayat Dunia* and Abdullah's writings a number of perspectives which could be identified with a liberal bourgeois ideology.

The second group of the "new generation" comprised the young aristocrats of Johore, particularly those who were educated by Keasberry and Abdullah. It has been noted that the *Hikayat Dunia*, which denigrates most Malays, displays a surprising diplomacy in its treatment of Johore. Both the missionaries and Abdullah are likely to have recognized that this particular court presented an unusual opportunity to influence the Malay aristocracy. The Johore élite (as will be explained in chapter 8) was engaged in creating a new polity across the straits from Singapore and would probably have been more open than the longer-established leadership in neighbouring sultanates to new social or religious ideas. The colonial educators met with a measure of real success in Johore, but there were other ideologues of a different type who also competed for the attention of this innovatory élite.

By introducing the *Hikayat Dunia* and the British educators of the mid-nineteenth century, I have begun to present Abdullah's writings as components in an ideological campaign. Looked at from a different perspective, of course, Abdullah and his books also constituted the most spectacular achievement of that campaign. He was both a component and a product of the new education programs. The contents of the geography and the declarations of missionaries testify to the fact. They provide insights into the type of intellectual climate in which he wrote: after noting the Islamic religious training of his youth, they tell of the charming Raffles who perhaps introduced Abdullah to the thought of Adam Smith; of Thomsen attempting to teach him "how to think"; of Keasberry requesting translations of textbooks conveying the new Western knowledge; and of North placing before him such ideas as might seem "new and striking". North, in fact, actually claimed to have proposed to Abdullah that he write the *Hikayat* or autobiography: "I suggested to him he might compose a work of deep interest ... a memoir of himself".<sup>101</sup> But when North adds immodestly that he had also proposed the topics for much of the subject matter of this work, the implications are misleading. It is not possible to characterize Abdullah's writings as merely imitative.

To appreciate the independence and creativity of Abdullah's reaction to fresh intellectual stimuli it is fruitful to glance again at his books in the specific context of our reading of the *Hikayat Dunia*. For the historian not just the geography but also Abdullah's writings benefit from being read intertextually. On its part, the geography presents a relatively systematic presentation of the type of Western ideological claims which Abdullah encountered. We have examined their influence



on him in some detail. What has not been attempted so far is an assessment of the ways in which he sought to counter rather than execute such claims. We have observed Abdullah debating with the *kerajaan* but not up to this point debating with the colonialist spokesmen of liberalism.

### Countering colonialism

Contrasting the Munshi's *oeuvre* with the *Hikayat Dunia* reveals the extent to which the two authors stress different themes. Just as the latter gives added attention to matters such as race, the exploitation of natural resources, and what might be termed historical process, so Abdullah develops certain themes which are at best only alluded to in the geography. To some extent these differences between the Munshi's writing and the geography are a result of diverging purposes and separate genres, but they also reveal something of the particular character of Abdullah's response.

First, the *Hikayat Dunia* and Abdullah's writings differ in the way they handle the concept of individual 'freedom' or 'liberty'. The geography presents 'freedom' as a feature of English rule and as a key to English success but, unlike Abdullah, it does not attempt to define what that freedom involves. In the geography two words are used to express 'freedom', *merdeheka* (*merdeka*) and *bebas*, but it is significant that neither appears to have conveyed at that time the notion of "the individual as the embodiment of certain natural and imprescribable rights which authority is not entitled to invade". It is this perception of liberty which, as Harold Laski has suggested, became a "commonplace of political speculation", at least after the time of John Locke.<sup>102</sup> In nineteenth-century Malay writing, *merdeheka* was used specifically in reference to freedom from slavery. Marsden's dictionary of 1812 defines the word that way, and calls a man who is *maidika* a "manumitted (or freed) slave".<sup>103</sup> In addition, all of the sentences Marsden employs to illuminate the meaning of the word refer to freedom from slavery. Swettenham's dictionary of the 1880s also defines the word as "free (manumitted)"<sup>104</sup> and even Klinkert in 1930 described it as meaning "*vrij van slavernij of dienst plichtigheid*".<sup>105</sup>

The other term, *bebas*, was not specific to slavery; Marsden defined it as "unrestrained license", but both the examples of its use which he quotes relate to freedom of trade. Thus, *De bibas-kan ulih* is translated as to "suffer to pass free of duties" (by the East India Company).<sup>106</sup> Wilkinson in 1903 also uses *bebas* in the sense of "freedom from restraint" and gives an illustration from the celebrated text, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, about a youth who was given "the run of" the palace.<sup>107</sup> An

impression is conveyed, therefore, that *bebas*, like *merdeheka*, has only gradually and quite recently assumed the more comprehensive and abstract sense of 'liberty'. The use of both words together in the mid-nineteenth century *Hikayat Dunia* might best be interpreted as no more than an admission that the author, or translator, had difficulty at that time in expressing the concept of 'freedom' in Malay.

Abdullah, however, takes far more trouble to elucidate the concept of 'freedom'. As an apparently vital ingredient of English success it probably intrigued him, and to expound the subject as part of his advice to the "new generation" might have seemed essential. Abdullah virtually listed the different aspects of "freedom" under English rule. He identified the lack of sumptuary laws and of threats to property; the absence of what he saw as ridiculous regulations demanding humiliating obeisance; and the existence of prohibitions against anything 'novel', or any act opposed to Malay *adat*. According to Abdullah, these were all desirable freedoms to be found in the colony. In particular, he extolled the freedom to improve one's intellect, to do something important, and to enjoy oneself. Such notions of 'liberty', his writings suggest, are grounded in a particular perception of the human person. It was the freedom of the growing individual, the developing human intellect which British rule fostered and which the Munshi expounded. Without the premise of individualism, of course, the sentiments of the *Hikayat Dunia* about the value of freedom would be hardly comprehensible.

It is when we read Abdullah alongside the geography that his explicatory role is most pronounced. He appears to be both explaining and advocating concepts of human 'freedom' and of 'humanity' – concepts alluded to tantalizingly in the geography's account of English triumph – to an audience possessing cultural assumptions of a fundamentally different type. In his exhortation, in his radical writing style as well as the content of his books, he was perhaps actually trying to evoke among the younger Malays the preconditions for that freedom which, as portrayed in the *Hikayat Dunia*, fostered prosperity and contentment under British rule.

A second area of dissimilarity between the *Hikayat Dunia* and Abdullah's writing concerns their relative approaches to Malay society. Abdullah's approach is more constructive and more reformist and this is likely to be significant. The geography is unspecific in its criticism. Both *rajas* and subjects are merely referred to as "stupid" and "lazy". By contrast, Abdullah's condemnation is far more detailed. He identifies the aspects of the *kerajaan* – in particular its stultifying laws and oppression of the Malay subject class – which he considers to be damaging the Malay race, and does so in a manner which suggests the basis of a

program of reform. In one respect, Abdullah's campaign actually received indirect support from the geography. The latter implies that reform was at least theoretically possible. Although the *Hikayat Dunia* celebrates English achievement and insists that only white people possess the necessary industry, skill and freedom to open up Borneo, it nevertheless admits that races can change. Thus, under British rule the Javanese are described as becoming industrious. The geography also frequently advocates the education of the native races. Even in the case of the Australian Aborigines, the failure to respond to English education is presented not so much as an inevitability as a warning to other native peoples who fail to foster or develop their *akal*.

The geography, however, is not concerned specifically or primarily with the reform of the Malays. In general, their future, and even their improvement, is portrayed as lying within the English and Dutch imperial framework. In the *Hikayat Dunia* we encounter a firm colonialist perspective. English power is expanding, bringing with it just government and the effective exploitation of resources. Thus, when the text explains that Borneo has not yet been traversed by the white man, the implication is clear that this island too will soon be developed by Westerners. The reader of the geography constantly meets the image of an irresistible and beneficial advance of European power. Reading Abdullah alongside this text immediately suggests the danger of overemphasizing his Anglophilia. Abdullah offers a markedly different perspective on the West's expansion into the Malay world. When he notices that the Malay race is "always governed by other races",<sup>108</sup> the comment does not carry a tone of approval. Moreover, when he predicts that the Malays will fall further and further behind until they are "trodden under foot",<sup>109</sup> he seems to be challenging the Malays to reform themselves. Abdullah is emphatically not looking to the English to initiate change, as they had in Java, for instance; rather, he advocates a renaissance inspired from within.

The *Hikayat Dunia*, therefore, offers the opportunity of a different perspective on Abdullah. Reading Abdullah in dialogue with this text we get a glimpse of the way in which he may have perceived, and experimented with, the new liberal and Protestant ideas current in the colony. The contents of the *Hikayat Dunia* provoke questions, first of all, about the nature of the ideological dimension of British expansionism. In this chapter they have led to an examination of some of the educational programs of the missionaries and the colonial government. The nineteenth-century educators, through their promotion of literacy and of the doctrines of the Enlightenment and Protestantism, seem to have played a more stimulative role than we previously realized. Abdullah's writings, in particular, provide strong evidence of their

impact. Indeed, these writings suggest we ought to perceive the seed time of Malay modernism as occurring not in the first years of the 1900s but a half century earlier. We should not dismiss the possibility, for instance, that Abdullah – just as he claimed – was addressing a “new [if small] generation” of Malays. He himself was certainly a pioneer and influential member of this generation and, as the contrast between his writing and the geography suggests, he was no merely passive imitator. Especially when we see the Munshi’s works in context, it is possible to understand how he was able to appropriate ideas, vocabulary, and even literary genres in order to construct what we might, with a little exaggeration, term a program for the future development of the Malays.

From the perspective of the *ancien régime*, this program had revolutionary implications. It required fundamental changes in Malay culture. Abdullah’s vision demanded the acceptance of new notions of the individual, of historical development, of social organization and of geographical knowledge. In this sense, he challenged not merely the current objectives of the Malay royal élite but also the rules of classification and the grounds of knowledge – the entire discursive foundation – of the *kerajaan*.

Shifting attention, as Chatterjee would put it, from the problematic to the thematic of ideological writing has an obvious significance for the way we perceive Abdullah and indeed later Malay writers.<sup>110</sup> Although not qualifying as a radical nationalist, writing in explicit opposition to colonial rule, Abdullah was nevertheless, from a Malay perspective, a pioneer in creating a new way of thinking about man and society. It could be argued that he helped to establish the preconditions for a later nationalism and, more immediately, for a recognizably modern style of politics. We might also be encouraged to reassess certain late nineteenth-century liberal ideologues in British Malaya (and other colonies) if we shift our analytical focus away from programs. The next chapter, which is concerned at a specific level with the impact of Abdullah’s writings, introduces one of these turn-of-the-century ideologues, a Malay journalist who today is not so much controversial as ignored. This journalist, Mohd. Eunus Abdullah, also promoted a *bangsa* sentiment among his people and, at the same time, sometimes praised the British and espoused their values. He wrote not in the first years of colonial encounter but in the relatively settled period of early twentieth-century colonialism. He also wrote at a time when Islamically inspired ideologues were offering a specifically religious program for Malay social change.

In the manner of such contemporaries as Gokhale in India or U Ba Pe in Burma,<sup>111</sup> Mohd. Eunus Abdullah is vulnerable to criticism from a

radical nationalist point of view. All three of these men were liberals who operated within the colonial system, perceiving opportunities as well as threats in the expansion of European power and ideologies. Men of their persuasion – and they were found in numerous colonial situations – might wear Western clothes and often worked as lawyers or journalists. They mixed frequently with Europeans, drinking in the doctrines of what they saw as the European age. It is when the writings of these devotees of Enlightenment thought are examined from the vantage point of the pre-colonial political culture that we can appreciate their oppositional character. Ideologues such as Eunus, in addressing the small but growing middle class which Abdullah had hoped to influence, were working toward the displacement of much of that traditional culture. They not only criticized but also speculated and experimented. Although they began to investigate such new doctrines as nationalism, they were pioneers, above all, of a new discourse of politics.

### Notes

- 1 C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements 1826–67* (London: Athlone, 1972), 227.
- 2 R.A. Datoek Besar and R. Roolvink (eds), *Hikayat Abdullah* (Djakarta and Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1953), 396; R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1969), 176.
- 3 B. Harrison, *Waiting for China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1979); L.E. Browne, *Christianity and the Malays* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1936); A.C. Milner, 'The Sultan and the Missionary', *Jebat*, 9 (1979/80), 1–15; A.C. Milner, 'Notes on C.H. Thomsen: Missionary to the Malays', *Indonesia Circle* 25 (1981), 45–53; A.C. Milner, 'A Missionary Source for a Biography of Munshi Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, 53, 1 (1980), 111–19.
- 4 *Hikayat Dunia, iaitu pada menyatakan dari hal Benua Asia dan Africa serta dengan tokong pulau di Tanah Melayu* (Singapore: Bukit Zion, 1855), 3. (As there are no printed page numbers, I have numbered the pages myself. I call the first page of the book, which contains a map, 'page 1'.)
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Quoted in C. Skinner, 'Transitional Malay Literature: Part 1: Ahmad Rijalluddin and Munshi Abdullah', *BKI*, 134 (1978), 471.
- 7 R.O. Winstedt, *An Unabridged Malay–English Dictionary* (Kuala Lumpur: Marican, 1971), 351.
- 8 *Hikayat Dunia*, 14.
- 9 Kassim Ahmad (ed.), *Kisah Pelayaran Abdullah* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1964), 103.
- 10 *Hikayat Dunia*, 19.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 24.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 15 Amin Sweeney, *Reputations Live On: An Early Malay Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 17–18.
- 16 *Hikayat Dunia*, 36.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 44.

- 20 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 22 H.M.J. Maier, *Fragments of Reading: The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Alblasserdam: Offsetdrukkerij Kanters B.V., 1985), 42. Republished as *In the Center of Authority: The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1988), 39.
- 23 Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, 'Modern Developments', *JMBRAS*. 17, 3 (1940), 151. In *Center of Authority*, Maier notes that the terms *tarihh* and *tawarihh* had been used for many years prior to the publication of Winstedt's history. It must be asked, however, at what stage these words began to suggest 'history' as against 'date' or 'dates'; see the discussion below in chapter 7. For further analysis, see A. Sweeney, 'Some Observations on the nature of Malay Autobiography', *Indonesia Circle*, 51 (1990), 23.
- 24 R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 76ff; Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1975), chapter 1.
- 25 J. Crawford, *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands and Adjacent Countries* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1856), 250.
- 26 Quoted in Maier, *Center of Authority*, 42.
- 27 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 220. See also the discussion in Maier, *Center of Authority*, chapter v.
- 28 V. Matheson and A.C. Milner, *Perceptions of the Haj. Five Malay Texts* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), chapter 2.
- 29 The Middle Eastern horizons of the Malay world are discussed in A.C. Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1 (1981), 46-70.
- 30 A. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, Association of Asian Studies Monograph, 1982), 27-8. See also Wilkinson, 'Malay Customs and Beliefs', 17-18. For an illuminating anecdote which throws light on the significance (or otherwise) of borders in Bali, see C. Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 24-25.
- 31 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 81.
- 32 Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 78.
- 33 Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 223.
- 34 W. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 35, 23.
- 35 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, see chapter 9 on the Anglo-Chinese college in Malacca.
- 36 Browne, *Christianity and the Malays*, 82.
- 37 The speech is printed in the *Singapore Institute Free School, 4th Annual Report 1837-1838* (Singapore: Singapore Free Press, 1838), 50. For studies relating to education in the Straits Settlements, see D.D. Chelliah, *A History of the Educational Policy of the Straits Settlements* (Singapore: Kiat and Co., 1960); A. Cohen, *The Influence of Western Educational Thought from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century upon the Growth of Education in Malaya*, Masters thesis, University of Liverpool, 1964; and J.H. Haines, *A History of Protestant Missions in Malaya during the Nineteenth Century*, PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1962.
- 38 Thomsen to Directors, 12 July 1820, Malacca File (London Missionary Society: Ultraganges Mission) 1/4/C. See also Milner, 'Thomsen', 46.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Thomsen to Directors, 8 December 1821, Malacca 2/1/C.
- 41 David Abeel, quoted in Harrison, *Waiting for China*, 142.
- 42 *Report of the Malacca Free School 1835-6*, 8.
- 43 Governor Blundell, quoted in Chelliah, *Educational Policy*, 59.
- 44 See the missionary letters in Penang File A/1/1.
- 45 Beighton to Directors, 24 September 1822, Penang 1/4/C.
- 46 Chelliah, *Educational Policy*, 42.
- 47 Beighton to Directors, 9 June 1828, Penang 9/6/A.
- 48 School statistics in Penang 5/5/C.

- 49 Beighton to Directors, 10 September 1842, Penang 4/5/C.
- 50 William Farquhar, 20 October 1820, Singapore 1/1/A.
- 51 Raffles, 23 January 1823, Singapore 1/2/A.
- 52 Milner, 'Thomsen', 46.
- 53 *Singapore Institute Free School, 7th Annual Report 1841-2* (Singapore: Singapore Free Press, 1841), 41; Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 225-6.
- 54 Governor, Singapore to Secretary to Government of India, 15 December 1855, *Straits Settlements Records*, Series R, vol. 28, no. 164. See also A.H. Hill (transl. and ed.), 'The Hikayat Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, 28, 3 (1955), 31.
- 55 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 412.
- 56 Governor, Singapore to Secretary to Government of India, 28 May 1855.
- 57 Governor, Singapore to Secretary to Government of India, 15 December 1855, Series R, vol. 28, 164.
- 58 Chelliah, *Education Policy*, 59; Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 229.
- 59 Milner, 'Thomsen', 46.
- 60 Milner, 'Munshi Abdullah', 113; Milner, 'Thomsen', 46.
- 61 Thomsen to Directors, 28 October 1829, Singapore 1/5/A. On the magazine see Hill, 'Hikayat', 328; Milner, 'Thomsen', 46; Ibrahim bin Ismail, 'In Quest of the Malay Magazine (1821-22)', *Indonesia Circle*, 21 (1980), 45-8. See also Thomsen to Directors, 18 August 1818, Malacca 1/2/C.
- 62 *Singapore Institute Free School 7th Annual Report*, 7. On North see Hill, 'Hikayat', 327.
- 63 Keasberry to Directors, 15 September 1839, Singapore 2/1/C. See also his letter of 5 April 1840 in Singapore 2/2/A.
- 64 A. Skinner, 'Report on Education', 13 May 1873, in *Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements Proceedings 1873*, Appendix 34, 82. See also Hill, 'Hikayat' 31, 253.
- 65 *Singapore Institution Free School Report 1853* (Singapore: Mission Press, 1853), 21.
- 66 Quoted in Hill, 'Hikayat', 31.
- 67 Milner, 'The Sultan and the Missionary'.
- 68 Thomsen to Directors, 12 July 1820, Malacca 1/4/C.
- 69 Thomsen to Directors, 21 September 1828, Singapore 1/4/C.
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 Beighton to Directors, 21 January 1840, Penang 4/4/C; and 20 August 1840, Penang 4/4/D. On the social position of the missionaries see Milner, 'The Sultan and the Missionary', 1, 6.
- 72 Beighton to Directors, 21 January 1840, Penang 4/4/C.
- 73 Beighton to Directors, 27 February 1839, Penang 4/4/A.
- 74 Beighton to Directors, 2 November 1842, Penang 4/5/C; also see Beighton to Directors, 21 October 1842, Penang 4/5/C.
- 75 Milner, 'The Sultan and the Missionary', 2.
- 76 W. Medhurst, 'Journal of a Voyage up the East Coast of the Malayan Peninsula', *Quarterly Chronicles of Transactions of the London Missionary Society*, (1830), 188.
- 77 *Ibid.*
- 78 *Ibid.*, 150; for further evidence of tracts actually being read in the Malay states, Beighton to Directors, 19 April 1821 and 10 July 1821 in Penang 1/3/A.
- 79 Quoted in Milner, 'Munshi Abdullah', 118.
- 80 Beighton to Directors, 21 January 1840, Penang 4/4/C. See also the letter from J. and A. Stronach, 3 August 1839, quoted in R.M. Greer, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, 1959), 18.
- 81 Quoted in Milner, 'Munshi Abdullah', 112.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 118.
- 83 J.T. Thomsen, quoted in *ibid.*
- 84 W. Allen, *The English Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 3.
- 85 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 242. For a discussion of the influence of Bunyan on Abdullah, see J.T. Thomson, *Translations from the Hakayat Abdullah* (London: Henry S. King, 1874), 172. Beighton discusses Malay interest in the Pilgrim, Beighton to Directors, 8 March 1842, Penang 4/5/B.

- 86 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), chapter 4. See also L. Febvre and H.J. Martin, *The Coming of the Book* (London: Verso, 1976), chapter 8.
- 87 L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 152.
- 88 Quoted in Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 221.
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 Thomsen to Directors, 5 December 1821, Malacca 2/1/C.
- 91 Beighton to Directors, 21 January 1840, Penang 4/4/C.
- 92 Thomsen to Directors, 28 October 1829, Singapore 1/5/A.
- 93 Chelliah, *Educational Policy*, 41; Cohen, Education in Malaya, 125–6.
- 94 Kalyan Kumar Ghosh, *Twentieth-Century Malaysia* (Calcutta: Progressive, 1977), 143.
- 95 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 35.
- 96 See chapter 2, above.
- 97 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 429.
- 98 Governor, Singapore to Secretary of Government of India, 28 May 1855.
- 99 Skinner, 'Report on Education', 84.
- 100 J.M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), 192.
- 101 Quoted in Skinner, 'Transitional Malay Literature', 480.
- 102 See his essay on 'Liberty' in *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 443.
- 103 Marsden, *Dictionary*.
- 104 F.A. Swettenham, *Vocabulary of the English and Malay Languages with Notes* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1910).
- 105 H.C. Klinkert, *Nieuw Maleisch: Nederlandsch Woordenboek* (Leiden: Brill, 1930), 975.
- 106 Marsden, *Dictionary*, 159.
- 107 R.J. Wilkinson, *Malay-English Dictionary* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1959).
- 108 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 260.
- 109 *Ibid.*, 426.
- 110 The significance of Michel Foucault's writing in my thinking about epistemic rifts will be obvious. See, in particular, his *Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972). See also the revealing way in which H.M.J. Maier explores such rifts in the context of the 'history' of a single Malay *hikayat*, *In the Center of Authority the Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1988).
- 111 On Gopal Krishna Gokhale, see Stanley A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1962). On U Ba Pe, see Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 7–11; and Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 171–2.



## CHAPTER 4

### *Conceptualizing a Bangsa Community: A Newspaper of Moderate Opinions*

By the end of the nineteenth century an increasingly confident liberalism was challenging the Malay royal courts. Now familiar with British doctrines and practices, liberal ideologues began to formulate a detailed program for Malay society. They conceptualized a new, *bangsa*, community and it contrasted strongly with the hierarchical, ceremonial *kerajaan*. I use the word 'conceptualized' rather than 'imagined' because it conveys better the purpose and energy with which Malay writers engaged in the construction of a new form of community. The *bangsa* was certainly an intellectual rather than a natural construction, but the concept of imagination tends to disguise the anxiety, the experimentation, the contest and the sheer intellectual difficulty faced by those who relinquished their loyalty to older forms of community and constructed a new form. In examining the writing of Mohd. Eunos Abdullah, we learn something about this process, particularly about the creative significance of old vocabulary.

In one sense, the turn of the century was a time of retreat not only for the Malays but for most Asian peoples, a period when European imperial authority was being consolidated all over the East. But the triumph of the West also entailed a victory of ideas, and the propagators of the ideas were not merely Europeans. By 1900, those who had begun to appropriate the doctrines of liberal Europe to undermine the *ancien régime* in Malaya and other lands – even if they themselves were victims of colonialism – sensed that they possessed a formidable ideological armoury. Colonialism was frequently feared and disliked but, not surprisingly, the doctrines which seemed to underpin the startling achievements of late nineteenth-century Europe were of absorbing interest. Mohd. Eunos Abdullah was one such devotee of the new thinking. His writings were mild-mannered in style but he

developed what might be termed a 'bourgeois philosophy', and the threat it posed to the old Malay order should not be underestimated. For a start, this philosophy entailed the further refining of the concept of *bangsa* as an alternative Malay focus of loyalty and basis of social organization.<sup>1</sup>

### **Mohd. Eunos Abdullah and British Malaya at the turn of the century**

Although Mohd. Eunos Abdullah was in the vanguard of Malay journalists and became the president of the first Malay political association, he lacks credentials as a nationalist hero. He has been called a "loyalist Malay" whose newspapers were published with British approval and who himself became a "confidant and adviser"<sup>2</sup> to the British government in Singapore. The political organization which he led in the 1920s, the Singapore Malay Union, is known to have held a massive procession to celebrate the coronation of King George VI. As a member of the colony's Legislative Council, Eunos even spoke of the Malay's "rightful place in the sun as a happy and contented citizen of the British Empire".<sup>3</sup>

From the vantage point of many modern Malay readers such a declaration could not be more conservative or less attractive. In alluding to 'citizenship', however, it also draws attention to an area in which Eunos exercised a far-reaching influence.

The *kerajaan* leaders would have recognized the revolutionary potency of the idea of 'citizenship'; it means less to us today simply because we take for granted much of the political culture which the term connotes. Only by adopting as closely as possible the perspectives of Eunos' contemporaries can we appreciate his ideological contributions – that is, his role in the formulation of innovative doctrines about race, statehood, individualism and progress. In particular, it is possible to examine his participation in generating the new politics of citizenship.

The first newspaper which Eunos edited, the *Utusan Melayu*, is undeniably a landmark in the history of Malay journalism. Commenced in 1907 as the Malay edition of the English-language paper, the *Free Press*, the *Utusan* provided in the Malay language "for the first time something like daily newspaper journalism".<sup>4</sup> The circulation was only 550 but, as William Roff has noted, newspapers were read aloud in coffee shops<sup>5</sup> and we know that the *Utusan Melayu* was used for teaching purposes in Malay vernacular schools. In 1909, for instance, the Malay teachers' training college in Malacca reported that it was "much indebted to the *Utusan Melayu* for valuable help in broadening the outlook of its students".<sup>6</sup> Just what might have been meant by 'broadening'

is important in considering not only the paper's but also its editor's role in Malay ideological development. Reading the paper in the context of late twentieth-century Malaysia, one is indeed struck by what has been described as its "uncontentious presentation of the news"<sup>7</sup> and "moderately expressed comment".<sup>8</sup> But from the perspective of the *kerajaan* tradition, or even of the mid-nineteenth-century reformism examined in the last chapters, the *Utusan Melayu* looks very different. The mere existence of a commoner Malay employing a new medium to comment on Malay society is itself a radical departure. In the manner of Abdullah, Eunus was also instrumental in the development of a new vocabulary (and even a new syntax) which could be used to interpret and discuss the interactions and associations operating in human society.

The local world upon which the *Utusan* commented had changed in important ways, of course, since the time of Abdullah. The major transformations of the period are charted in numerous scholarly histories.<sup>9</sup> The British, who had ruled the colony of the Straits Settlements over the previous century, had by 1900 firmly established their authority in many of the sultanates of the Peninsula. They described themselves euphemistically as the 'protector' of these Malay states. As in the expansion of Dutch power in the Sumatran sultanates, the British brought the Malay polities under varying degrees of control. In 1896 the four states which were most directly under British influence (Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang) were pressed into a type of federation and a unified, British-led bureaucracy was developed. By the end of the century this 'Federated Malay States' was remarkable for possessing a large and rapidly growing immigrant community. Nearly two million Chinese had entered the states between 1881 and 1900 and by the latter date the total Chinese population was almost equal to the number of Malays. Chinese commercial success was proverbial. Together with the Europeans, for instance, they dominated the massive mining industry which was firmly in place in 1900. These non-Malays were also prominent in the plantation industry which was in the process of being created. But the Malays were not entirely excluded from the new commerce. By the opening of the twentieth century, as John Gullick has explained, there were examples as well of a "new type of Malay capitalist" who used "commercial methods of management".<sup>10</sup>

In some regions at that time Malays were involved in a thriving smallholder rubber industry and many were benefiting from a dramatic land boom.<sup>11</sup> Such a new class of Malays emerged in the peninsular sultanates as well as in the colony. In the towns of the British 'protected' states, groups of Malays began to be seen wearing "stiff shirt collar and polished black shoes" together with "blue tinted goggles".<sup>12</sup> (They remind one of the Malays of mid-nineteenth-century Penang mentioned

in the last chapter as having been dressed in “trousers, socks, shirts, and boots”.) The turn of the century, as we shall see, was a time of anxiety as well as opportunity for such Malays. One of the earliest editorials of the *Utusan Melayu* observes that although thirty years of “administration and law making by English officials” had brought peace and other benefits to the Malay states, it was also a period of danger for the Malay community. Predictably, the editorial stressed that one critical aspect of that danger arose from the startling increase in Chinese – and, to a considerable extent, Indian – immigration.<sup>13</sup>

### The *Utusan Melayu*

Eunos’ reflections on this changing world are to be found in the editorials of the *Utusan Melayu*, his aspirations and biases sometimes lightly disguised. The topics covered by these editorials are certainly diverse. They include such matters as education, rubber planting and football as well as developments in China, Japan, India and Egypt. To list topics in this manner, however, is, in one sense, misleading. Although the editorials generally commence with a comment on some item of current news, they often develop into a lecture about the condition and reform of Malay society. Most editorials appear to attempt to inculcate new values and a new way of thinking in the Malay community. However distant the topic might appear to be from local concerns, the editorials usually contain a pertinent message for the Malay reader. From the first editorial in the opening issue of the paper, it is clear that these messages were not entirely novel.

The first editorial states the aims of the paper.<sup>14</sup> It commences with a communication of goodwill (sent to the paper in Jawi script, from London) from a former governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Frank Swettenham. We are immediately reminded of the apparently obsequious gestures made by Munshi Abdullah and, in fact, the *Utusan* possessed equally good reasons for paying such respect. The paper was not merely produced in a British colony but was owned by William Makepeace, the English publisher of the Singapore newspaper, *The Free Press*.<sup>15</sup> The political and financial imperatives guiding the *Utusan* should constantly be kept in mind when analysing its editorials. Following Swettenham’s statement, the editorial explains that the paper will carry news contained in the English newspapers, news not just of Malay lands but of other continents. “The whole intention behind the publication of this newspaper”, it declares, “is to expand the knowledge of the Malays concerning affairs and developments constantly taking place in the world.” The *Utusan* explains that it wants Malays to be able to “understand matters taking place each day just as

they are understood by races (*bangsa*) which live in a modern (*moden*) way". (The precise way in which *bangsa* is used in the *Utusan* will be examined in due course.) The paper declares that it looks upon the Malays "with great affection" and hopes they will "in the future possess knowledge and skills which cannot be bettered by other races in any aspect of modernity". Readers are then invited to correct the language and spelling of the *Utusan* whenever necessary. They are also requested to refrain from the sort of acrimonious correspondence which "brings benefit to no one".

There is much to comment on in this editorial. Immediately striking is its didactic tone – strong by the standards of most newspapers – and familiar to readers of Abdullah. In its unambiguous desire to reform the Malays, in its concern for the Malays as a race (reminding them of the need to catch up with other races), and in its devotion to the expansion of knowledge and the promotion of language, the *Utusan* is reminiscent of the Munshi's writing. The author of this and later editorials seems to have been conscious, in fact, of participating in an established tradition of writing. The *Utusan's* opening pronouncements do not suggest the paper was a first, cautious, attempt to present modern opinions and matter-of-fact reports on the world to an uninitiated Malay audience. Rather it expresses a confidence of purpose which raises questions about Eunos' background and, in particular, about his relationship to Abdullah.

#### A liberal education

Eunos was born in 1876. Before studying at the Raffles Institution in Singapore, he attended one of the two Malay schools (it is not certain which one) set up in 1856 by the Singapore government in a flurry of educational enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup> By the time Eunos went to school, of course, both Abdullah and Keasberry were dead. Yet Keasberry had lived to 1875 and even in his last years his school had continued to teach 25 to 45 boys annually, sending many of them off, as has been seen, to jobs "with good salaries".<sup>17</sup> Keasberry's influence was not restricted to missionary education. Because the Mission Press (as noted in the last chapter) printed "almost the only educational works" in the Malay language,<sup>18</sup> the *Hikayat Dunia* and other texts would have been used not only in Keasberry's school but also in the secular Malay schools (located at Telok Belanga and Kampong Gelam) which continued to operate after Keasberry's death.

Both these schools were praised highly by English educators: the 1870 official educational report declares that a pupil who attended either of them "regularly for even three years obtains a thorough

knowledge of the Reading and Writing of his own language".<sup>19</sup> But if Eunus studied at Telok Belanga – which is likely because pupils from there commonly transferred as he did to the Raffles Institution<sup>20</sup> – he was certainly involved in a particularly interesting establishment. In 1888 it was described as the “best school in the colony”<sup>21</sup> and since the 1870s it had been associated with a teachers’ training college. The college, which was housed in a former residence of the ruler of Johore, took students from Penang and Malacca as well as Singapore and its graduates were appointed to schools located both in the Straits Settlements and in the new ‘protected’ states.<sup>22</sup> The official reports on education suggest the college’s students may have been socially confident. “Their position and relationship to leading Malays in the districts to which they belong”, it was explained by the British authorities, “will enable them to exert considerable influence in securing the attendance of children”.<sup>23</sup> By 1894 (just before the training college closed), some 200 of the 268 graduates had become teachers; others became clerks and shopkeepers.<sup>24</sup> Eunus, who was himself the son of a Minangkabau merchant from Sumatra, might have found such an assembly of Malays from different regions congenial: it must certainly have enhanced among the students a sense of Malayness reaching beyond parochial loyalties. An additional feature of the Telok Belanga school which could have interested Eunus was the Malay printing press established by the ruler of Johore at the college in 1881.<sup>25</sup>

In the absence of any personal memoirs, it is necessary to speculate on the way Eunus may have been affected by this early education in a government Malay school. How important, for instance, was the new emphasis on the romanization of Malay which had been introduced into education at this time? We will see that it was inspired, at least in part, by a British desire to undercut Islamic influence. To use the Roman not the Arabic (or Jawi) alphabet was expected to predispose Malays to European rather than Muslim ideological influence.<sup>26</sup> Was Eunus himself influenced by such considerations when he decided to include a romanized page in his primarily Jawi newspaper? It has been suggested that his aim was to attract Baba Chinese readers (who were writing and reading romanized Malay in the late nineteenth century),<sup>27</sup> but it may also be the case that Eunus intended to indicate a commitment to the *moden*.

Among the *moden* books which Eunus is likely to have read were the works of Abdullah and the *Hikayat Dunia*. It is clear that, as publications of the Mission Press, these books were widely circulated outside the missionary world. Furthermore, they were printed by the government itself in later decades. The official education report of 1888, for instance, notes a new printing of what it terms the “first volume of the

*Hikayat Abdullah*” and at a price “within the range of all children except those of very poor parents”. To the latter, “copies were issued free”.<sup>28</sup> In 1889 the ‘second volume’ was also reprinted.<sup>29</sup> In 1891 a reprinting of the *Voyage of Abdullah* was announced, and another *Hikayat Abdullah* was underway.<sup>30</sup> The geography, the *Hikayat Dunia*, appeared in a new edition in 1892.<sup>31</sup> The next year further printings of the *Voyage* and the *Hikayat*, the autobiography, were announced and it was explained that these books had been sent to the peninsular states and to Borneo.<sup>32</sup> Private presses too appear to have reprinted Abdullah’s works. Thus, the autobiography and the *Voyage* were both advertised in 1889 by Haji Mohd. Siraj’s press which had agents in Singapore, Penang and Batavia.<sup>33</sup>

These books were undoubtedly read in many schools. The *Hikayat Abdullah*, right up to the end of the colonial period, was reported to be a “school text-book in use all over the country”.<sup>34</sup> The *Voyage* was said to be “of all Malay texts the most widely read by students of the language”.<sup>35</sup> In a memoir of the early years of the first school in Pekan, Pahang (established at the end of the nineteenth century), it is the *Voyage* which is mentioned as the Malay text.<sup>36</sup> (What the *kerajaan* élite of that town thought about the *Voyage*’s account of their noble ancestors will be considered in chapter 8.)

The influence of Abdullah’s writings, however, was not confined to the schoolroom. They were quoted, for instance, in a geographical and historical account of the Malay lands published in 1875<sup>37</sup> and in the Islamic journal, *Al Imam*, in 1908.<sup>38</sup> We will see also that Abdullah’s writings were carefully perused by *kerajaan* ideologues in the sultanate of Johore.<sup>39</sup> The point ought now to be clear: Eunos was a member of an educated ‘new generation’ which, just as the Munshi had intended, could not have avoided reading Abdullah’s *Voyage* and his autobiography.

After leaving the Malay school, Eunos’ attitudes would have been further shaped by his education at the Raffles Institution. The fortunes of the institution had waxed and waned through the nineteenth century, but it was flourishing when Eunos studied there in the early 1890s. A headmaster from England had been appointed in 1871 and in the following years the government reports were often complimentary.<sup>40</sup> “In the direction of higher education,” remarked the Annual Report for Education in 1892, “the Institution is doing excellent work”.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps because there were only 26 Malays there in 1894 and few of the numerous European staff knew the Malay language,<sup>42</sup> Eunos developed a command of English for which he was to be praised in the 1920s as a member of the colony’s Legislative Council.<sup>43</sup> In terms of acquiring practical skills, it is significant that at the Raffles Institution he was a graduate of the ‘commercial class’<sup>44</sup> and thus would probably have

gained a further knowledge of printing. Furthermore, like the Kampong Gelam Malay school, the institution had a connection with the first Malay language periodical of Singapore, the weekly *Jawi Peranakan*. The editor of that paper (which ran from 1876 to 1895) taught at both establishments<sup>45</sup> and, in the manner of the later *Utusan*, the *Jawi Peranakan* was used for reading in schools.<sup>46</sup>

The *Jawi Peranakan* may well have been an inspiration for Eunos, and in more than one way. It could have stimulated him not only to consider a career in journalism for himself but also to adopt new social views and an innovative style of writing. This pioneering weekly has been examined with care by Roff.<sup>47</sup> It was run by locally born Indians, offered no editorial, achieved a relatively small print run and did not subject local affairs to “analytical comment”.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the paper introduced Malay readers to a new genre of writing. (Those few Malays who had read Thomsen’s *Malay Magazine* of the 1820s would be either dead or of advanced age.) It was a genre which entailed a special intimacy between authors and readers. The cultural consequences of the act of reading have been discussed in previous chapters but newspapers could bring a new directness and reciprocity to the relation between author and audience. Munshi Abdullah’s books had offered personal observations on his voyage and his life; the new journalists went so far as to ask their readers to reply. As Roff tells it, the editors of the *Jawi Peranakan* seem to have been unprepared for the sheer volume of correspondence (often in “traditional epistolary style”) which their publication inspired. The letters were concerned with education, social customs, wild pigs, spelling and pronunciation. The correspondents wrote at such length that the editors complained.<sup>49</sup>

The *Jawi Peranakan* also developed the innovations of Abdullah in another area. Although much of the day-to-day information in the paper seems commonplace to the modern reader it is strikingly different from the content of *kerajaan* literature. The news items, commercial reports, shipping movements and commodity prices (familiar features of Western newspapers) constitute the type of “realistic” material which Abdullah introduced into Malay writing. Roff is particularly impressed by the “long reports” on different parts of the peninsula and archipelago which were sometimes presented in the *Jawi Peranakan*. He considers that they “must have assisted in the development of a general consciousness of the unity as well as the diversity of the contemporary Malaysian world”.<sup>50</sup> Despite the fact that these reports presented no explicit critique of Malay society, reading them would at least teach Eunos to address Malay matters in a new voice. It is sufficient that the Malay polities were discussed in other than a *kerajaan* voice to make these descriptions novel. When we read, for



instance, of migration from one peninsular state to another, even though the article includes a detailed description of an audience with a ruler, the perspective is external to the court and its discourse. To quote one passage:

In 1304 [1886/7] many people of the Malay race (*bangsa Melayu*) from Kelantan, Patani, Patalung and Songkhla, together with some Siamese people – more than 2000 people in all – entered Kedah. Bringing their belongings they came to reside at that place. When the Raja addressed inquiries to these new arrivals, they declared ‘we were all hungry, we could not restrain ourselves from streaming over here. We all come to submit ourselves to your Majesty (*Duli Yang Maha Mulia*)’. They were then asked ‘what type of work can you carry out here’. They answered: ‘we are accustomed to planting rice. That is our living’. The Raja was happy because the country of Kedah is filled with wet and dry rice lands.<sup>51</sup>

In this passage, the perceptions and motivation of the migrants are given as much attention as those of the ruler and his advisers. We are presented with the economic imperatives leading to migration, and also to the welcoming of the immigrants. Moreover, the language used does not employ all of the normal vocabulary associated with royalty.

In other ways, too, the actual vocabulary used in the *Jawi Peranakan* may have helped prepare Eunos to write his own editorials in 1907. However politically modest the *Jawi Peranakan* may have been, its use of language was sometimes innovative. Certain words had to be borrowed or adapted, for example, to describe the day-to-day affairs of a British colony. Thus, a description of the early development of the British protectorate in Pahang introduces the word ‘collector’. (The paper defines this pivotal office in British colonial administration merely as an “official who gathers the taxes of a territory”.<sup>52</sup>) Even the official government announcements and commercial advertisements contained in the *Jawi Peranakan* introduced readers to a new vocabulary relating to modern institutions of administration, the law and commerce. The pages are filled with ‘government proclamations’.<sup>53</sup> There are announcements about ‘limited companies’ and ‘auctions’.<sup>54</sup> Vacant government posts are always described with reference to a fixed salary: the “superintendent of education in Malacca possesses the monthly salary of 150 dollars”.<sup>55</sup>

Again these seem prosaic matters and yet innovation in vocabulary, the introduction of new signifiers, facilitates and promotes new modes of thought. Like the *Hikayat Dunia* and Abdullah’s writings, the *Jawi Peranakan* offered Eunos many of the terms and concepts which he would later employ as a newspaper editor and social reformer. Although we cannot be certain of the type of criticism of Malay society

which he encountered at the Raffles Institution, the presence there of these publications gives some idea of the intellectual background of Eunus and other members of the generation of 1900. Above all, the fact that so many people in the 1870s and 1880s were actually eager to express themselves in their own language in correspondence to a newspaper is a particular sign that already an active, participatory, readership was forming. Such developments underline the perception that this generation of 1900 was by no means the first wave of Malay 'modernism'.

It is the innovations made by the generation of 1900, however, that are especially revealing in a study of Malay political thinking. In contrast to Abdullah, for instance, Eunus was not satisfied with generalized condemnation and exhortation. He made concrete proposals to the Malay community living under British rule in the colony or British 'Protection' on the peninsula. At times he seems to have been charting the future of his community within the context both of its pre-colonial past and of the new colonial and capitalist era. This is not to say that Eunus' views differed essentially from those of Abdullah, but rather that he pursued the implications of the Munshi's reformism in changed social and political circumstances.

### *Bangsa*

The most significant concept to which Eunus made innovations was *bangsa*. He added new content – new signification – to the term, enhancing in particular its emotive power. Certain of this new content, not surprisingly, he adapted from the *kerajaan* tradition itself. From the first editorial, the focus of the *Utusan Melayu* is on the Malay race (*bangsa*) rather than, for example, the individual sultanates or, for that matter, the international Islamic community. The character and dynamics of ideological contestation in the Malay community will become evident in the course of this study, but we must keep in mind from the outset that Eunus wrote in such a context.

In advocating the racial community in preference to any other type of social bond, Eunus followed Abdullah. As was the case with other topics, however, Eunus took the discussion of race beyond the type of formulations which the Munshi offered. Although Abdullah warned, admonished and tried to inspire the Malays he did not directly advocate the type of emotionalism, the love of race, which emerges in Eunus' editorials. The latter writes of the Malays "with great affection"; he praises "love of race" in other peoples, and he urges Malays to make their race "great" and "powerful". Malays, he says, should enhance the *nama* or reputation of their race; they should try to "lift its rank".<sup>56</sup> The

emotional commitment to the concept is to be explained partly in terms of the influence of changing British usage, but the actual rhetoric employed here is also significant. This 'love', this 'enhancing of *nama*' and 'lifting of rank' is resonant of *kerajaan* culture. It is the specific object of loyalty and devotion which has changed, and this change is of momentous significance. In applying these sentiments to race rather than ruler, Eunus was by no means the last Malay ideologue to appropriate the vocabulary of the sultanates in the service of new political doctrines. The use of this vocabulary, we will see, might also provide a clue as to why *bangsa* began to be perceived with such emotion.

The second way in which Eunus' handling of 'Malay *bangsa*' may be distinguished from that of Abdullah arises from the newspaper editor's deliberate stress on the problematic character of Malay ethnicity. We will see that the *Utusan* does not treat *bangsa* as a given. Although Abdullah's writing constantly foregrounded the Malay *bangsa*, and so contributed to the growing power of the concept, the *Utusan* differs in explicitly treating *bangsa* as an intellectual construction. (We are reminded of Benedict Anderson's dictum that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact [and perhaps even these] are imagined".<sup>57</sup>)

The problematic character of *bangsa* is suggested partly by its impermanence. Thus, the *Utusan* explains to its readers that a people who do not work diligently might be unable to make their race "permanent (*hekal*) in this world".<sup>58</sup> Such anxiety about permanence raises an issue which had long concerned Malay thinkers. Life itself was considered transitory: dying rulers and other leaders warned their followers that "this world will not endure ... all that liveth here upon earth cannot but die in the end".<sup>59</sup> Politics, too, were capable of disappearing from view – Aru in Sumatra, for instance, dissolved some time in the sixteenth century – and even their wooden physical remains were unlikely to be able to withstand the moisture of the tropics. Written chronicles – manuscripts carefully preserved – give the impression of attempting to capture a kingdom, to fix it in time as an heirloom for future generations. In these circumstances, the aspiration to make a sultanate "permanent", recorded in some texts, was an understandable objective.<sup>60</sup> When the *Utusan* speaks of the need to give permanence to the *bangsa*, therefore, it seems to invoke a longstanding Malay anxiety.

To 'fix' the Malay *bangsa*, Eunus argued for the need to understand it in a specific way, and to commit oneself to that understanding. Although consciousness of 'race' had become increasingly influential among Malays since the eighteenth century, in 1900 (and, as we shall see in chapter 10, even in 1940) large numbers of Malays continued to

give primacy to their relation with a sultanate, a local village or a region. What Eunoss asserts is that the community – the intellectual construct – which Malays needed to be made aware of, and encouraged to give priority to, was the *bangsa*. The way in which the *Utusan* educates its readers about race is often indirect. Discussions of developments in Egypt or Japan, for instance, provide opportunities to make general observations which might otherwise have provoked official antagonism in the colonial situation. When an editorial on Egypt refers to the people of that country wishing to “raise themselves up and become one *bangsa*”,<sup>61</sup> the message for Malays is not difficult to determine.

A number of messages, however, are designed specifically for the Malays. Thus, they are warned not to become like those communities of people “who are so confused that they do not know their own race”.<sup>62</sup> Certain Malays, members of what we might call the new middle class, are warned that they could “lose” their race.<sup>63</sup> One editorial explains that with the success of the rubber industry – by the early nineteenth century there was indeed a boom in Malay planting and a good deal of lively land selling<sup>64</sup> – it would be possible for an increasing number of Malays to go to Europe for schooling. The *Utusan* argues that just as many Indians had “become European” through European education, so Malays might also “forget their race in their intention to become Europeans”.<sup>65</sup>

In certain other editorials the *Utusan* attempts to assist Malays to “remember” their race. In the spirit of the traditional *kerajaan* world, for instance, readers are reminded that in training their children they must never neglect to teach the Malay “courteous behaviour” and “soft and gentle” manners.<sup>66</sup> In a discussion of the Malays of Ceylon and South Africa, the *Utusan* delineates what it considers a further characteristic of Malayness. A brief account is given of the origins of these Malay groups and then it is related that in 1885 the Sultan of Johore met Malays in Colombo on his way to Europe. In this meeting, the editorial explains, he encountered the same “love and affection” and “submission” which was normally offered by Malays to *Raja Melayu*. Although the Ceylon Malays were “not from the Malay Peninsula” (*tanah Melayu*), the editorial continues, “they are *bangsa Melayu* and because of that it is appropriate for people here to take notice of them and seek ways to bring about a unity with them”. In general, the *Utusan* declares, it is “time for Malays to try to unite themselves, especially when almost all of the Malay *bangsa* is governed by other races”.<sup>67</sup>

In one important respect this statement differs substantially from the views expressed by Abdullah. The *Raja Melayu* is not treated with the same ridicule and disdain which generally characterizes Abdullah’s comments on Malay rulers. The criticism is more subtle than this and

yet, from the perspective of the royal courts, no less dangerous. The Malays of Ceylon are considered to be expressing their Malayness by greeting the Malay ruler in a traditional fashion. That is, in the *Utusan* the significance of 'rajaship' is grounded not so much in the potency of the institution itself but in its usefulness to the *bangsa*. 'Rajaship' is introduced in the process of enumerating the characteristics of 'Malayness'.

*Kerajaan* culture is used again to define Malayness in a special series of articles.<sup>68</sup> The articles come as a further surprise after reading Abdullah. Far from ridiculing royal ceremony, they provide detailed and lengthy descriptions of the wedding of the Sultan of Perak. In this way, they draw upon a tradition readily accessible to them. Once more, however, the concern appears to be not to pay homage to the *raja* but to record, and remind readers of, the ancient customs of the Malays. The articles detail the titles, ceremonies and music. The fact that the author considers it necessary to define the *gamelan* (as a 'band') is a sign that in 1908, at least in Singapore, these courtly matters may have been unfamiliar to many Malays (and Malay-reading Chinese). This *bangsa* concern for royalty arises again in a later issue of the *Utusan* which contains the demand that the dignity of the rulers under British 'Protection' (as the British described their colonial presence) should be maintained. The precise wording of this editorial is significant. It states that the *raja's* dignity must be respected in accordance with "the customs (*adat*) of the race (*bangsa*)".<sup>69</sup> *Kerajaan* texts had presented the sovereign in the reverse position. Custom was said to be "in the hands"<sup>70</sup> of the ruler and we know also from Abdullah's journal that Malay subjects were reluctant to alter the *adat* for fear of invoking the wrath of "rulers of old". In the *Utusan* it is stated that the ruler's position must be in accordance with the customs of his *bangsa*; that is, *bangsa* is made to precede *raja*. Thus, the impression is given that rulers and their ceremonial are dimensions of Malayness and they are to be preserved in the service of the race.

Such attempts to define Malayness, together with anxiety about whether Malays actually "know their race", give the editorials a tone of defensiveness. The *Utusan* certainly promotes *bangsa* consciousness but seems to do so in a manner which communicates anxiety. The paper was engaged in developing a social vision to replace that of the *kerajaan*. Malayness was a particularly fragile basis for such a project. There was little in *kerajaan* writing, for instance, for a strong, genetic view of race. In the pre-colonial world, so royal texts suggest, people could change their group ethnic identification with considerable ease. They could, for instance, lose or acquire what was increasingly described as 'Malayness'. One Malay text even explains how certain people who altered

their customs, language and attire were able to become Jakun or aborigines.<sup>71</sup>

During the nineteenth century in Sumatra and Borneo, as well as the Malay Peninsula, European observers encountered a process of 'Malayization' in which peoples on the periphery of specific sultanates were gradually absorbed into a specific *kerajaan*, adopting its language and culture. The reverse process might also occur. It appears to have taken place, for instance, in East Sumatra after the disintegration of certain sultanates. As the Malay courts collapsed, people who once called themselves 'Malay' reverted to the Batak identification of their ancestors.<sup>72</sup> It would have been to some extent in terms of this ideological inheritance, therefore, that Eunos is likely to have perceived the issue of race. Such a perception of ethnicity would have influenced him in recognizing the possibility that the *bangsa Melayu* could not merely decline but also disappear. It was not only the Malay individual educated in Europe on the profits of the thriving rubber industry who might "forget his race". In writing of the need to give the Malay *bangsa* 'permanence', Eunos was perhaps painfully aware of an oft-quoted declaration from the legendary hero of Malacca, Hang Tuah, who is said to have warned of the possibility that the Malays (in that period specifically the people of the Malacca Sultanate) might actually "disappear from the world".<sup>73</sup>

A second factor which would almost certainly have inspired a defensive tone in the *Utusan's* discussion of *bangsa* arises from the momentous social developments taking place in Malaya at the turn of the century. These developments involved much more than the danger that European culture might assimilate a new generation of élite Malays, causing them to "lose their race". They involved also a threat from Asia. By the end of the nineteenth century, as noted, the dimensions of Asian immigration into Malaya and the Straits Settlements were apparent to any alert observer. Eunos himself, when he surveyed the progress of what was often called 'British Malaya' in 1907,<sup>74</sup> reported that from 1901 to 1905 the population of the four states of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang had increased by 20 percent and that the majority of the increase was made up of Chinese and Indians. If the Malays, he warned, did not wish to be "driven away from their own states by other races", then it was necessary that they "work hard day by day for themselves and their race".

Although five decades earlier Abdullah had referred to the competition which Malays would have to face from other races, he did not specify the precise nature of the threat. To some extent his Indian and Arab background may have discouraged Abdullah from discussing racial threat in the manner of Eunos, but the concept of *bangsa*, of

course, was also less developed and the danger of immigration less apparent in 1850. As noted above, by 1900 almost a half (48%) of the total population of the Federated Malay States and Singapore combined was Chinese.<sup>75</sup> The last two decades of the century had seen especially large immigration, with well over a million and a half Chinese entering the states of Perak and Selangor alone.<sup>76</sup> Such population movement, particularly of people displaying what the *Utusan* perceived to be great energy,<sup>77</sup> must inevitably have sharpened Malay anxiety about the future prospects of their own *bangsa*.

### Political vocabulary

Whatever anxieties Eunus may have possessed about the future of the Malay race, he at least employed with confidence the term *bangsa* itself. The precise way in which he used this word is important. It is just one of the ways in which he influenced the emergence of the new language of politics and social criticism. It is especially revealing to examine in this context Eunus' contribution to the changing relationship between *bangsa* and that critical term of the pre-modern era, *kerajaan*. A further significant relationship is that between *bangsa* and *nama*.

*Kerajaan* is not a term used by Abdullah<sup>78</sup> and yet it was constantly employed in the traditional Malay texts produced in his lifetime and even later. The *Hikayat Pahang*, written at the end of the nineteenth century, and the *Tuhfat al Nafis*, appearing a few decades earlier, still used *kerajaan* (in the old sense) to denote not merely 'government' but also 'king', 'royalty' and 'kingdom'. In these texts, it is the *kerajaan* to which people are said to owe loyalty.<sup>79</sup> By contrast, when Abdullah wrote of 'government' he generally used *perintah* (often defined simply as 'an order'). He described people as living "under" Malay "government" or "orders" ("*dibawah perintah Raja Melayu*").<sup>80</sup> Sometimes when referring to 'government' in the sense of the institution or office of government, he employed *raja*. That is, in discussing an agreement made between the Chinese and English governments, the terms he used for these governments were "*Raja China*" and "*Raja Inggeris*".<sup>81</sup> On another occasion, he merely employed the English word and wrote of "*Goberman Inggeris*".<sup>82</sup> It is the agility with which Abdullah avoided *kerajaan*, therefore, which suggests the continued potency of the word in the mid-nineteenth century. The promotion of 'bangsa-mindedness', the Munshi may have feared, could be frustrated by competition from the traditional notion of a community bonded together 'in the condition of having a *raja*'.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the power of the word *kerajaan* was blunted in another significant way, by redefinition rather

than avoidance. *Kerajaan* began to be defined in narrower and what might be called more mundane terms as 'government'. Although in 1887 the *Jawi Peranakan* appears to have used *kerajaan* in the old manner, and to have relied upon *perintah* to convey 'administration',<sup>85</sup> in 1894 a Chinese-run newspaper (*Bintang Timor*) used the phrase *menjalankan kerajaan* for to "carry out government"<sup>84</sup>. A few years later a Malay translation of a book about the modernization of Japan also used *kerajaan* in this way, distinguishing, for instance, the *raja* from his *kerajaan* or 'government'.<sup>85</sup> It is in this sense also that *kerajaan* is used in the *Utusan Melayu*. Indeed, nothing could demonstrate more clearly the separation of *raja* from *kerajaan* than the *Utusan's* definition (and it is presented explicitly as a definition) of 'republic'. Although the notion of 'republic' would once have been diametrically opposed to the concept of *kerajaan*, 'republic' was now described as a "*kerajaan ramai*" i.e. a "*kerajaan of the populace*".<sup>86</sup> In the *Utusan*, therefore, *kerajaan* is not avoided; but it is no longer used as the potent signifier of the institution and community which once commanded Malay loyalty and was also capable of giving meaning to Malay lives. In the *Utusan*, *kerajaan* is used as a matter-of-fact term for 'government'.

Although this demotion of *kerajaan* is likely to have assisted, at least indirectly, in enhancing the significance of *bangsa*, it appears at the same time to have raised other issues of terminology. How in particular would the sultanate now be described? There was a need for a classificatory term, one also which permitted Malays to discuss countries that were adamantly not monarchical. In court literature, there had been no clear concept of 'state' as distinct from *kerajaan*; even countries outside the Malay world were described as *kerajaan*. Increasingly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *negeri* was employed for 'state'.

Despite the fact that *negeri* possessed none of the connotations associated with *kerajaan*, this word too required a degree of redefinition. It had been used for many years in court texts, but more in the sense of a 'settlement' than of a political entity. To quote a modern editor of one important Malay chronicle, *negeri* denoted merely a "fairly large community, centred usually on a river estuary, an entrepôt for foreign merchants, with some political influence over the surrounding territory". The editor translated *negeri* as 'city'.<sup>87</sup> Abdullah himself seems to have used the word in this way when he wrote of "*negeri Singapore*" and "*negeri Canton*" as well as "*negeri Pahang*".<sup>88</sup> The *Hikayat Dunia*, in its discussion of Australia, referred to "*negeri Melbourne*" and its "dependencies" in Port Phillip. In giving an account of the Temenggong of Johore establishing a new settlement at the opening of the Johore river, that text described the settlement itself as a *negeri*.<sup>89</sup> It is particularly during the late nineteenth century that *negeri* acquired its new



meaning. With growing frequency, publications of the 1870s and 1880s employed the term to refer either to individual Malay sultanates or any political state in the world beyond the Malay territories.<sup>90</sup> The usage possessed, in particular, clear territorial implications, something relatively absent from *kerajaan*. In this sense at least it was immediately in harmony with current notions of the state in Europe, notions which were attracting the attention of Eunos.

In another area, however, *negeri* was less adequate. As a relatively prosaic term in traditional writing, it conveyed little emotional or sentimental value. Only gradually and perhaps cautiously was *negeri* used to represent an object of political commitment which might replace or at least compete with the *kerajaan*. Thus, in the book mentioned above as discussing the rise of Japan (published in 1906), the Japanese are portrayed as being motivated by a desire to serve not their *raja* but their state: they are said to seek ways to “raise” and “bring honour” to their *negeri*.<sup>91</sup> The continued hesitation in the use of *negeri*, however, is suggested by the way the text couples the term to a foreign word sometimes defined as ‘nation’ or ‘homeland’. The Japanese are said to “love their *watan*” and “for that reason” wish to “raise” and “bring honour” to their *negeri*.<sup>92</sup> The second term, *watan*, was a fashionable expression for ‘nation’ in Arab writings of the period and became popular for some decades in Malaya.<sup>93</sup>

The joining together of these two words *negeri* and *watan* in the book on Japan seems to imply that the translator feared his audience would not comprehend immediately the idea of devotion to the formerly mundane *negeri*. *Watan* was not the only term introduced to reinforce *negeri*. Two years later, an editorial in the *Utusan Melayu* coupled *negeri* with *raja*. The topic again was Japan. The editorial notes that the Chinese did not ‘truly love’ their *negeri* and their *raja* in the manner of the Japanese.<sup>94</sup> A third (and final) term used to strengthen *negeri* was *tanah ayer* meaning ‘land and water’ or ‘homeland’. In discussing Turkey, the *Utusan* proclaims that there was “no greater love than that which a subject (*rakyat*) devotes to his/her *negeri* and *tanah ayer*”.<sup>95</sup> Clustering these three terms together in such a manner gives the impression of an attempt to convey the idea of a potent ‘state’. It has the effect of extending the signification of *negeri*, and perhaps also of *tanah ayer* and *watan*. All these terms were evidently in flux. Although in the 1920s and 1930s, *tanah ayer* and *watan* were commonly used to convey ‘homeland’ or ‘nation’, they possessed no such distinct meanings in 1900. *Tanah ayer* does not appear in the earliest European dictionaries of Malay and even in Wilkinson’s magisterial dictionary of 1903, it is defined merely as “the whole extent of land and water forming a geographic unit”.<sup>96</sup> *Watan* was defined in 1881 by the

Egyptian reformist, Abduh, as “your place to which you belong and in which you have rights and towards which your duties are known and in which you have security for yourself and yours and for your property”.<sup>97</sup> It has been argued that the concept of *watan* was a European borrowing, and we will examine at a later point the claim that it “runs counter to the universal community, ‘*umma*’, so basic to Islam”.<sup>98</sup>

The correlating of *watan*, *tanah ayer* and *negeri* was one of the ways in which, in the opening years of this century, the *Utusan* was a pioneer in the development of a new political vocabulary. To some extent the paper’s use of these terms involved a process of contagion in which meaning was transferred through association. In retrospect, such experimentation appears to move uncertainly toward a formulation and understanding of nationhood. The concept of community which immediately concerned the *Utusan*, however, was the *bangsa*. As a focus of identity and loyalty, *bangsa* was a far more heavily value-laden term than *watan*, *tanah ayer* or *negeri*. More than any other concept, it was given a stress equal to the significance which court writers attributed to *kerajaan*. Thus, as we have observed, the *Utusan* urged the Malays to make their *bangsa* ‘great’ and ‘powerful’ and to enhance its reputation (*nama*). The paper called upon Malays, in effect, to raise the *bangsa* above even the *kerajaan* itself.

Even in conveying the notion of a specifically political community, Eunus appears to have preferred *bangsa* to other alternatives. At particular points in the *Utusan*, *bangsa* is used to convey the notion of what might be described as a political as well as an ethnic community. In this sense, *bangsa* tends to communicate a certain, vague, concept of ‘nationhood’. The clearest expression of this dimension of the word is in an editorial which deals with developments outside Malaya. Egypt, the Philippines and India, the *Utusan* explains, are examples of states (*negeri*) administered (*diperintah*) by other governments (*kerajaan*). In all of these cases there are people who desire to have their own government (*kerajaan sendiri*). These people are described by the editorial as *ahli-ahli bangsa*.<sup>99</sup> *Ahli-ahli* is generally defined as ‘members’ or ‘specialists’: thus, an *ahli bahasa* is a linguist or specialist in language (*bahasa*). So those who might in retrospect be called ‘nationalists’, those who sought self-government for their people, are described in Malay in the *Utusan* as “specialists in *bangsa*”. The implication of this choice of word, of course, would seem to be that *bangsa*, rather than *negeri* or *tanah ayer* or *watan* (all three of which were beginning to possess some tentative claim to be defined as ‘nation state’), was considered to convey most effectively the emotional value associated with the English word ‘nationalist’. The linking of *bangsa* and ‘nation’ in this way was to become a persistent theme in Malay political thought during the twentieth century.

The term *bangsa*, however, lacked an immediate territorial reference. Royal ideologues, it should be noted, were later to argue that Malay racial or national feeling was most appropriately expressed in terms of an immediate loyalty to particular sultanates or *negeri*. But sentiment of this type also had the potential to compete with a wider Malay nationalism. Apart from experimenting with such terms as *watan* and *tanah ayer*, both of which might also be applied either to an individual sultanate or to a far larger territorial unit, the *Utusan* occasionally employed one further expression. This phrase, *tanah Melayu*, laid claim to a specific and broad territorial scope for Malay political sentiment. It was eventually adopted, in fact, as the Malay name for the independent state of 'Malaya'.

The literal meaning of *tanah Melayu* is 'the country of the Malays' and the expression was used at least from the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>100</sup> John Crawfurd, who knew the Malay world in the early decades of the nineteenth century, noted in his *Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands* that *Tanah Melayu* referred specifically to the peninsula and not to all lands of the archipelago where Malays were located. He explained that "the Malays, although seldom giving names to such large masses of land, occasionally call [the Peninsula] *Tanah-Melayu* – the 'Malay land', or 'country of the Malays'".<sup>101</sup> The *Utusan* itself implies that the term did not denote merely the more southerly states which came under British influence but also those Malay territories which were within the Thai sphere.<sup>102</sup> What is clear from these observations is that even if Malays "seldom" gave names to "such large masses of land", and only "occasionally" used the phrase *Tanah Melayu*, there was emerging in some quarters nevertheless a perception of a Malay *bangsa* which entailed a notion of territorial unity transcending individual sultanates.

### **Bangsa and nama**

How do we explain this stress on *bangsa* as a key concept in the writings of Eunus and others? The answer must be partly given in terms of British influence. In the last chapter, we saw that the term was used persistently in the geography, *Hikayat Dunia*. As Charles Hirschman's recent study explains, the category 'race' became increasingly important in late-nineteenth-century British thinking. It was in 1891, he notes, that 'race' replaced 'nationalities' in the government population census for the Straits Settlements. The new formulation was "not the inevitable solution to a complex ethnographic maze but rather a particular construction of European taste".<sup>103</sup> By the later 1800s a 'scientific' theory of racism was becoming influential. The "Darwinian theory of the natural selection of the species was universally applied to

the races of mankind".<sup>104</sup> It was this new conception of race, according to Hirschman, that lay behind the change of terminology in the census and the final sentence in his article reminds us of the "residue of racial ideology [which] continues to haunt contemporary Malaysia".<sup>105</sup>

Just how rapidly this "construction of European taste" in the categorization of humankind began to have a general impact on Malay thinking is difficult to detect. It would not be surprising, however, if Eunos, who had been educated at the largely European-staffed Raffles Institution and worked closely with Europeans in the newspaper industry, came into contact with the new racial thinking. We will see that he was attracted to a broad range of other social and economic conceptions deriving from Europe.

The influence of British practice provides only partial explanation of one aspect of the use of *bangsa*. The degree of sentiment which Eunos attached to the term, a sentiment which many later Malay writers also expressed, would certainly have been influenced by British example. The geography, for instance, had spoken with pride of the English race and there is plenty of evidence in the speeches of late-nineteenth-century British administrators of a growing sense of satisfaction about the English achievement. Few governors, for example, could have surpassed Sir Frederick Weld in racial pride. He served in Singapore from 1880 until 1887, years when Eunos was an impressionable schoolboy.<sup>106</sup>

The emotion embedded in *bangsa* was not merely a consequence of foreign influences. It was a reaction, also, to longstanding Malay concerns. In this respect the terminology used to convey loyalty to race is of significance. When Eunos and later Malay writers used the language of the *kerajaan* to describe devotion to *bangsa*, when they wrote of "loving the *bangsa*," of "raising its rank", and of "enhancing its *nama*" – they engaged in more than the skilful appropriation of a potent vocabulary. The use of this language indicates the possibility that the *Utusan* was presenting *bangsa* as a category of social unity possessing some qualities not unlike those of the *kerajaan*. We shall see that when Eunos discusses the benefits of "hard work" he makes at least an indirect connection between the advancement of personal *nama* and the status of the *bangsa*. Just as the *kerajaan* had defined and recognized the Malay subject and his achievements, so the *bangsa*, too, may have been expected to serve such a purpose. The substitution would not always have been complete. Advocates of *bangsa* such as Munshi Abdullah and Eunos were, at the same time, proponents of an individualistic way of thinking. (More will be said of this aspect of Eunos' philosophy.) Such individualism, of course, had the potential to undermine the very notion of *nama* as reputation of "public man", a notion which is so essential to understanding the power of the Malay ceremonial polity.

There is indeed an element of contradiction in stressing at the same time both *bangsa* and 'individualism', an element which was coped with to some extent by this *kerajaan* perception of *bangsa*. The contradiction is perhaps best understood in terms of the audience to which Eunus and other liberals appealed. The editor of the *Utusan* definitely considered that substantial numbers of Malays continued to be pre-occupied with *nama*. We find the same assertion in certain other twentieth-century writings. In the 1920s, for instance, one Malay author (a *bangsa*-minded modern historian) made the point dramatically by a comparison with the Chinese. While the latter devoted their lives to industry, he observed, the Malay concern was with the "search for *nama*".<sup>107</sup> What we do not know is to what extent these *nama*-oriented Malays perceived their *namas* as a personal achievement which did not require to be imbedded in the *kerajaan* or any other type of communal identity.

Many of the Malay community with which Eunus was concerned would certainly not have thought in individualistic terms. The editor himself was perhaps only beginning to explore such concepts. Malay anxiety about focusing on the individual rather than society, as will be explained in later chapters, continued to be expressed for many years. For Malays (who still perceived their *nama* in communal terms) the opportunity to achieve reputation in the service of the *bangsa* would have particular attractions. Moreover, the use of *kerajaan* terminology to describe loyalty to race would satisfy a desire to find in this new community a full-scale compensation for the loss of the old. It is particularly in this sense that the sentiment which the *Utusan* attributes to *bangsa*-mindedness indicates more than the influence of English racial thinking. The emotion also indicates that in contributing to the formulation and signification of new and radical key terms, Eunus was sensitive to certain conventional claims of the long-established concept of *nama*.

In respect to *bangsa* and numerous other words, the significance of the *Utusan* in the elaboration of a new political language is undeniable. Eunus used his editorials to contribute to the process of developing Malay terms for such key concepts as 'state', 'race', 'nation', 'government', 'self-government', 'nationalist', and 'republic'. Building upon the work of Abdullah and the *Hikayat Dunia*, the *Utusan* was creating a new vocabulary, a discourse, designed to supplant that of the *kerajaan*. As is increasingly becoming clear, such potent vocabularies were at this time being developed in numerous other parts of the colonized world.<sup>108</sup> In a less straightforward fashion, however, Eunus was also beginning to envisage the form of a Malay society which might one day be released from the hegemony both of the *kerajaan* and the British.

The *Utusan* perception of *bangsa*, as we have seen, incorporated a certain territorial dimension. Just as in the case of Egypt, the Philippines or India, the future Malay *ahli bangsa* (the 'specialists in race') – so the *Utusan* hints – would be concerned to establish 'self-government'. And they would do so not merely in the context of individual sultanates or states but rather in that of the Malay race and the Malay Peninsula.

The scope and focus of the constructed community was a critical element in Eunus' liberal program, and its implication for the defenders of the *kerajaan* are obvious. Other liberal tenets, however, were equally subversive. In the next chapter we will examine the character of the *bangsa* society advocated by the *Utusan*. It could be termed a bourgeois vision, and one which possessed far-reaching implications for the perception of the individual's role in Malay society.

### Notes

- 1 Changes in meaning of *bangsa* are surveyed in Tan Liok Ee, *The Rhetoric of Bangsa and Minzu: Community and Nation in Tension, the Malay Peninsula, 1900–1955* (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1988).
- 2 W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 160–1. William Roff has carried out the major pioneering research with respect to Mohd. Eunus Abdullah. Radin Soernarno compares Mohd. Eunus Abdullah unfavourably with the leaders of the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (the Union of Malay Youths). They were "selfmade' in that they emerged as such out of their own conviction and struggle". Eunus, Tengku Abdul Kadir and Inche Embok Suloh, leaders of the earlier Singapore Malay Union, are all called "chosen personalities of the Government". They served the government on the Municipal Council or as Justices of the Peace before they established the Singapore Malay Union; Radin Soernarno 'Malay Nationalism, 1896–1941,' *JSEAH*, 1 (1960), 18.
- 3 See his speech of 28 October 1929 in *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements*, 1929, B150. On the coronation celebration see Soernarno, 'Malay Nationalism,' 11.
- 4 W.R. Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals Published in the Straits Settlements and Peninsular Malay States 1876–1941* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1.
- 5 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 167; also 51. For circulation figures, see I. Proudfoot, 'Pre-War Malay Periodicals, notes to Roff's Bibliography drawn from Government Gazettes', *Kekal Abadi*, 4, 41 (1985), 4.
- 6 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements* (1908), 11.
- 7 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 159.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 160.
- 9 J.M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987); B. W. and L. Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: Macmillan, 1982), chapter 5; Emily Sadka, *The Protected Malay States 1874–1895* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968); Jagjit Singh Sidhu, *Administration in the Federated Malay States 1896–1920* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980).
- 10 Gullick, *Malay Society*, 162; see also J. M. Gullick, 'The Entrepreneur in late 19th Century Malay Society', *JMBRAS*, 58, 1, 59–70. For immigration figures, see Ooi Jin-Bee, *Land, People and Economy in Malaya* (London: Longmans, 1964), 110–11.
- 11 Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874–1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 74–5.

- 12 Gullick, *Malay Society*, 193.
- 13 *Utusan Melayu*, 5 December 1907.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 7 November 1907.
- 15 Roff, *Bibliography*, 6.
- 16 Roff states that Eunus attended the Kampong Gelam school, Nik Ahmad says he attended the Telok Belanga school; Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 159; Nik Ahmad bin Haji Nik Hassan, 'The Malay Press', *JMBRAS*, 36, 1 (1963), 46.
- 17 See chapter 3, note 99.
- 18 See chapter 3, note 64.
- 19 Quoted in Francis H. K. Wong and Gwee Yee Hean (eds), *Official Reports on Education, Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States* (Singapore: Pan Pacific, 1980), 96. See also, *ibid.*, 31, on the expansion of the vernacular school system in the 1870s and 1880s.
- 20 *Report of the Inspector for Schools, Straits Settlements, 1874*, 44.
- 21 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements, 1888*, 208.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 1894, 169; see also *ibid.*, 1888, 209; *ibid.*, 1884, 159; see also D.D. Chelliah, *A History of the Educational Policy of the Straits Settlements, etc.* (Singapore: Kiat and Co., 1960), 135–6; Amin Sweeney and Nigel Phillips (eds), *The Voyages of Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), xxv.
- 23 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements, 1881*, 209.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 1894, 169.
- 25 Chelliah, *Educational Policy*, 106.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 69; see also chapters 6 and 9 below.
- 27 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 159–60.
- 28 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements, 1888*, 213.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 1889, 7.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 1891, 29.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 1892, 177.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 1893, 322.
- 33 See, for instance, the advertisement printed in the *Hikayat Indra Bangsawan* (Singapore: Haji Mohd. Siraj Press, 1889).
- 34 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 135; see also Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya 1874–1940* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), 24.
- 35 A.H. Hill, 'Introduction', 'The Hikayat Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, 28, 3, 27.
- 36 Mahmud bin Mat, 'First Malay School in Pahang', *Malayan Historical Journal*, 1, 2 (1954), 86.
- 37 *Hikayat Pada Menyatakan Cherita Cherita Tanah Melayu* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1875), 4, 27–8.
- 38 *Al Imam*, 27 October 1908; see also E. W. Birch, 'Vernacular Press in the Straits', *JSBRAS*, 4 (1879), 53.
- 39 See chapter 8 below.
- 40 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements, 1888*, 208.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 1892, 174.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 1891, 275.
- 43 See the editorial article in the *Malayan Tribune*, 6 March 1924.
- 44 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 159.
- 45 Nik Ahmad bin Haji Nik Hassan, 'Malay Press', 45; Roff, *Bibliography*, 29.
- 46 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements, 1888*, 213.
- 47 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, see esp. 48–53.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 52. The print run was 300; Proudfoot, 'Malay Periodicals', 4.
- 49 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 52–3.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 52.
- 51 *Jawi Peranakan*, 26 September 1887; see also 22 August 1887.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 20 Jumadilawal 1307 (13 January 1890).
- 53 *Ibid.*; see also 25 Zulkaedah 1304.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 12 Syaban 1304 (7 May 1887).

- 55 *Ibid.*, 20 Jumadilawal 1307 (15 February 1890).
- 56 “*naik darjat*” *Utusan Melayu*, 30 April 1908 and 17 December 1907. The previous quote is from 5 December 1907.
- 57 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.
- 58 *Utusan Melayu*, 17 December 1907.
- 59 Brown, ‘Sejarah Melayu’, 124.
- 60 Regarding Aru, see A.C. Milner, E. Edwards McKinnon and Tengku Luckman Sinar, ‘Aru and Kota Cina’, *Indonesia*, 26 (1978), 1–42. For a reference to making a sultanate permanent see below, chapter 8, n. 76.
- 61 *Utusan Melayu*, 14 April 1908.
- 62 “*tiada mengenali bangsa sendiri*”, *Ibid.* 26 November 1907.
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874–1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 74.
- 65 “... *lupakan bangsanya sendiri dalam niatnya hendak menjadi sa-orang bangsa Eropa itu*”. *Utusan Melayu*, 9 April 1908.
- 66 “*lemah lembut dan beradab*”, *Ibid.*, 24 December 1907.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 26 November 1907.
- 68 Commencing with *Ibid.*, 12 May 1908.
- 69 “... *berpatutan dengan adat bangsanya*”, *Ibid.*, 16 November 1907.
- 70 See quote in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 97, also 101.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 89.
- 72 For a discussion of ‘Malayization’, see *ibid.*, chapter 5; see also Milner, Edwards McKinnon and Tengku Luckman Sinar, ‘Aru and Kota Cina’, 13–15.
- 73 The statement is often attributed to Hang Tuah but I have not found it in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*; Kassim Ahmad (ed.), *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1968). For a typical attribution of the quote to Hang Tuah, see Mahathir b. Mohamad, *Menghadapi Cabaran* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1982), 5. Dr Mahathir is the Prime Minister of Malaysia.
- 74 *Utusan Melayu*, 5 December 1907. For other discussions of Asian immigration, see *ibid.*, 26 December 1907; 23 April 1908; 18 July 1908; and 29 August 1908.
- 75 Ooi Jin-Bee, *Land, People and Economy in Malaya*, 113.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 77 *Utusan Melayu*, 5 December 1907.
- 78 In the *Hikayat Abdullah* he notes that the phrase “*kerajaan syurga*” was not generally used by Malays; Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat Abdullah*, 397.
- 79 Raja Haji Ali, *Tuhfat*, 266; ‘*Hikayat Pahang*’ (unpublished manuscript located in the Malaysian National Archives), 27, 87, 143, 200. For a discussion of this romanized manuscript see Milner, *Kerajaan*, 135; Muhammad Yusoff Hashim and Aruna Gopinath, *Tradisi Persejarah Pahang Darul Makmur 1880–1930* (Petaling Jaya: Tempo, 1992).
- 80 Kassim Ahmad (ed.), *Pelayaran Abdullah* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1964), 103.
- 81 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 414.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 415. His son, Ibrahim, also uses the word *Guberman*; Mohd. Fadzil Othman, *Pelayaran Muhammad Ibrahim*, 70.
- 83 *Jawi Peranakan*, 22 August 1887.
- 84 *Bintang Timor*, 6 October 1894.
- 85 Abdullah b. Abdul Rahman, *Matahari Memancar* (Singapore: Al Imam, 1906), 54.
- 86 *Utusan Melayu*, 12 March 1908.
- 87 A. H. Hill, ‘*Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*’, *JMBRAS*, 33, 2 (1960), 173, 90.
- 88 Datoek Besar and Roolvink, *Hikajat*, 414; Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 44, 103.
- 89 *Hikayat Dunia*, 35.
- 90 See, for instance, the *Jawi Peranakan*, 22 August 1887, or the use of *negeri* in the *Hikayat Tanah Melayu*, 12, 51, 52.



- 91 Abdullah b. Abdul Rahman, *Matahari Memancar: Tarikh Kerajaan Japan* (Singapore: Al Imam, 1906), *passim*.
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 On the use of *watan* in Malay, see B. W. Andaya, 'From Rum to Tokyo: The Search for Anticolonial Allies by the Rulers of Riau 1899–1914', *Indonesia*, 24 (1977), 140.
- 94 *Utusan Melayu*, 26 December 1907.
- 95 *Ibid.*, 27 August 1908.
- 96 Wilkinson, *Malay-English*, 154. It is not in Marsden *Dictionary* or Swettenham *Vocabulary*.
- 97 Quoted in Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt – A Critique of Al-Afghani, Abduh and Ridha* (Slough: Open Press, 1976), 15.
- 98 E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 37.
- 99 *Utusan Melayu*, 14 November 1907.
- 100 Marsden, *Dictionary*,
- 101 Crawford, *Descriptive Dictionary*, 253; also 251.
- 102 *Utusan Melayu* 26 November 1907. For other examples of its use see *ibid.*, 7 and 17 November 1907.
- 103 Charles Hirschman, 'The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications', *JAS*, 42, 3 (1987), 567.
- 104 *Ibid.*, 568.
- 105 *Ibid.*, 570.
- 106 Alice Lovatt, *The Life of Sir Frederick Weld: A Pioneer of Empire* (London: J. Murray, 1924). For examples of Weld's views, see Weld to Secretary of State, 21 October 1880, C/O 273/104; also F. Weld, 'The Straits Settlements and British Malaya', *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute* (1883–4), 269.
- 107 Abdul Hadi bin Haji Hasan, *Sejarah Alam Melayu* (1929) (Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, 1948), vol. 3, 6.
- 108 See, for example, Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 31–2, 66–7; G. Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People's Army of Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Building a Bourgeois Public Sphere*

The *bangsa*-mindedness of the *Utusan Melayu* challenged the hierarchy no less than the social and geographic scope of the *kerajaan*. It built upon the type of dynamic egalitarianism and sense of the possibilities of human progress that had been hinted at in Abdullah's discussion of race. And what is more, the form of *bangsa* being fostered in Eunos' paper possessed new and specific notions about the procedures members of a community might follow in ordering their affairs. It is in this latter respect that Eunos made his contribution to the 'invention' of a discourse of politics and a bourgeois public sphere in Malaya.

At the outset it is worth investigating further what attractions *bangsa* would have had for a middle class seeking to defend and promote its freedom from the constraints of a hierarchical social system. Abdullah addressed the earliest members of such a Malay class. By the time Eunos wrote, it had grown significantly. Moreover, by propagating *bangsa*-mindedness through a newspaper, he was employing a relatively new medium which itself possessed implicitly democratic characteristics.

The *Utusan*, in fact, was specifically directed not at an aristocratic audience but rather at "the people", the *rakyat*. One editorial explains that the paper was written for people "from all walks of life".<sup>1</sup> In its value judgements the paper often expresses this democratic sentiment. Government, it explains in one editorial, ought to bring benefits to "the people".<sup>2</sup> Even in the *Utusan*'s description of royal ceremonial events such as the Sultan of Perak's wedding (discussed in the last chapter), the style of presentation is distant in significant ways from that of *kerajaan* texts. The account of these ceremonies is clearly intended to be read by an audience located outside royal circles, that is to say, outside the immediate sway of royal ideology. There would be no need to take pains to define *gamelan* as 'band', for instance, for an audience

of insiders. And in general, the descriptions are written in a style which seems designed to enlighten both non-Malay and Malay readers who were no longer familiar with the customs 'of their race'. Such a Malay audience, standing at a distance from traditional Malay culture, is reminiscent of the 'new generation' addressed or anticipated by Abdullah.

The postulated audience of the *Utusan* is unlikely, in fact, to have included the poorest Malays. Even in Singapore, at most only a quarter of the Malay population was literate at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The paper itself also possesses a distinctly middle-class tone. It often gave support, for instance, to Malays who sought jobs in the public service or other white-collar areas. Much of its advertising and news content would have served the interests of the same group. Raymond Williams has observed how the commercial concerns of English newspapers in the early eighteenth century – the news of markets and shipping, the lists of exports and imports, the advertisements – served the "need of the new class".<sup>4</sup> Like the old *Jawi Peranakan*, the *Utusan* contains much information of this type. We have seen, too, how an article on education explicitly addresses Malays who were profiting from the rubber boom and might perhaps send their children to Europe to be educated. Another editorial calls for a bank to be established to help Malays with planting. In the process of arguing that particular case, the editorial explains how banking operates and notes that such a system already existed in India, Egypt and the Philippines. (It would be interesting to know why Eunus was relatively well informed about these countries.) "Our wish", the *Utusan* declares, is for a bank to help facilitate rice production among those Malays who "work the hardest".<sup>5</sup>

Here and elsewhere Eunus is clearly in favour of capital, even from foreign sources. He writes with capitalistic delight, for instance, about "opening up" economically backward states such as Kelantan and Trengganu with the money of English merchants. He believes that English traders were generally keen to bring money into a state (*negeri*) where "suitable and able people fill the offices of government"; and for that reason hopes Kelantan and Trengganu will be made members of the Federated Malay States which, he observes, possessed a sophisticated, bureaucratic administration.<sup>6</sup>

The actual language used by Eunus, it might be argued, was also consciously designed for a "middle class" readership. It was directed at readers who were educated but not specifically in the culture of the courts or, for that matter, the mosque. One editorial explains that the paper aimed to produce not "market Malay" (*Melayu pasar*) nor a "high Malay" (*Melayu yang tinggi*) but rather a "true Malay" or "correct Malay" (*bahasa Melayu yang betul*). The expression "high Malay" appears to include specialist religious language because the editorial describes it as

“full of Arab words and Malay words which are rarely known by the people”, words like those used in *kitab* (religious treatises) or by “learned Malays”.<sup>7</sup> Speakers of a “true Malay” which was neither “high” nor “market-place” – a “true Malay” which was also significantly influenced by English – are likely members of a ‘class’ for whom the *bangsa* rather than the *kerajaan* might be the focus of identity and solidarity. As already hinted at, it would also be a readership which was more conscious of its membership of the *bangsa* than of the Islamic *umat*, the “community of the Muslim faithful”. (We will return to this religious community in the following chapters.) In considering these readers of “true Malay” it is tempting to recall Abdullah’s ‘new generation’ and also those ‘modern’ Malays in “stiff shirt collar and polished black shoes” singled out by a European observer of late nineteenth-century Malay society. What was the condition of this Malay middle class, one might ask, at the time the *Utusan* began to be published?

Historians have focused on the middle class less directly in the case of Malaya than in that, for instance, of Burma. The British colonial advance in Burma (unlike Malaya) was both violent and radical, involving the dethroning of the king, the removal of the royal system and the imposition of direct British rule. Michael Adas has provided memorable portraits of the entrepreneurs who flourished following the British cancellation of restrictions on rice exports and the abolition of royal sumptuary laws. (As in the case of Malay traditional society, the latter had prevented people from engaging in the conspicuous consumption which can follow and sometimes inspire economic success.) One of these new entrepreneurs is described by Adas as expanding his land holdings, lending money to new settlers and obtaining more land for himself by foreclosure of mortgages. Such men went on to build monasteries and houses of wood (instead of thatch and bamboo). They possessed European furniture and gramophones and they might display a portrait of Queen Victoria.<sup>8</sup>

The opportunities appear to have been less dramatic in such places as Malaya or Cambodia, where kingship was not abolished. As Munshi Abdullah observed, however, it was at least possible in the colony of the Straits Settlements, beyond the ken of royal control, for a successful Malay to live “like a raja”. In the colony, according to one European observer, the people were “not burthened with the support of a dissolute and luxurious nobility” and were able to “enjoy the fruits of their labour”.<sup>9</sup> On the peninsula too, although much of the *kerajaan* structure remained, there was a gradual blunting of its powers and prerogatives during the period of British ‘Protection’. In the last years of the nineteenth century reports occurred of Malays being “far less submissive to ill-treatment and extortion on the part of their headmen”.<sup>10</sup>

As John Gullick has explained, the practice of squatting by the roadside as a man of superior rank passed – a practice abhorred by Abdullah – was increasingly reserved for people of only the highest dignity and by the 1920s was in many places not followed at all.<sup>11</sup> Regulations about house styles continued to have effect, but Gullick observes that they might be bypassed, for instance, by building in a fashion which was not distinctively Malay.<sup>12</sup>

In Malaya as in Burma, therefore, British intervention offered advantages to those who wished to raise their economic level and engage in conspicuous consumption. The new land laws are an important example. The Torrens system of registered ownership of land, which was introduced by the British at the end of the nineteenth century, contrasts vividly with the ‘traditional’ form of occupation. In the words of one of the European opponents of the pre-colonial system, the people had been accustomed to “cultivate such lands as they chose” and the authorities were able to “dispossess the occupants at pleasure or help themselves to any produce they thought worth having”.<sup>13</sup> The Torrens notion of land as a “valuable and saleable form of property” began to influence Malay economic behaviour and perhaps also the growth of an element of individualism. (We shall return to the latter conjecture.) The possibility of using land as security, or of selling land – as Gullick explains – tended to promote a “gradual stratification of village society into wealthy land-owners, middle-category tenants or sharecroppers and landless labourers”.<sup>14</sup> It was in about 1905, according to another study, that peasants became active in their land dealings: “there was excitement in the air and the sale of land was one way, perhaps the best, to take advantage of the economic boom.”<sup>15</sup>

A further opportunity offered by British intervention was the possibility of borrowing government money. In Selangor, one entrepreneur (Haji Tahir) grew coffee and indigo in the 1880s and borrowed \$4,000 from the state government in 1887 to develop further his land.<sup>16</sup> Improved communications were also of obvious assistance to numerous types of commercial endeavour. Even the opening up of European and Chinese estates could offer Malays the chance to accrue funds through timber felling.<sup>17</sup> From the 1890s many peasants were benefiting from such developments, particularly from the growing demand for rubber. From Perak, Selangor, Pahang and Negri Sembilan came reports of Malay smallholdings producing rubber. In Negri Sembilan in 1906, 4,500 acres were utilized by Malays and Chinese for rubber planting. A total of 6,799 new smallholdings “mostly of rubber” (according to Lim Teck Ghee’s study) were reported in that state between 1908 and 1910.<sup>18</sup> It was economic developments of this type which produced the successful entrepreneurs and planters – people such as Haji Tahir of

Selangor – to whom the *Utusan Melayu* addressed its comment about the dangers of an education in Europe.

Like the teachers, printers and clerks mentioned in education reports, these Malays were members of a loose grouping or class. Together they were beginning to fill the social gap which many years earlier the missionary, Thomsen, had described as lying between the “dependent” poor on the one side, and the chiefs on the other. It cannot have been a very extensive class in 1900. It must have numbered thousands rather than tens of thousands. A government education report from the Straits Settlements of 1894 provides at least some indication of the dimensions of the educated Malay community within the colony. Of 14,592 pupils described as having attended the vernacular schools, 223 had become teachers, 250 clerks, 556 traders, 306 students of religion and 335 police constables. A further figure of 333 had gone on to English schools. Of the 3,070 who had taken up the occupation of paddy planters and 1,263 fishermen, perhaps only a very small proportion ought to be counted among the middle class.<sup>19</sup>

The character of this new class is no easier to delineate than its size. Its members possessed no well-defined role in the process of economic production, except in so far as they are generally likely to have worked in white-collar occupations. Nor can we assume the presence of a coherent class consciousness. In this area, however, there is some possibility of observing a changing direction in the development of tastes and ideas. Presumably it was members of the middle class, living in the peninsula towns, who had been described in a visitor’s report as being dressed in partly European attire. We obtain a further hint of their developing tastes from a 1909 account by a junior British official. It states that a schoolmaster’s house would have “crocheted antimacassars and bentwood Austrian chairs, photos of the owner by a Chinese perpetrator and oleographs of Queen Victoria [or] the Sultan of Turkey”.<sup>20</sup> The account has obvious affinities with Adas’ sketches of the new post-British occupation, Burmese lifestyle.

To obtain some idea of the attitudes and aspirations of the developing Malay bourgeoisie, we might consider first the education department reports. At the very least, the products of the European-led school system would have been readers of Abdullah and the *Hikayat Dunia*. They were also likely readers of the *Utusan*. Whether or not we can assume that Eunus spoke for a “middle group” of his people – users of a ‘true’ rather than a ‘high’ or ‘market’ Malay – he was certainly promulgating doctrines consistent with their interests. The egalitarianism of the *Utusan’s* *bangsa*-mindedness, for instance, would have had immediate attractions for such a new bourgeoisie. And it was not the only Malay reform which the *Utusan* designed for them.

### Reform and the *bangsa*

In the writing of Eunon, even more than that of Munshi Abdullah, the Malays are portrayed as falling behind in a great competition between races. Yet from one perspective, the *Utusan's* message seems more optimistic. In presenting a more developed sense of historical progress, it could be seen as offering an element of hope to the Malay community.

Consider, for example, the *Utusan's* discussion of Asian immigration which has been considered briefly in the previous chapter. Malays, according to the *Utusan Melayu*, were in danger of being driven "away from their own states (*negeri*) by other races".<sup>21</sup> The Chinese, for instance, are described in this and many other writings of the period as having an immense capacity for hard work. The Chinese, it is explained, went to different foreign lands to work as coolies, labouring in the toughest conditions. They were feared in Australia, Canada, America and Java and, according to the *Utusan*, there was reason to fear them also in Malaya (*Tanah Melayu*). This "yellow danger" could create an emergency, explains the paper, using a word for 'emergency' which, incidentally, would be employed again after the Second World War to describe the largely Chinese-dominated Communist uprising.<sup>22</sup> English-language newspapers were also quoted on the subject of what one of them described as the "Malay question". A newspaper from Ipoh is quoted in one *Utusan* article as having declared that the Malays had already been defeated by foreign races. In former times, the paper had explained, Malays killed many members of foreign races but this was no longer possible.

In discussing this Ipoh observation, the *Utusan* commented that foreigners had not come to Malaya at "our invitation"; and now, the paper complains, Malays themselves were not able to earn a living: "the places where [the Malays] used to fish are ruined; the rice fields have been plundered to obtain land for sago, sugar cane etc; the jungles have been cut down and the rivers ruined."

The *Utusan* article concludes with a plea to British officials to protect Malays in their competition with Chinese mine owners, European rubber planters and Indian money-lenders. Do not allow the Malays, declares the paper, to be "removed from their own country (*negeri*) by foreign races who possess great greed and a lack of manners, and are accustomed to seize people's property by means of trickery".<sup>23</sup> The request for English assistance will be considered at a later point. What is immediately evident is the anxiety and the acutely defensive posture of the *Utusan*. There is an implied conviction not only that the Malays were losing against stronger races but that they were also well behind in a long-distance historical race. And it is here that we find ground for optimism.

The *Utusan Melayu*, more distinctly than Abdullah's writing, communicates a sense of history as development over time. Eunus appears to be conversant with the language of 'progress' which was so powerful in nineteenth-century Europe. The advanced races, he declares, are those which are *moden* or possess 'civilization' (*tamaddun*).<sup>24</sup> The second, Arabic, term tends to replace *moden* in later issues of the paper perhaps because *moden* was just too European in flavour. The term *maju*, 'to advance', is also often used in the *Utusan* to imply 'progressive'. In later times it was to become a very widely acknowledged expression for 'progress'.<sup>25</sup> (It was not used in the mid-nineteenth century.) What the *Utusan* meant by being modern or advanced is not clear. A health service might be called 'modern' and so might government by legislative council.<sup>26</sup> The Malays are warned that they must compete with 'civilized races' (*bertamaddun*)<sup>27</sup> which presumably means something analogous to Abdullah's "races on the move". Indeed, the general impression is given that all races are progressing through time.

In some cases this developmental, historical perspective is explicit. In one editorial, for instance, it is declared (in spite of the example of Ancient Greece) that anyone who reads the "history of the world" will understand that races which keep slaves will not become great.<sup>28</sup> Another carefully worded essay places the "Malay problem" itself in a world historical context. Knowledgeable people, it declares, know that at certain times particular lands are left behind in a condition akin to sleep. Other lands may in the same period be full of energy. Some 1,500 years in the past, all the "talent and clever strategies" were gathered together in the lands of the East; then about 500 years ago, the West, in its turn, began to rise. Europeans began to conquer various states (*negeri*) and lands (*tanah*). The Europeans were clever, rich and powerful and the East merely slept. The editor declares, however, that by chance he is writing at what he describes as another historical turning point. Tumultuous changes were again on the way and this time to the advantage of the East. A "period of great energy" was coming to the East. There was a "new consciousness", a belief that states (*negeri*) should be governed "by people of their own *negeri* or race (*bangsa*)". Popular assemblies had actually been established in four empires – Russia, Persia, Turkey and China – during a period of only four years. That is, the people (*rakyat*) of these states were beginning to "involve themselves" in the "business of government" (the work of the *kerajaan*).<sup>29</sup>

The reader would assume that "specialists in race" whom Eunus had described in another editorial as demanding to govern themselves – the "nationalists" of Egypt, the Philippines and India – would also be participants in the "new consciousness". The Malays are not directly mentioned in this editorial but the implications are evident. Readers of the



*Utusan Melayu* were being presented with a historical, East-West, pump-action model which offered not only an explanation of the position of the Malay people but also an inspiration for the future. Talk of a “new consciousness”, as the *Utusan* suggested, was far from novel in India, the Middle East and East Asia<sup>30</sup> but in his East–West model, Eunós presents a dynamic scheme which was at best only hinted at in the Malay writings of the mid-nineteenth century. It was a scheme which, at least when applied to the Malay race, would also involve Europeans actively assisting in the Eastern renaissance.

Indeed, the fact that Eunós did not call for an end to British rule in the Malay world may have been due to more than a fear of censorship. The British had a historic role to play. The British are often presented favourably in the *Utusan* editorials and this view may have been sincere. They are explicitly defended, for instance, against a charge of being prejudiced towards Islamic countries: “the British govern large numbers of Muslims and these include many who live strictly by the law of Islam”.<sup>31</sup> The *Utusan* also denies the accusation that the British made “great profit from the Malay states”. The fact that the issue was raised at all suggests the presence of some genuine discontent; nevertheless, the editorial explains that many benefits flow from British ‘protection’ (and the word used – *naung* – indeed conveys ‘protection’ or ‘shelter’). The British protected the Malay states from ‘foreign races’ (*bangsa*) who might “desire to conquer the Malay states and possess all their riches”. In India too, adds the *Utusan*, there were people foolish enough to be unable to see that they were “surrounded by enemies” who could not be resisted without British assistance. The insinuation is plain. In Malaya the Chinese and Indian immigrants were the “enemies” who posed a threat to the Malay people.<sup>32</sup> Here and elsewhere Eunós looks to the British for assistance in a time of such large-scale immigration. He explicitly requests British officials to ward off the Chinese merchants (*towkays*) and Indian money-lenders.<sup>33</sup> The Malay retention of control of their land, he considers, is an essential ingredient in this process.

After writing in one editorial of the need to protect Malay land against Chinese, Indian and European entrepreneurs, Eunós explains that:

if perhaps the Malays do become workers in mines or railwaymen or clerks or managers of rubber estates [all occupations of which Eunós approves], they will certainly not be able to work properly, or even at all, if they are not allowed to possess a little land and live quietly in their villages.<sup>34</sup>

The assistance from European colonialism, as envisaged in the *Utusan*, was not to be limited to protective or defensive measures. As noted above, the British are also urged to set up a bank to provide rural credit and to expand the education system. If the Malays are considered

to “lack education”, the *Utusan* tells the government administration, then “teach them as well as possible and help them to enter the competition (*perlumbaan*) against the immigrant peoples”.<sup>35</sup>

### Inculcating rationality and individualism

The British contribution to Malay education, as presented in the *Utusan*, was to be one element in a far wider program for the historical development of the *bangsa*. Eunus saw the *Utusan* itself playing an independent educative role. It is appropriate to view the paper’s discussion of race and its exposition of concepts relating to politics, economics and progress in this light. The *Utusan* sometimes comments directly on education: in a manner reminiscent of that of Abdullah, it speaks of “fostering [in children] reason (*akal*) and thoughts which are perfect”.<sup>36</sup> It is also concerned (in a way Abdullah, perhaps because of his particular ancestry, does not seem to have been) that Malays should continue to acquire or learn a “manner which is soft and gentle and cultured”. In a more general way, however, almost the entire content of the *Utusan* had a didactic purpose. As its very first editorial declares, the paper wished to “expand the knowledge of the Malays concerning affairs and developments constantly taking place in the world”. Such aims involved more than the conveying of fresh information. The new newspaper was designed to help Malays to “understand” events just as they were understood by *modern* races. Thus, the *Utusan*, aimed to teach a way of thinking about events, one which presumably involved fostering powers of reason or, as the paper expressed it, a “perfect *akal*”. The new language of politics – the terms for ‘state’, ‘government’, ‘republic’ and so forth, contributed to this new manner of understanding. But the paper was also an exponent of a particular style of analysis. It was characterized to some extent by a syntax which contrasts strongly with that of traditional Malay writing.

An important study of the *Language of the Editorials in Malay Newspapers* by Mohd. Taib bin Osman suggests that, with the appearance of Eunus’ writing, the “mode of expression” in Malay newspapers took a “new shape”<sup>37</sup>. It is, in fact, immediately obvious to the reader of Malay traditional literature that the *Utusan*’s language is far less reliant on paratactic construction. In Eunus’ writing, one clause is commonly subordinated to another by the use of connectors: “In our opinion”, declares a particular editorial, “the time has arrived when Malays should make attempts to get unity among themselves, especially as this is a time when almost all of the Malay race is administered by other races”.<sup>38</sup> In former times, it is observed in another issue, “Malays did not perhaps know that if they wanted their race to become great and powerful they

must therefore labour diligently every day".<sup>39</sup> According to Taib Osman's study the *Utusan's* use of "many subordinate clauses and phrases", together with its frequent resort to punctuation marks, owed much to Eunos' knowledge of the English language.<sup>40</sup> Particularly important for the education of the *Utusan's* readers is the analytical, or what might even be called the 'mechanistic', character of this mode of writing. It seems to connote an inductive style of analysis very different from the formulaic, repetitive narration commonly found in traditional literature. The hypotactic mode of the *Utusan*, one might argue, hints at a new epistemology. It suggests a theory of knowledge based on the rationalist principles which were so much respected in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, principles which in the Malay world had been invoked in such works as the *Hikayat Dunia* published by Benjamin Keasberry.

Like Abdullah, Eunos identifies the expansion of literacy as one way of fostering a rational mode of thinking. As we saw in chapter 3, scholarly studies have noted the link between a changing mode of expression and a shift from orality (or rather 'oral orientation' because many people who acquire some reading or writing skills do not immediately abandon the rhetoric of the past) to literacy. Amin Sweeney views the "frequent use of complex subordinating constructions in spoken language" among Malays today as an "indication that the patterns of writing have become a part of the thought processes, enabling a much more analytic mode of speech".<sup>41</sup> There can be no doubt that Eunos, like Abdullah, was conscious of at least some causal link between this 'modern' manner of 'understanding' and literacy. In one editorial he enunciates clearly what he sees as the disadvantage of orality. The religious instructor, he explains, teaches "by mouth" and his words are "remembered only in the head". The editorial asks: "Is it not preferable for every person to read and to understand books with his/her own eyes and own reason (*akal*)?"<sup>42</sup> Here again the significance of literacy is explained in terms of its link with 'reason'; so too is the act of reading once more presented as a specifically individual occupation.

Indeed this individualistic dimension is not just commented upon but actually fostered by the paper. Once more in the manner of Abdullah, Eunos places much stress on the development of an individualistic style of thinking in the reform of the Malay *bangsa*. As in the case of Abdullah (and, as we saw in chapter 2 above, of de Tocqueville), he saw nothing inconsistent about stressing both the individual and race. The very fact of producing a newspaper might be viewed as an attempt to promote such an individualistic consciousness. A newspaper could be read privately or communally by a large number of people at the same time, even at the same hour of the day. The editor could speak directly

to individual Malay readers, sometimes explicitly seeking their response in the form of corrections of his Malay or written opinions on a particular topic. Such encounters would have promoted more than a sense of community among the *Utusan* audience. They established also an interpersonal relationship between author/editor and reader. The regular publication of a newspaper would create what the historian of eighteenth-century France, Robert Darnton, refers to as a “new rhetorical situation” in which “reader and writer communed across the printed page”.<sup>43</sup> Readers who were brought virtually into conversation with Eunos, whether or not he himself saw his position in these precise terms, might experience a heightened sense of their own (and the editor’s) individuality.

### Work

One area in which Eunos displays with particular clarity a desire to stimulate an individualistic or egotistical attitude of mind is in his discussion of work. According to a *Utusan* editorial, individuality might develop through the process of ‘work’. In general, the *Utusan* places ‘hard work’ or ‘industry’ alongside education as a remedy for the backwardness of the Malay race.<sup>44</sup> The word for work, *pekerjaan*, is derived from the old Sanscrit borrowing, *kerja*, which had long been used in *kerajaan* literature to describe both ‘work’ for the *raja* and the highly significant ‘ceremonial work’ which he performed in his kingdom. In the *Utusan*, it possesses no such connotations, but such a history may well have enhanced the dignity of the term.<sup>45</sup> To become “great” and possess “power”, so the *Utusan* explains, a people must carry out their work “to the best of their ability every day”.<sup>46</sup> The paper stresses the individualistic aspect of work specifically in the context not of entrepreneurialism, where it is perhaps obvious, but of wage labour. The paper urges Malays to work on rubber plantations and not leave such jobs to Javanese and Indian immigrants. The Malay aversion to engaging in occupations of this type is admitted. It is argued, however, that the people of Java, had come to realize that working for wages did not “bring degradation on a person” but “increased the individual’s sense of self” bringing him “freedom and happiness” as well as “increasing the strength of his country”.<sup>47</sup> In these circumstances – interesting in themselves as representing a particular Malay perception of the Javanese – Malays are advised to become plantation workers in order to “improve their own lives and increase the numbers of their race so that it can become a great race”.<sup>48</sup>

Such urging of Malays to work hard for the sake of their community conveys much of the spirit of Abdullah’s exhortations of a half century

earlier. It is the emphasis on the way the individual achieves “freedom” and a “sense of self” in the process of work that is novel. Abdullah celebrates both hard work and individualism but does not specifically link the two. In making that link, the *Utusan Melayu* reminds one strongly of Samuel Smiles’ enormously influential, *Self Help*, a book which Eunos might even have read. First published in 1859, *Self Help* was reprinted many times in Britain and translated into numerous foreign languages. The Khedive of Egypt was even reported to have “mixed inscriptions from the Koran with others from Smiles on the walls of his palaces”.<sup>49</sup> *Self Help* was particularly widely read in late nineteenth-century Japan.<sup>50</sup> The book posited that the highest patriotism consisted of “helping and stimulating men to elevate and improve themselves by their own free and independent action”.<sup>51</sup> Smiles wrote of “energetic individualism”<sup>52</sup> and advised that “national progress is the sum of individual industry, energy, and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness and vice”.<sup>53</sup> What is more – and here Smiles invokes a value of much concern to Malays – this “energetic individualism” can allow even a person of the “humblest rank” to earn a “solid reputation”.<sup>54</sup> We can easily detect echoes of these sentiments and prescriptions when the *Utusan* explains that “every person who works hard for himself and looks after his dependents” is able to become “a person who has *nama* and is praised”,<sup>55</sup> or again when the *Utusan* declares that “if people work they can free themselves (*merdeheka*) from their neighbours and obtain respect for themselves”.<sup>56</sup>

Discussing ‘liberty’ in terms of freedom from one’s neighbours underlines the radical character of Eunos’ social thought. For all his ideological ‘Europeanness’, Abdullah did not elucidate this aspect of freedom. To advocate such liberty necessitates a sharp reversal of priorities in a society valuing, or valorizing, communal solidarity rather than the separateness of the individual. The *kerajaan*, of course, provided an elaborate hierarchical structure capable of binding together a larger community. At the village level Malays were incorporated to a considerable extent within a specifically local custom. The point is often made in ethnographic accounts. Thus, one early twentieth-century report of village life relates that, when a married couple leaves the wife’s family home to establish their own home, the community would help them to clear new land and erect a house. The villagers would then assemble to view the couple’s migration, to act as witnesses to the proper distribution of property and to see that the earth spirits at the new property were properly propitiated.<sup>57</sup> In such a corporate society, urging people to free themselves from their neighbours would be undeniably disruptive. The suggestion dramatically distances Eunos from a ‘traditional’ Malay audience.

In introducing the concept of *nama* into his discussion of 'work', once again Eunus invokes the *kerajaan* tradition. When he argues that, by means of industry, men might improve their *nama* as well as assist their race, he presents a formulation tantalizingly close to that found in *kerajaan* writing. In the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, for example, it is declared that "we who live under rajas do whatever work we have to do as diligently as possible, for as the old people say: it is good to die with a name (*nama*) which is good".<sup>58</sup> Both in the *hikayat* and the *Utusan* work is described as enhancing one's *nama*. In both texts also the individual may serve a higher, social purpose. To this extent, the *Utusan's* exhortation was drawing upon long-established concepts and might have seemed somewhat familiar and thus powerful to Malays. (For a parallel strategy recall the discussion above about the substitution of *bangsa* for *kerajaan* as an object of devotion.)

The critical difference between the *Hang Tuah* perspective and that of the editorial is that although the *hikayat* suggests that work for a *raja* enhances one's *nama*, it does not give any specific emphasis to the promotion of an egotistical individualism. There is no suggestion that work can free the individual from the community, or that in the possession of such freedom an individual can achieve high *nama*. As we have observed in earlier discussion, in *kerajaan* writings the advancement of *nama* is expected to be synonymous with the advancement of the sultanate. It is the antithesis of egotistical behaviour. In this *Utusan* statement, *nama* is clearly considered quite independently of the *kerajaan*. It is also only indirectly, and not inevitably, linked to *bangsa*. Although recognizing the significance of *nama* in Malay culture, Eunus (at least in this editorial) appears to be attempting the radical move of reformulating the concept in a new, individualistic mode. In this particular discussion *nama* is not presented in the context of a united community, whether it be the hierarchical *kerajaan* or the apparently organic *bangsa*. Rather, Eunus situates *nama* in a composite society of free individuals. As has been noted, he does not always perceive *bangsa* in these terms. But here we encounter an echo of Abdullah's aspiration to foster the type of *bangsa* in which individual energy, initiative and even egoism might flourish.

### Citizenship

The *Utusan* fostered an active individualism in one final and critical area. The point is implicit in much of our earlier discussion of the contents of the paper. It arises from the type of political community which Eunus appears to have hoped to engender. As one looks through the regular *Utusan* editorials, sometimes focused on apparently obscure

topics, it is possible to piece together some of the political structure which he envisaged. It is not a coherent structure. One has the impression that here, as in other areas, Eunus was experimenting with new ideas.

Certainly, the Malay *bangsa* rather than the sultanates or the Straits Settlements is identified as the preferred focus of political and emotional unity. The *Utusan* defines what would be termed in later years a 'nationalist' as a "specialist in race" and there is an intimation of a broader territorial unity in the term *tanah Melayu*, (the 'Malay peninsular lands'). A practical significance is given to this broader unit when one editorial suggests that a single Islamic judge be appointed for the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States.<sup>59</sup> (Although put forward in apparent innocence, this proposal amounts to a trenchant attack on the religious powers and privileges of the individual sultans.) In a far less sensitive area the *Utusan* praised an "Agri-horticultural show" held in Kuala Lumpur as an opportunity for the participation of Malays from all parts of the peninsula.<sup>60</sup> But it is not merely in the content of its comment that the *Utusan* fostered such a Malay unity. The paper itself, as we have noted, created a community of readers, and that community might be seen as "the embryo of the nationally-imagined community".<sup>61</sup> By means of its very circulation, the *Utusan* gave substance to the concept of a *tanah Melayu*.

The way in which the *tanah Melayu* might actually be governed is not, as far as I have seen, directly described by Eunus; but there are plenty of intimations of what he may have anticipated. We do not, to begin with, find the *Utusan* calling explicitly for 'self-government' in Malaya. However, the sense of shame expressed at the fact that most Malays were ruled by foreigners, and the prominence given to independence movements elsewhere in the world, give some indication of editorial sentiment. In other ways, too, the *Utusan* presents a view of government and of political obligation which differs radically from that found in the *kerajaan* world. It is a view of government which is consistent in general terms with that expressed by Abdullah. Thus, Eunus is impatient with leaders who are concerned only with status, with their own *nama* (*mengambil nama saja*).<sup>62</sup> He declares that they should not "sit on high carrying out what their hearts desire".<sup>63</sup> Leadership should be judged by what we would today call performance – and performance as far as both Eunus and Abdullah were concerned in the practical and essential matters of government. As elaborated earlier in this chapter, the *Utusan* considered that leaders should assist the people (*rakyat*). Leaders had an obligation to be "financially generous and bring peace where there is tyranny".<sup>64</sup> They should "improve the circumstances and happiness" of the people, helping them to be "industrious and free".<sup>65</sup>

The aspect of Eunos' proposed political community which is not enunciated in Abdullah's writing concerns the active role of the common people. In attending to what is entailed in being a member of a modern political entity, the *Utusan* propounds a doctrine of citizenship. In considering what was implied by 'citizenship', it is misleading, of course, to focus exclusively on Eunos' later declarations in the Legislative Council about the "contented citizen of the British empire". The sincerity of such declarations about the British connection is in any case difficult to estimate. The issue which concerned Eunos throughout his journalistic and political career was rather the need to promote "good citizenship" *per se*. He wanted "to build up and foster" the practice of citizenship.<sup>66</sup> In this apparently innocuous training activity lies what was perhaps Eunos' most significant contribution to political change.

A sharp distinction exists between citizenship and subjecthood. The former implies rights and duties. Those people who lived in the pre-colonial Malay *kerajaan* were emphatically subjects, not citizens. There is considerable accuracy in the comments of an early European observer that commoner Malays possessed "no rights either of person or of property".<sup>67</sup> Even in the sultanates of the colonial period the point was made by a frustrated Malay radical (whom we will discuss in chapter 9) that "ordinary Malays" were not permitted to "meddle in politics, because the politics of the state and its people are in the hands of the Sultan and the traditional elite".<sup>68</sup> The condition of these Malay subjects cannot be dismissed as purely a product of repression. The actual concept of 'citizenship' did not exist in the *kerajaan*. It is for this reason that not only Eunos but also certain English observers began to speak of the need for "training in citizenship".<sup>69</sup> Right from its inception in 1907, one might argue, the *Utusan* was committed to this task. Although it is anachronistic to assess Eunos' motives as nationalistic, it is possible to argue that he made a deliberate contribution to the birth of citizenship and thus, of a new politics in Malaya.

There is a *prima facie* difficulty in appreciating the significance of the practice of "citizenship" as novel in colonial Malay society. We recognize the novelty of the phenomena of nationalism or democracy but tend to take for granted the process by which people began to "consciously participate in the life of the state".<sup>70</sup> Citizenship is perhaps so elemental and familiar to us that it seems unproblematic. In these circumstances, the historical writings of Baron and Pocock on early modern Europe are seminal for Asian as well as Western history. Their separate writings draw our attention to the emergence, beginning in Italy at the end of the fourteenth century, of a tradition of involvement in public life. They encourage us to reflect with some care on what Eunos may have been attempting in Malaya in the early years of this century. 'Civic



Humanism', as this involvement in public life is termed, was a "new philosophy of political engagement and active life, developed in opposition to ideas of scholarly withdrawal".<sup>71</sup> The Civic Humanist's *polis* was a "time-bound" polity<sup>72</sup> which did not merely "reflect by simple correspondence the eternal order of nature".<sup>73</sup> It was "composed of interacting persons rather than of universal norms and traditional institutions".<sup>74</sup> In Civic Humanist thinking the citizen was aware of being a "political actor in a public realm".<sup>75</sup> Pocock assumes the task of explaining how this new philosophy became operative in England in an apparently hostile "environment dominated by monarchical, legal, and theological concepts" which were ill-suited to the "definition of England as a polis or the Englishman as a citizen".<sup>76</sup>

By focusing on the introduction and progress of "civic humanism" in this English context, Pocock's scholarship suggests the importance of the same theme in other parts of the world. It brings the emergence of citizenship to the centre stage which has for long been occupied by the rise of nationalism. As a result, colonial politicians such as Eunus who have been too easily dismissed as colonial loyalists or at best timid nationalists may now be more easily recognized as ideological pioneers. It is not surprising that Eunus gave so much attention, for instance, to the political changes in Turkey and Russia at the opening of the twentieth century. It gave him an opportunity to declare that the "time was arriving when the people of a state would involve themselves in the business of government".<sup>77</sup>

The *Utusan's* requests for the British to expand the education system and to employ more Malays in the colonial bureaucracy might also be considered as requests for training in citizenship. So should the paper's praise of the advisory councils established in the British protectorates on the peninsula. In these councils, the *Utusan* explains, "every person is able to say with freedom whatever he thinks" and is not limited to expressing those things which are "in accordance with what is said or thought by the chairman of the council". In promoting "freedom of speech", the councils were capable of providing "education" and "practice".<sup>78</sup> (Eunos does not explain how it was possible for Malays to maintain a consistently "soft and gentle" demeanour in such free debate.) Eunus urged the British to foster citizenship just as he had encouraged them to help Malays economically by setting up banks and protecting their land. But again Malay fortunes were not to be left entirely in the hands of the English protectors. Eunus' own newspaper was engaged in what today is sometimes described as the transformation of the 'public sphere'.

One dimension of the transition from subject to citizen involves the displacement of a public sphere characterized by what the sociologist

Habermas calls “representation”. In the pre-modern polity the ruler “displayed himself, presented himself as an embodiment of some sort of ‘higher’ power”. As long as the “prince and the estates of his realm ‘were the country and not just its representatives, they could represent it in a specific sense. They represented their lordship not for but ‘before’ the people”.<sup>79</sup>

In the modern period, by contrast, there emerged a “depersonalized state authority”.<sup>80</sup> A new type of public sphere came into existence. It was no mere arena of “courtly-knightly representation”.<sup>81</sup> In the public sphere, according to Habermas, public authority was compelled to “legitimate itself” in the presence of “public opinion”.<sup>82</sup> The *subjectum* of the earlier society became a reasoning citizen in the new one. The mere “receiver of regulations” became the “adversary” of the ruling authority.<sup>83</sup> In the countries of Western Europe, newspapers, coffee houses, and reading societies played a part in the creation of this new public sphere. By means of newspapers the “public held up a mirror to itself”.<sup>84</sup>

Eunos appears to have understood well this function in the case of the *Utusan*. He saw the need for an informed public opinion. He hoped his paper would help Malays to “understand” matters of the wider world in a new way and to this end adopted new vocabulary and a hypotactic style of prose. Literacy itself, he anticipated, would promote rational thought. His newspaper, as he proclaimed in the opening issue, was to be not only an educator but an arena for discussion and debate. Its comments on government policy, even though they were often complementary, acted as a persistent reminder that government itself was to be subject to public opinion. In Eunos’ writings the implication is always present that government is accountable to a public informed, among other influences, by newspaper communication and comment. In some cases he called directly for comment on affairs of government. When a new Muslim marriage law was proposed, for example, Eunos declares that the government officials would welcome Muslim opinion. He urges readers to write to the *Utusan*: “Give your correct name (for our knowledge only) together with your address – and the letter will be published with any necessary editing for brevity”.<sup>85</sup>

By assisting in the creation of a new public sphere, by promoting the concept of a citizenship engaged in critical debate about affairs of government, Eunos was adding a political dimension to Abdullah’s concept of the individual. Eunos supported Abdullah in subverting the hierarchical *kerajaan* in which (as one court text boasted) the ordinary subject could, in the economic sphere, produce enough food “for private consumption only”.<sup>86</sup> Eunos wished to give specifically political as well as economic and social rights to the commoner Malay. He envisaged a society of educated individuals, of political animals, of

citizens – a public sphere in which the future of the Malay race and its government might be subject to discussion. Eunus' efforts to inculcate a political vocabulary capable of replacing that of the *kerajaan* ought to be considered in the context of this vision. He was developing more than an ideological program. He contributed to a new discourse in which the claims not only of liberal ideologues but also of the royal courts and Islamic scholars would eventually be expressed. This much is evident in the pages of the *Utusan*.

### Audience

Where we must be cautious is in making assumptions about the concerns of the audience which Eunus addressed. To what extent his bourgeois readers were merely passive imbibers of these new concepts of political life is difficult to determine. Just as the paper appears to have answered some of the economic needs of this emerging class so might it have expressed, as well as stimulated, their changing political aspirations. As always, texts cannot be examined out of context. A comprehensive account of the impact of the *Utusan* would seek to understand why the paper had so rapid a success. As in the case of the earlier *Jawi Peranakan*, the volume of correspondence which it attracted suggests that at least in certain pockets of the Malay community, there already existed the type of aspiration and desire for self-expression which the *Utusan*, like its predecessor, hoped to foster.

To what extent, we might ask, were social and economic forces creating the preconditions of citizenship well before the inauguration of the *Utusan*? The influence of urbanization, for instance, might be investigated. Some of the observations of anthropologists in Malaya and other parts of the world support the assessment of the novelist, Thomas Hardy, of the individualizing effect of city life. In describing social life in late-nineteenth-century London, Hardy had noted that the urban individual of that period was "conscious of *himself*, but nobody is conscious of themselves collectively".<sup>87</sup> Similar comments have been made about the Malays of Singapore, at least in the twentieth century.<sup>88</sup> The expansion of commercial activity and particularly of the cash economy may also have promoted change in Malay social attitudes. Anthropological studies are again of assistance. As one study of rural Pahang observes, cash transactions contain a "strain of insularity, of individual sovereignty" which is capable of threatening the "sense of equilibrium in the village". Cash is a "kind of individual *adat*, private and secret 'property'" which can parallel (and presumably compete with) the community *adat* or custom of the village.<sup>89</sup>

An equally important type of stimulant of social change among the readers of the *Utusan* would have been the novel institutions and practices introduced by the British government. Quite independently of the influence of newspaper comment, the colonial administration, like most modern governments, operated in a manner which tended to suggest public accountability and invite public comment. New policies were announced and defended in open councils and official publications. The newspapers of the time – both Malay language such as the *Utusan* and English papers like the *Straits Times* and the *Singapore Free Press* – record in detail this particular style of administration. The acts of government, so this style implied, were to be explained to educated, rational individuals.

The British legal system, too, possessed implicit presuppositions about the character of the community it served. It entailed notions of ‘contract’ law which differed fundamentally from the Malay ‘status’ legal system. Those who were accustomed to defining legal and social obligation in terms of ‘caste’, race or religion would inevitably have found much that was alien in the essentially humanist definition of the person in modern European contract law.<sup>90</sup> In encountering the new legal system, Malays would necessarily have recognized a challenge to their own preconceptions about the ‘person’ or ‘society’. We know, for instance, that the new land tenure system, which bestowed individual and transferable rights to land, caused much bewilderment and confusion.<sup>91</sup> It has been noted previously that this system appears eventually to have promoted a degree of entrepreneurial activity in Malay society. In the absence of detailed ethnographic and legal investigation, we can only hypothesize as to how this specific introduced form of land ownership may also have moulded (perhaps quite unconsciously) the perception of the individual in certain sections of the Malay community. How far, we might ask, do the assumptions which accompany a contract legal system help to excite the type of aspirations which motivate correspondence with newspapers?

Eunos’ liberal, modernizing, politicizing proposals, therefore, were directed at a growing bourgeoisie – speakers not of a “high Malay” but of a “true Malay” – about which we still know remarkably little. What becomes clear in the following two chapters is that at the opening of the twentieth century this was not the only type of ideology which was being propagated among this group and the wider Malay community. The passive revolution against the *kerajaan* was pursued from at least one other direction. In the same period as the *Utusan* was probing the Enlightenment ideologies of Europe – investigating and expounding the often interrelated themes of individualism, race, progress, nation

and citizenship – another periodical drew inspiration from a very different, Islamic, tradition of thought.

A characteristic of the *Utusan* which has not been commented upon until this point is the scant attention which it gives to Islamic matters. In fact Eunos declared openly that his was “not a religious newspaper”,<sup>92</sup> and we have noted his determination to adopt a style of written Malay which was not heavily dependent on Arabic vocabulary. In the next chapter we turn to a periodical, *Al Imam*, which was very much a “religious newspaper”. Its editors were no less antagonistic than Eunos toward the doctrines of the *kerajaan*. At the same time, however, they competed with him for the allegiance of the new generation of Malays. They presented their readers with an alternative program of reform and yet, as we shall discover, there are indications that these rival ideologies did not differ radically from one another at all conceptual levels.

### Notes

- 1 *Utusan Melayu*, 21 November 1907.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 9 April 1908.
- 3 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 50.
- 4 Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 203.
- 5 *Utusan Melayu*, 13 June 1908.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 13 August 1908.
- 7 *Utusan Melayu*, 20 February 1908.
- 8 M. Adas, *The Burmese Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852–1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1974), 71–6.
- 9 G.W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971 (orig. pub. 1837), 374–5; see also James Low, *A Dissertation on the Soil and Agriculture of the British Settlement of Penang, etc.* (Singapore: Singapore Free Press, 1836), 253.
- 10 J.M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987) 79.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*, 184; see also R. Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors 1867–1942* (Oxford: Clio, 1981), 111.
- 13 F. Swettenham, quoted in Gullick, *Malay Society*, 98. On the Torrens system see Heussler, *British Rule*, 97–8; S.K. Das, *The Torrens System in Malaya* (Singapore: Malayan Law Journal, 1963); David S.Y. Wong, *Tenure and Land Dealings in the Malay States* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977); and Hj. Salleh Hj. Buang, *Malaysian Torrens System* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989).
- 14 Gullick, *Malay Society*, 214.
- 15 Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants and Their Agricultural Economy in Colonial Malaya 1874–1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 74. For a new study which explores the interaction between law and practice in land tenure in the Pacific, including the wider economic and social implications of codifying customary practices, see R. Gerard Ward and E. Kingdon (eds), *Land, Custom and Practice in the South Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).
- 16 Gullick, *Malay Society*, 161.
- 17 Lim Teck Ghee, *Peasants*, 74.

- 18 *Ibid.*, 75.
- 19 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements*, 1894, 169.
- 20 Quoted in Gullick, *Malay Society*, 185.
- 21 *Utusan Melayu*, 5 December 1907.
- 22 The word for 'emergency' is *dzarurat*.
- 23 *Utusan Melayu*, 26 December 1907.
- 24 For the use of *moden* see *ibid.*, 14 November 1907; for the use of *tamaddun*, see *ibid.*, 14 April 1908; 16 April 1908; 21 July 1908 and 14 August 1908. For a discussion of why *moden* might not have been used consistently, see Sharon Siddique, *Some Malay Ideas on Modernization, Islam and Adat*, Masters thesis, University of Singapore, 1972. *Moden* appears to have been an extremely important word in Indonesia at about this time: "this year we've begun hearing a new word: 'moden'", says Minke (the central character of Pramoedya's series of novels: at the end of the nineteenth century; see Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Awakenings* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1990), 116).
- 25 See, for example, Zabedah Awang Ngah (ed.), *Renongan: Antoloji Esei Melayu 1924-1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1964); Senu Abdul Rahman et al., *Revolusi Mental* (Kuala Lumpur: *Utusan Melayu*, 1973); also Shahrudin Maaruf, *Malay Ideas on Development: From Feudal Lord to Capitalist* (Singapore: Times Books, 1988).
- 26 *Utusan Melayu*, 14 November 1907.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, 17 December 1907. Possession of slaves, the paper remarks, leads people to become lazy.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 1 August 1908. The Malay for 'new consciousness' is *baru sadar*; the Malay for 'involve themselves' (in the business of government) is *berchampur didalam perkerjaan*.
- 30 The references are numerous but see, for instance, Teng Ssu-Yu and J.K. Fairbank, *China's Response to the West* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 221; Albert H. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 31 *Utusan Melayu*, 25 July 1908.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 28 August 1908.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 23 April 1908.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Ibid.*, 24 December 1907.
- 37 Mohd. Taib bin Osman, *The Language of the Editorials in Malay Vernacular Newspapers up to 1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966), 34.
- 38 "Pada fikiran kita telah sampailah masanya bagi orang-orang Melayu menchoba seberapa boleh supaya bersatu diantaranya istemewa pada masa ini hampir hampir kesemuanya bangsa Melayu telah habis diperintah oleh bangsa lain"; *Utusan Melayu*, 26 November 1907.
- 39 "Pada masa dulu barangkali tiada diketahui oleh orang-orang Melayu iaitu jika merekaitu berkehendakkan supaya bangsanya jadi besar dan berkuasa herdaklah merekaitu menjalankan dengan bersungguh-sungguh pekerjaannya pada setiap hari"; *ibid.*, 5 December 1907.
- 40 Mohd. Taib Osman, *Language of the Editorials*, 36.
- 41 Sweeney, *Full Hearing*, 265; see also Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, chapter 4.
- 42 *Utusan Melayu*, 2 July 1908.
- 43 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985). Benedict Anderson notes that "the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even world events into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers...", *Imagined Communities* London: Verso, 1983), 63.
- 44 *usaha, Utusan Melayu*, 2 July 1908.
- 45 A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, Association of Asian Studies Monograph, 1982), 45, 137;

- C.C. Brown, 'Sejarah Melayu; or, Malay Annals', *JMBRAS*, xxv, 2-3 (1952), 221 n. 184. Also, see n. 58 below.
- 46 "... menjalankan dengan bersungguh-sungguh pekerjaannya pada setiap hari", *Utusan Melayu*, 5 December 1907.
- 47 *Ibid.*; 'increased the individual's sense of self': *meninggikan perasaan dirinya*.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 Samuel Smiles, *Self Help* (London: Sphere, 1968 (first pub. 1859) ), 272.
- 50 C. Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 106; see also Earl H. Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought from Samurai to Salary Man* (Berkeley: University of California, 1981). I am grateful to J.A.C. Mackie for the second reference.
- 51 Smiles, *Self Help*, 12.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 14. I am grateful to Dr John Merritt and Dr Iain McCalman for their advice on Smiles.
- 55 "... orang yang bernama dan terpuji", *Utusan Melayu*, 17 December 1907.
- 56 "merderhaka mereka itu daripada jirannya dan memperoleh kehormatan bagai dirinya", *Ibid.*
- 57 R.J. Wilkinson, 'Papers on Malay Customs and Beliefs', *JMBRAS*, xxx, 4 (1957), 61ff.
- 58 Quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 109.
- 59 *Utusan Melayu*, 29 August 1908.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 8 August 1908.
- 61 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 47.
- 62 *Utusan Melayu*, 17 December 1907.
- 63 *Ibid.*
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 *Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Straits Settlements*, 30 June 1924. For his use of the phrase "good citizenship", see *ibid.*, 28 November 1929.
- 67 Hugh Clifford, quoted in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 8.
- 68 Ibrahim Yaacob, quoted in Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 230.
- 69 L. Richmond Wheeler, *The Modern Malay* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928), 247; *Malayan Tribune*, 23 August 1929.
- 70 R.M. MacIver, *The Modern State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 11.
- 71 Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 459.
- 72 J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 9. I should like to thank Professor Lawrence Bryant and Dr John Graham for discussing Pocock's work with me.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 335.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 334.
- 77 See note 29 above.
- 78 *Utusan Melayu*, 24 March 1908; 28 April 1908.
- 79 Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 7-8.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 25-6.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 84 *Ibid.*, 43. I should like to thank Dr Brendan Dooley for drawing my attention to Habermas' work on the public sphere.
- 85 *Utusan Melayu*, 6 August 1908; see also 20 June 1907.
- 86 See chapter 1, note 62 above.

- 87 Quoted in R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth, 1985), 215; see also J.C. Mitchell, *Cities, Society and Social Perception: A Central African Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 279–80.
- 88 J. Djamour, *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore* (London: Athlone, 1965), 21.
- 89 William D. Wilder, *Communication, Social Structure and Development in Rural Malaysia: A Study of Kampong Kuala Beru* (London: Athlone, 1982), 128.
- 90 M.B. Hooker, *A Concise Legal History of South-East Asia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). For a perceptive discussion of the conflict of cultures which can occur when European legal systems are imposed in Africa, see Paul Bohannan, *Law and Warfare Studies in the Anthropology of Conflict* (Austin and London: University of Texas, 1967), 43–56. I am grateful to Professor Arjun Appadurai for this reference.
- 91 See, for instance, the reports from the state of Pahang in Kuantan District Office File, 43/1891; Temerloh District Office File 354/1894; see also Gullick, *Malay Society*, 109; Wan Hashim, *Peasants Under Peripheral Capitalism* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan, 1988), 76–84; Wilder, *Communication*, 24.
- 92 "... Surat khabar bagi ugama", *Utusan Melayu*, 15 February 1908.



## CHAPTER 6

### *Ideological Challenge on a Second Front: The Kerajaan in Contest with Islam*

The Islamic challenge to the royal ideology in Malaya was just as far reaching as that of European liberalism, and it developed over a far longer period. In both program and justification the Islamic critique, argued on the basis of religious doctrine, was established to a significant extent independently of the European colonial process. In fact, in the twentieth century, its exponents, now living under British power, engaged in a three-cornered struggle for hegemony. They formulated an alternative to liberal as well as royal doctrine and, in the post-independence period, their ideological pronouncements were designed to subvert much of the structure of the Malayan (and Malaysian) state.

This chapter and the next focus on a religious journal which debates with both *kerajaan* and liberal ideology. *Al Imam*, which commenced in Singapore a year or so earlier than the *Utusan*, addresses a number of those issues relating to authority, administration and political language which have been major themes in our earlier discussion.

At first glance, a religion-based antagonism within Malay society seems surprising. The Sultanate is often portrayed as an Islamic institution and much scholarly comment on Malay culture denies a distinction between “Malayness” and “Islam”. It is said that “Malay” and “Muslim” were “synonymous terms” and “still are”.<sup>1</sup> Islam is described as “the common amalgam by which the Malays of all classes were united rather than divided.”<sup>2</sup> We are also frequently reminded that to “become Muslim” is to *masuk Melayu*, that is, to ‘enter the fold of Malaydom’.<sup>3</sup> The contents of *Al Imam* suggest that assertions of this type fail to take account of deeply entrenched religious divisions within the Malay Muslim community.

*Al Imam's* critique of the growing liberal tradition in Malay society is examined in due course, in chapter 7. The present chapter deals with the journal's perceptions of the sultanates. To appreciate the significance of these perceptions, it will be necessary to probe beyond many of the scholarly generalizations made about the sultan's role in the Malay Islamic community. *Al Imam's* articles give the impression that there were contending interpretations of the *raja's* religious status. When historians refer to the Malay sultan as 'head of both church and state' and the 'symbol of Muslim unity'<sup>4</sup> within his polity, they present only one version of royal authority. In the pages of *Al Imam* there is certainly a concern with Muslim unity. But the editors and authors of this fiery journal do not seem to have believed that the sultanate *per se* should provide the focus of that unity. Islam itself would be the "common amalgam", and they make clear that it was not to be employed in the service of sultanate, race or nation.

### *Al Imam*

The history and format of *Al Imam* has been well documented.<sup>5</sup> That the editors had a religious standing is immediately suggested by the fact that they used such titles as *haji* (pilgrim) and *shaykh* (an honorific suggesting piety and usually assumed by people of Arab blood). In particular, Shaykh Mohd. Tahir b. Jalaluddin Al-Azhari and Sayyid Shaykh b. Ahmad Al-Hadi were prominent religious and social reformers. Such men possessed ideological (or scholarly) antecedents in the Malay society of an earlier period; but they were also conscious of themselves as participants in the social and cultural debates which occurred in the opening years of the twentieth century. The editors were not ignorant of the liberal principles which attracted Eunos. Indeed, the immediate influence upon their publication was that of the Egyptian reformers who were familiar with the philosophies of nineteenth-century Europe. *Al Imam* itself, in content and style, is reminiscent of the Egyptian reformist journal, *Al Manar* (which commenced publication in the 1890s). *Al Imam* also contains translations of articles by the enormously influential Egyptian, Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905). The impact of the *Al Manar* group would explain, for instance, much of the emphasis on the concept of reason in *Al Imam*. Muhammad Abduh, in particular, did not see reason and religion as being in conflict and condemned the blind acceptance of traditional dogma. He was critical of many superstitions practised by Muslims, including the veneration of saints, and he saw the essential rationalism of Islamic religion as being in harmony with much modern scientific and liberal constitutional thought. Such condemnation of

superstition, however, was grounded in the apparently backward-looking demand that Islamic practice be stripped of innovation, that Muslims return to what the reformists saw as the central and the fundamental teachings of their religion. It was this 'fundamentalist'<sup>6</sup> demand as much as any other which brought the Islamic reformers of Singapore into conflict with Malay royalty.

*Al Imam's* editors were well acquainted with life in the sultanates. Although this journal, like the *Utusan* and Abdullah's writings, was published in the colonial enclave beyond the reach of the royal courts, both Shaykh Tahir and Sayyid Shaykh had travelled and worked in neighbouring Malay territories. The attitude they appear to have adopted toward the *kerajaan* is to some extent surprising. Historical scholarship on the period has not prepared us for the severity of their critique. It stresses the central role of the sultans in Malay Islamic experience and when historians have examined *Al Imam* itself, they have concentrated on the journal's contribution to the development of Malay modernism and nationalism rather than its position *vis à vis* the Malay *ancien régime*. The journal's articles have been read in what was described earlier as a retrospective rather than a prospective context. From the contemporary vantage point of the royal courts, *Al Imam* was, in fact, as determined and thoroughgoing an opponent as was Munshi Abdullah.

The *Al Imam* authors were critical, first of all, of individual Malay rulers. Their concern was not limited to the Malay Peninsula but extended also to Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago. The journal was sold in many parts of the region<sup>7</sup> and the articles it published often came from distant places. Complaints were received, for instance, about the ruler of Langkat in East Sumatra who was said to oppress his people so that they "cry out for help".<sup>8</sup> Trengganu too is described as having a "despotic government" (and here the actual English words are used).<sup>9</sup> After learning of 'unorthodox', mystical rites in Patani, *Al Imam* criticizes the Malay rulers there for not enforcing the law of Islam, the *shari'ah*.<sup>10</sup> In other regions, Malay aristocrats are said to seize property in "ways which contravene Islamic law."<sup>11</sup> Faced with such negligence and injustice, *Al Imam* urges the *rajās* to follow the leaders of Japan who, the paper explains, devote themselves to expanding education in their country. Rulers, it is stressed, should provide training for their subjects and help them "to become independent of infidels."<sup>12</sup> In a period of rising European power, the journal makes abundantly clear, the traditional Malay leadership had failed utterly. The Koran itself is quoted to express disdain: the Holy Book contains sentiments which, when liberally translated into Malay by *Al Imam* (in an article by Sayyid Shaykh), assess the rulers' failure in a manner which Malays would immediately

comprehend. To quote one example: "Oh our God, we have been loyal to all our *penghulus* (headmen) and *orang besar* (chiefs) who have led us astray. Oh our God bring upon them double torment".<sup>15</sup>

A rich and expressive vocabulary, in fact, is often employed in *Al Imam* to condemn the traditional leaders. They are said to be "specialists in extravagance"<sup>14</sup> and "exponents of every stupidity."<sup>15</sup> In some cases their reason is "astray" or "confused".<sup>16</sup> The Malay community is said to be diseased and the Malay leadership is described as the "origin of all disease and the cause of all affliction."<sup>17</sup> The words themselves sometimes seem to be used as instruments to chastise the rulers. Some of the most effective essays are translations from Arabic and present generalized but obviously pertinent dissertations on royal government. An article republished in *Al Imam* in January 1908, for example, could certainly have stimulated anxiety among the *kerajaan* élite. It declares:

If the Raja happens to be ignorant, of bad character, low ambition, greedy, narrow minded and so forth, then his action will lead to the downfall of the community (*umat*)... It will fall under the government of another race because of the evil policy of the Raja and because the ministers feared opposing him. In such a situation the people too are foolish ... if there existed some spirit in the *umat*, and if they had the slightest reason (*akal*) in their heads – even the size of an ant – they would root out the poisonous tree.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the aggressive tone, the use of *umat* (the Islamic community) and the stress on *akal* (to which we will return), there is in this statement a certain degree of respect for the old *kerajaan* formula: the welfare of the community depends directly on its *raja*.

Other articles would have discouraged even the best-intentioned *kerajaan* ruler. Members of the *kerajaan* élite who perused the pages of *Al Imam* would quickly have recognized that the campaign waged by *Al Imam* went well beyond criticism of individual rulers. It was not merely that the traditional leadership had failed to respond to the European challenge or even that it had often disobeyed specific elements of Islamic law (*shari'ah*). The whole basis of the *kerajaan* was brought into question by *Al Imam* just as it had been by Munshi Abdullah. The statement that Trengganu had a "despotic government", for example, would certainly have to be viewed as a general condemnation of the traditional Malay rule. (The additional suggestion that the state needed a "*Parlimen*" through which the people would be responsible for administration, is an indication of the significance of liberal notions in religious circles in Malaya and Egypt at the opening of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>) Equally suggestive is the way Malay rulers are dismissed as "idol kings" or "chess kings".<sup>20</sup> Some of the most forceful criticisms by *Al Imam* focus on the royal preoccupation with ceremony which Abdullah and European

observers also denigrated. One *Al Imam* article, for instance, portrays the Malay élite squandering its money “uselessly on the Prophet’s Birthday celebrations” (persistently condemned by ‘fundamentalist’ Islamic critics all over the world),<sup>21</sup> on other customary (*adat*) celebrations, and even on “glasses and goblets and dancing girls.”<sup>22</sup> In Malay court texts, it must be recalled, the types of activity suggested here, even the dancing, are often recounted with respect and affection.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Kerajaan* externals, Islamic essences**

It is in an article entitled ‘Honour and Dignity’,<sup>24</sup> that *Al Imam*’s attack on the ceremony of the *kerajaan* is most far-reaching in significance. The emphasis given in Malay society to titles, medals and material display, to what *Al Imam* considers to be mere appearances, is the object of this assault. It is directed not merely at the rulers but also the subjects of sultanates. In addition, there is little comfort for certain bourgeois readers of the colony and the ‘protected’ states who, in *Al Imam*’s view, were equally concerned with superficial matters. The majority of people, explains the article, do not understand the true meaning of “honour” and “dignity”. The confusion is not restricted to the *kerajaan* élite. Some people believe that honour comes to those who possess material wealth and possessions, “large godowns, finely decorated houses, graceful horses, large numbers of servants, beautiful clothing and jewellery.” For other people (and here the *kerajaan* élite is clearly intended), honour seems to arise from “titles and ranks and decorating the chest with such and such medals.” Sometimes people passionately seek such titles and even adopt foul measures to acquire them. “We find certain persons working day and night seeking ways to obtain a particular title or rank or a medal to adorn their chests.” In their quest, *Al Imam* continues, they may well bring “ruin to their country or humiliation to their community”.

The preoccupation with titles, of course, is persistently encountered in the *kerajaan* world. It has been suggested above, in chapter 1, that these titles ought not to be perceived as being ‘empty’ as some European commentators had asserted. Titles had a profound importance in this world and the next. They were capable of encapsulating *nama*, just as the hierarchical ceremonies of state were able to display and in a sense protect the individual’s reputation and status. *Al Imam* not merely condemned the means adopted to acquire such honours but also questioned the significance which *kerajaan* literature attributed to titles. Such criticism was ontological in character in that it insisted on a different perception of man and on the existence of another level of reality. In the *kerajaan* system, the individual was presented as ‘Public

Man'. He was perceived in what we today usually consider to be superficial terms. Powers or capacities, as we have noted, appear almost to be layered physically on his or her material form. In this literature there is no delineation of the inner person. Some of Munshi Abdullah's most powerful writing appears to have been a reaction to this *kerajaan* portrayal of the individual. In a somewhat different manner – in more distinctly religious terms – *Al Imam* also debates the court viewpoint.

The journal's article on 'Honour and Dignity' takes pains to explain that it is primarily in terms of his *zat* that an individual ought to be perceived and valued, and that a person's *zat* depended neither upon possessions nor titles. The fact that *zat* is actually defined in the text gives an indication of how unfamiliar the term is likely to have been to many Malay readers. One's *zat*, according to the journal, is one's *batang tuboh*. Although *batang tuboh* is defined merely as 'trunk of the body' in a Malay-English dictionary<sup>25</sup> published just before the article was written, it had probably already begun to convey the notion of 'person'. Some two decades later Dutch and English dictionaries<sup>26</sup> defined *batang tuboh* as 'persoon' or 'person'. The word *zat* itself is said to mean 'nature' or 'essence' in Malay-English dictionaries both from the *Al Imam* period and later.<sup>27</sup> In Arabic, however, *zat* is defined as 'person' and 'personality' as well as 'essence' and 'nature'.<sup>28</sup> *Al Imam* makes clear that someone of status or, for that matter, great wealth, may not have (or be) an especially noble *zat*. It must be realized, the journal argues, that there are people who have been deprived of their possessions and rank yet have retained their *zat*. Furthermore, if people have a

*zat* which does not possess noble, human (*manusia*) attributes then they will join those people of a low rank in that no trace will remain of them in human hearts; they will be forgotten; they will never be mentioned on the tongues of mankind.

The Malay desire to possess a noble name, to be remembered and honoured after death, is clearly acknowledged here; but the *Al Imam* essay does not ground that name in public position (or material wealth).

Dress and jewellery, which are both significant in demonstrating rank in the *kerajaan*, are seen by *Al Imam* as particularly superficial. To boast of attire is to behave like "dancing girls or rich Chinese women." Medals and titles, the journal insists, must also not be confused with real honour. They are not, for instance, of a permanent nature: a *raja* can take back a medal or remove a person from his rank and then that person "will return to the humble place which he occupied earlier." What is more, if a person

obtains such marks of dignity from people of narrow understanding (*akal*) then the medal or title is a dignity only in the sense of being a medal or a title. It does not imply that the person (*zat*) himself is noble.

The article in this way expresses impatience with a dignity that is “only temporary”, a dignity which is of “appearance (*rupa*) only, rather than a dignity established in a permanent place, that is, in the heart”. Does such impatience (encountered outside as well as inside the Malay world) reflect again, one may ask, a deeply rooted Malay anxiety about impermanence?

*Al Imam* does not dismiss titles and medals *per se*. Sometimes they may indeed indicate work or service which deserves to be honoured but – and here the article diverges strongly from *kerajaan* ideology – it questions the actual nexus between title and *nama*. That is to say, the journal indicates that there is no necessary link between the position one holds in the sultanate and real personal worth. Furthermore, the judgement of whether or not a person’s service to the community is honourable is no longer viewed as the concern merely of the *raja* or the élite. It is a far more democratic process. “Human reason” (*akal manusia*), according to *Al Imam*, determines if the task or service is worthy of honour or whether the titles and medals bestowed merely demonstrate the “infamy of the person’s *zat* and the evil of the case.” In illustration of the argument, the article provides examples of prominent leaders who genuinely deserved honour. Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, for instance, had certainly received many titles or medals but he had done much for his country. (We shall be examining his achievements ourselves in chapter 8.) The people of Johore “could not forget the nobility of the late Sultan Abu Bakar.” Because of the “deeds and nature of Abu Bakar, his name is written in the hearts of everyone in his community and of all the people of his country (*negeri*).” (Referring to Abu Bakar without the title ‘Sultan’ appears to underline the point.) Egyptians also could not forget Muhammad Ali (who lived from 1769 to 1849, established a dynasty and promulgated social and economic reforms). The Turks would remember Sultan Osman I (1258–1324, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty).<sup>29</sup>

Turning to those who do not deserve to be honoured, the article identifies

some of our rajas in this region who gained their medals and ranks in states inherited from their ancestors, states which they later surrendered to other races. [These rajas] surrendered the law of their community (*umat*) and group (*kaum*) to foreign religions and allowed the cream of the revenue of their states to flow to foreigners. In such countries all the Muslims must endure the difficulties and burdens loaded upon them, one after another, by foreign races.

Despite its praise for the Johore Sultan such disdain toward the local *kerajaan* élites is never far distant from the argument of "Honour and Dignity." The warnings and admonitions are at times chillingly sarcastic. Thus *Al Imam* reminds those who live in "high buildings, take pleasure from beautiful gardens, and look down on mankind from decorated windows, that they may indeed enjoy their wealth during their lives; but will they be mentioned with respect in this world or after they are dead?"

It is obvious that the *Al Imam* article is attacking not just certain individual "rajas in this region" but also a number of concepts central to the *kerajaan*. When the reader is told that "medals and ranks are honourable only when the service for which they were awarded is also honourable," *Al Imam* asserts a world view which is only superficially consistent with that lying behind *kerajaan* ideology. The journal presents itself as employing rationalist principles. It rejects an apparently magical manner of thinking in which morality and power are seen to flow downwards from the *raja*. Most of all, the journal is concerned with the person beneath the medals. It is the actions and the essence, the *zat*, of a person upon which *Al Imam* focuses.

Despite the Arabic phraseology employed, this perspective is reminiscent of that of Abdullah. Both Abdullah and the *Al Imam* authors are struck by the superficiality of the *kerajaan*'s concerns. By the standards of both types of criticism, the texts written by royal ideologues have an air of unreality. The titles and the ceremony of the *kerajaan* seem frivolous. "What person of reason (*akal*)", *Al Imam* asks, "would talk of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore in terms of his beautiful attire, or of the huge buildings in which he lived, or of the many medals upon his breast? No such person would do so." The *Al Imam* article continues: "Sultan Abu Bakar will, in fact, be remembered for his achievements in saving an Islamic country (*negeri*) which had already slipped between the jaws of a savage tiger." In a further rhetorical question *Al Imam* asks whether "historians" investigate what clothes were worn by Alexander the Great, or what sort of house he possessed. (Again the historians' answer would, of course, be less straightforward today.)

Much of the rest of the article is concerned to identify the type of service which is worthy of real honour. There are important messages here for *Al Imam*'s readers but the point which must be made about these preferred categories of service is that the list is subversive. In particular, and this matter is critical, *Al Imam* attributes value to service which is devoted not to the monarch but to the community, and the word for 'community' is usually *umat* rather than the *bangsa* ('race') referred to so often by Abdullah and Eunus. It is by working for the *umat*, the *Al Imam* article emphasizes, that a person will be mentioned



“on the lips of all” and will “obtain rewards from God.” Even the Johore Sultan, Abu Bakar, is praised because of the service he gave to his “Islamic state” (*negeri Islam*).

From the perspective of the court élites the article on ‘Honour and Dignity’ would have been damaging at various levels. It contains criticism of the behaviour of numerous rulers in the region and condemnation of the *kerajaan* emphasis on luxurious display. Moreover, doubt is cast on the philosophical underpinnings of *kerajaan* political culture. In effect the essential position of the raja as a focus of loyalty is brought into question. There is innovation here of both a political and an ontological character. An emphasis on the Islamic community at the expense of the *kerajaan*, and on Islamic law in opposition to royal whim, is combined with an assertion of an apparently ‘deeper’ level of reality than that represented in the ceremonial and hierarchical structure of Malay courtly culture. *Al Imam* recognizes the Malay concern for ‘reputation’ but argues that a man’s position in this world and the next must be achieved in a specifically Islamic not a *kerajaan* context. Beneath a person’s formal status lies his *zat* and the value of a particular *zat*, what might be called a person’s real *nama*, is not in the gift of a *raja*. It is achieved through service to the *umat* (the Islamic community), and is dependent on the judgement of people of reason. We shall see in the next chapter that in *Al Imam* the criteria for sound reason are inextricably bound to an understanding of the Divine Law of Islam, the *shari’ah*. In this concern to identify the Islamic realities, often lying beneath *kerajaan* practices, *Al Imam* possesses a fundamentalist spirit. As suggested, these realities often relate to the desire to implement fully the Islamic law.

Already it is apparent that *Al Imam* contains elements of a positive program as well as a critique of the Malay *ancien régime*. Chapter 7 will explain that this program – which emphasizes both the *shari’ah* and a particular view of progress, rationality and personal essence – is radical not just in terms of *kerajaan* ideology but also in its distance from the reforms urged by Eunus in the *Utusan Malayu*. Even the community to which *Al Imam* addresses its admonitions and advice, the *umat*, is not coterminous with the Malay *bangsa* readership postulated by Eunus and Abdullah. Before exploring further the Islamic journal’s relationship with the liberal ideologues, however, it is necessary to examine more thoroughly the paper’s puzzling relationship with pre-colonial culture. In particular, why did *Al Imam* attempt to subvert the *kerajaan* in the name of Islam, the religion endorsed and patronized by the *rajas* and sultans themselves? To appreciate the significance and basis of *Al Imam*’s critique demands a sense of historical context, in particular of the relation and the tension between religion and polity in the

pre-colonial Malay World.<sup>30</sup> In order to understand why an Islamic journal in the opening years of this century vehemently condemned such critical *kerajaan* doctrines as those relating to 'Honour and Dignity', what is required above all is an account which is not founded upon the notion that 'Malay' and 'Muslim' were synonymous terms.

### Islam and Malay kingship

The prominence given to the ruler in traditional Malay society was far from unique in the Muslim world. Yet there is also a deeply rooted sense of unease in the interrelationship between religious doctrine and kingship in much Islamic ideological discussion. *Al Imam's* denunciation of the *kerajaan* is to some extent a product of this unease. The Prophet Muhammad himself is quoted as having warned that "whenever a man accedes to authority he drifts away from God";<sup>31</sup> and when an Arab chief, after agreeing to conversion, told the prophet, "You are our Prince," Muhammad is said to have replied that "the prince is God, not I."<sup>32</sup> Over the centuries, there always appear to have been spokesmen in Islamic society for such scepticism about kingship, but the influence of these spokesmen waxed and waned throughout Muslim history. It was very much on the wane in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries when Islam was first established in the Malay world.

In this period, an observer might have perceived the Muslim world as an expanding galaxy of monarchies, many of which asserted lofty spiritual claims. In earlier centuries of Islamic history there had been a single caliphate heading the Muslim community. At first this was a relatively prosaic rather than an imperial institution. Increasingly, however, it assumed many of the characteristics of Persian monarchy. The "light of prophecy" was said to shine around the caliph's forehead, he appropriated the old Babylonian epithet 'Shadow of God on Earth' and his subjects adopted the practice of kissing the ground before him.<sup>33</sup> Before Islam was widely adopted in the Malay lands, the caliphate gradually lost its monopoly of political and religious leadership in the Muslim world. Numerous rulerships or kingships emerged, for instance, in the Middle East and India. These new monarchs assumed for themselves such ambitious titles and epithets as 'Sultan' or 'Shadow of God on Earth'. Thus, in the eleventh century, the Seljuk sultans were described as 'Shadows of God on Earth'. In the fourteenth century the ruler of Delhi could declare that "He who obeys the Sultan obeys God" and the sixteenth-century Sultan of Bijapur was also called 'Shadow of God'.<sup>34</sup>

It was in the context of this proliferation of Persianized monarchies that many of the rulers of the Malay archipelago adopted Islam. Indeed, the significance of these monarchies may help to explain the

impression, conveyed in certain Malay accounts of the Islamization process, that these Malay rulers were enthusiastic converts. Putting aside the rulers' immediate reasons for conversion,<sup>35</sup> we can assume that they believed they had little to fear from Islam. Iranian-style monarchy would have seemed compatible with the monarchical system which they already possessed, a system based on Hindu-Buddhist principles. Furthermore, the Malay ruler might well have known that in many parts of the Muslim world, conversion had entailed no thoroughgoing abolition of pre-Islamic custom. Even in the critical area of law this is true.

Law is the sphere in which opposition to kingship in Islamic society is most likely to arise. We have already noted that one of *Al Imam's* principal charges against the sultans was that they contravened the *shari'ah*, the Holy Law of Islam: indeed it will be seen that *Al Imam* grounds its entire approach to social reform in the *shari'ah*. In taking this attitude the journal's editors might be perceived as members of a long-established Muslim group which the historian, Marshall Hodgson, refers to as the "*shari'ah*-minded".<sup>36</sup> For these *shari'ah*-minded members of the Muslim community, the centrality and implementation of the Islamic law is the highest consideration. They believe that "every individual's life should be directed under the guidance of God's laws, and everything in society not clearly necessary to His service [ought] to be frowned upon".<sup>37</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *shari'ah*-minded were to become increasingly influential in Southeast Asia and many other parts of the Muslim world: in important respects, *Al Imam's* condemnation of the neighbouring Malay sultanates was itself a product of this development.

When Islamization was first underway in the Malay lands, however, *shari'ah*-mindedness was a significantly weaker force. Its position is indicated by the fate of the Middle-Eastern scholar, Ibn-Taymiyyah. This fourteenth-century teacher and author, who was later to be highly esteemed by the type of people who wrote for *Al Imam*, was very much a minority voice. In fact, his criticism of the way Muslim monarchs of his time contravened Islamic law landed him in prison.<sup>38</sup> At the time Ibn-Taymiyyah lived, it seems Islamic law and its proponents were generally subordinated to the demands of royal authority. Thus, Islamic judges, or Qadis, were in many cases not merely royal appointees but also often bowed to a royal rather than the Divine will in the exercise of their judgement.<sup>39</sup> Significantly, we know of the survival of non-Muslim customs in many non-Malay lands.<sup>40</sup> And this situation is also indicated by the fact that a number of contemporary foreign Muslim travellers (such as the fourteenth-century Ibn Batutta and the fifteenth-century Ma Huan) who visited Southeast Asia did not single out Malay countries for criticism on account of their 'corruptions'.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the twentieth-

century *Al Imam* writers, they were evidently not horrified by legal practices which contravened Islamic law.<sup>42</sup> For the most part, these travellers even ignored the fact that religious law itself was promulgated in Malay lands in the idiom of *rajaship*. Yet here in particular the Malay rulers made innovations which would provoke later Islamic critics.

According to Thomas Stamford Raffles the Muslim rulers of Java “considered [it] a point of honour to profess adherence to [Islamic law]” but they were always “vested with a discretionary power of adapting the Mahometan law to the circumstances of society, a prerogative liberally exercised”.<sup>43</sup> The same might have been said of the Malay rulers. It is not merely the case that the legal digests and other documents of the Malay *kerajaan* contained non-Islamic as well as *shari’ah* injunctions. The manner in which the *shari’ah* was related to – or incorporated in – the structure of the *kerajaan* requires noting. Here the actual style of presentation of the digests may offer a valuable perspective. Although containing substantial elements of Islamic law, the texts themselves are emphatically products not of the discourse of *shari’ah*, but of that of the *kerajaan*.

For example, although the so-called ‘Malaccan digest’ clearly contains *shari’ah* material, especially in the fields of commercial and marriage law, it seems highly significant that the text grounds the entire body of the law it describes not in the authority of God but rather in that of the *raja*. The laws of Malacca are said to be in the “possession” of the *raja*. The text declares that the laws “come down to us” from the time of Alexander the Great, and it is Alexander’s descendant, Sultan Muhammad Shah, the first Muslim ruler of Malacca, who “first laid them down”. (Alexander is often encountered in the genealogies of Malay royalty and is mentioned as a prophet in the Koran). According to the text, the laws had been passed from one ruler to another and were now in the “possession” of the reigning sultan. They are said (at the time of writing) to be administered by the sultan’s “representatives”. Those people who dare to transgress these laws are warned that they are guilty of the heinous crime of “treason” not against God, but against His Majesty. The first chapter of this legal digest, moreover, focuses on a distinctly *kerajaan* rather than *shari’ah* concern; that is, as we saw in chapter 1 above, the text commences by listing sumptuary laws which regulate the costume, language and behaviour of the different ranks of royal subject and which exhibit the special position of the ruler.<sup>44</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of the *Al Imam* authors and other *shari’ah*-minded *ulama* (or scholars), the subjugation of Islamic law to *kerajaan* ideology in this way was a dangerous innovation. It would illustrate for them the truth of Muhammad’s warnings about those “acceding to authority”. As these Islamic critics became increasingly

influential in the nineteenth century, they threatened the *kerajaan* and were, in turn, recognized as foes by many of the royal courts. It is possible that royal perceptions of Islam changed substantially over the centuries. When at least some of the nineteenth-century Malay rulers looked back on the adoption of Islam by their royal ancestors, they might well have viewed the conversion as the acceptance of what we might describe as a Trojan horse. That is, although the new religion may not have seemed especially threatening in the early period, by the nineteenth century certain of its most influential doctrines (as we have seen in the case of *Al Imam*) expressly challenged the ideological basis of the *kerajaan* or, indeed, of any of the Persianized monarchies of Islam.

### The Islamic struggle

The literature of the sultanates themselves, not surprisingly, does not directly expose the ideological rupture within Muslim Malay society. The part played by the censor, or simply fear of censorship, should not be underestimated. It is significant, for instance, that we must turn to Portuguese accounts of fifteenth-century Malacca to find mention of a Sultan who announced that Malacca was to be “made into Mecca”. He is said to have been criticized for this pronouncement – indeed some people in the city considered it was “on account of the arrogance of [the Sultan’s] sin” that Malacca was conquered.<sup>45</sup> One is tempted to ask, however, whether this Portuguese report hints at a long-standing royal disquiet about Islam. To what extent, in particular, might Mecca have been seen by the *kerajaan* élite to represent a rival focus of loyalty and social consciousness? There are subtle indications of unease about the *haj* in certain extant *kerajaan* writings<sup>46</sup> and it is possible that some royal texts may have been far more explicit in their declarations. Nearly all such texts, however, exist now only in nineteenth-century copies. By this time the court itself was arranging for the rewriting of its *hikayat* in accordance with the growing demands of the *shari’ah*-minded,<sup>47</sup> and complaints about the *haj*, of course, would be precisely the type of unorthodox writing which nineteenth-century royal censors would expunge.

So too are *kerajaan* works unlikely to refer explicitly to a ‘*shari’ah*-minded’ critique of the traditional polity. For court-approved texts to admit, even in the form of rebuttal, that the ostensibly Islamic sultans were being accused of religious negligence would seem impossible. Again, however, an element of courtly antagonism toward some *ulama* is at least insinuated in a few royal chronicles. Passages in the *Malay Annals*, for instance, ridicule religious scholars. Certain Muslim

missionaries to Malacca are presented as pompous and rather foolish.<sup>48</sup> This is perhaps a hint of the type of full-blooded satirizing of ‘*shari’ah*-mindedness’ which we know took place in Java.<sup>49</sup> The entire text of the *Malay Annals* has been examined by A.H. Johns in order to assess the treatment which it gives to Islamic matters and he observes that “all the references to Islam are superficial in character” and sometimes “light hearted”.<sup>50</sup> Johns concludes from this that the *Annals* do little to assist our understanding of the role of Islam in fifteenth-century Malacca. But the references may also be interpreted as providing evidence of the way the *kerajaan* perceived Islam, and thus, of the type of ideological or discursive resistance which would have been encountered by a ‘*shari’ah*-minded’ version of the religion.

Turning from court literature to specifically religious writings one finds again little Islamic comment of a directly critical type on the Malay monarchy. However, when Shaikh Nuru’d-din bin ‘Ali A’R-Raniri (writing in seventeenth-century Aceh, West Sumatra) condemns a well-known *kerajaan* text (the *Hikayat Seri Rama*) because it does not mention the name of Allah, we get a hint of the way the ‘*shari’ah*-minded’ may have viewed the courtly tradition.<sup>51</sup> When a later religious scholar described the authors of such *hikayats* as “specialists in illegal innovation”,<sup>52</sup> he is likely to have been well aware of the fact that this genre was endorsed by the sultanate. In rare comments such as these one finds the type of cross-referencing between two traditions which would be an essential ingredient of any history of Islam in Southeast Asia. At this stage historians have only begun to trace the development of the Islamic scholarly traditions in the region and to analyse the various networks of influence and ideological inheritance which linked, and sometimes divided, the religious authors of the Malay world.

Even the most general perusal of the transcriptions, commentaries, and digests of Islamic doctrinal literature, however, confirms the impression that a great distance separates it from the ideology and style of the court texts. Although the Islamic writings – consisting in large part of translations from Arabic, annotations and glosses – seldom refer to the *kerajaan* tradition, the fact that so great a distance exists between the two genres is suggestive. The devoted production and reproduction of translations of apparently uncontentious, Arabic theological and legal texts conveys an impression of struggle. Some *ulama* were perhaps not merely “maintaining the pulse of religious teaching”,<sup>53</sup> as Johns has expressed it. They may also have been writing and copying, at least in part, in deliberate reaction to a different type of literature and to the rival ideological tradition which it expounded. A form of debate appears to have been taking place by means of emphasis rather than explicit argument.<sup>54</sup> From the sixteenth to the nineteenth

centuries the authors and translators who worked in such places as Aceh and Palembang in Sumatra, Patani and Kelantan on the peninsula and the island of Riau (near Singapore)<sup>55</sup> were compiling texts which explicate and advocate alternative religious and social programs to those encountered in much *kerajaan* literature.

In a few sultanates these scholars were welcomed.<sup>56</sup> In others they might understandably have perceived themselves as promoting the cause of a 'shari'ah-minded' ideology against a hostile Islamic practice infected by Persian innovation, Malay custom and a broad range of other corruptions. As the *Al Imam* writings suggest, it was to be far easier for such authors to comment explicitly on the rival, royal, ideology when they were safely based in British colonies beyond the reach of the *kerajaan* leadership. Before such a radical Islamic élite began to employ the medium of journalism in the Straits Settlements, however, there is evidence of growing 'sharia'ah-minded' or Fundamentalist criticism of the *kerajaan*. It is recorded with greatest clarity not in Malay but in European writings, in documents written by travellers, officials and missionaries. In these documents, in fact, we begin to perceive the nineteenth century as a formative period in the growth of religious division within the Malay Islamic community.

In 1811, Raffles, the doyen of British commentators on the Malays, observed that "in almost every state" (in the archipelago) there existed "a constant struggle between the adherents of the old Malay usages and the Hajis, and other religious persons, who are desirous of introducing the laws of the Arabs".<sup>57</sup> The ruling élite was clearly among the principal supporters of the "old Malay usages". In Trengganu, in the 1830s, the traveller, George Earl, reported that the "Arabs" (a term he probably used imprecisely to refer to Muslims living according to apparently Arab custom and style) had succeeded in the "partial introduction of the Mohomadan code of laws", but "many of the *pangerans*" (princes) were "in favour of the Undang Undang, the Adat Melayu, the old Malay codes, which differ much from those introduced by the Arabs."<sup>58</sup> There are suggestions also of a similar confrontation occurring on the other side of the peninsula in Negri Sembilan. A Catholic missionary visiting that region encountered a Sultan whose "ridicule" of "several Mohammedan Laws and Customs" visibly upset a "Malay Priest".<sup>59</sup> The ridicule may well have been reminiscent of the cavalier manner in which the *Malay Annals* refers to distinguished "Priests" of an earlier era.

These reports amount to only a portion of the foreign testimony regarding a developing rupture between the *kerajaan* élite and an increasingly potent, Islamic leadership.<sup>60</sup> Such a development may have been stimulated in part by external forces, particularly by repercussions flowing from what is known as the Wahhabi movement. In Arabia, this

late-eighteenth-century revolutionary movement (inspired to some extent by the same Ibn-Taymiyyah who had opposed the pretensions of monarchs in his region) challenged the right of the Ottoman Sultans to act as protectors of Islamic orthodoxy and demanded instead the rigorous implementation of the *shari'ah*. The Wahhabis were calling for purification. A direct line is said to lead from Ibn-Taymiyyah to the Wahhabi movement, and from there to the *Al Manar* groups of Egypt, who influenced so greatly the editors of *Al Imam*. The line ends with those late twentieth-century "*ulama* and thinkers who want to restore the rule of the *shari'ah* in an Islamic state."<sup>61</sup>

Wahhabi ideas were disseminated throughout the Muslim world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They probably reached the Malay archipelago primarily through the pilgrimage to Mecca and by means of Arab settlers and travellers. The Wahhabi impact is seen in most dramatic form in the so-called *Paderi* campaigns in West Sumatra, which, as Johns has remarked, commenced in 1803, the year when the Wahhabis conquered Mecca.<sup>62</sup> The Sumatran *Paderi* leaders were in close contact with Islamic developments in the Arab lands. One of them, for instance, established an administration which, in the opinion of a modern historian, bore "a striking resemblance to that of the Wahhabis".<sup>63</sup> The *Paderi* hostility to the traditional rulers of the region is immediately suggested by the fact that numerous members of the royal family died at their hands.<sup>64</sup>

Here in the Wahhabi movement of Arabia and its Sumatran offshoots we encounter the political and social (as well as military) implications of ideological fissure. The Muslim *rajās* in other regions of the Malay world would have observed these developments with anxiety. An East Sumatran ruler may have expressed a common fear when he complained to the British, in 1824, that many districts near to his country were "in a very disturbed state at present". The *Paderi*, he said, were "determined to attack different states and render them tributary ... to be obedient to all their peculiar laws".<sup>65</sup> On the peninsula the advocating of these 'peculiar laws' was not supported by military sanctions. Nevertheless, the observations of Raffles and others about the "constant struggle" between the "Hajis", on the one hand, and the "adherents of old Malay usages", on the other, suggest the presence of similar tensions. In the words of the Islamicist, Sir Hamilton Gibb, the Wahhabi spirit "spread little by little over the whole Muslim world."<sup>66</sup>

Viewed in this historical context *Al Imam's* antagonism toward the Malay *kerajaan* is no longer so unexpected. It is an episode in a long-standing struggle taking place within the Malay Islamic community. What has only been hinted at so far, however, is why a Malay language periodical, in the opening years of the twentieth century, should have



stated its views in so frank and trenchant a manner. To answer this specific question requires a closer examination of religious development occurring in the Straits Settlements.

### **Islam in the enclaves**

In the British-governed enclaves, where the liberal critique of the Malay sultanates developed, what might be termed the intellectual climate probably helped also to promote an Islamic Fundamentalist critique. At the very least, British rule seems to have led to a genuine intensification of religious activity. Considering the importance of the Straits Settlements as an Islamic centre, it is surprising how little has been written about religious developments there in the nineteenth century. William Roff's pioneering essay on the 'Malayo-Muslim World of Singapore' focuses on the end of the century when a phase of vigorous Islamic publishing commenced.<sup>67</sup> The major study on the Straits Settlements government and society in the earlier part of the century actually gives the impression that the British administration discouraged the growth of Islamic practice and weakened "the religious authority of the priesthood among the Malays".<sup>68</sup> On this matter, however, Munshi Abdullah provides a very different perspective.

In one of his many comparisons between the Malay states and the colony, Abdullah declares that in the former the "people take their religion more lightly".<sup>69</sup> This too is the impression conveyed in the few European documents which consider the character of non-Western society in the Straits Settlements. Much of this rare British comment (most European documentation is concerned with the exciting commercial and political developments in the colony) is to be found in the archives of the London Missionary Society. The Protestant missionaries, who had an important part in the dissemination of European knowledge in the Malay community, took a gloomy view of their prospects as opponents of Islam. Unable to claim success in terms of Christian conversion, the missionaries presented an often antagonistic account of the manner in which the colony's Muslims took their religion "seriously".

In Malacca in 1821, Claudius Thomsen found two mosques each attracting "a crowded attendance every Friday". He reported that corporal punishment was "publicly inflicted at the mosque on some person for non attendance"; other negligent people, he added, were warned that they would "not be attended when sick, nor attended to the grave when they die".<sup>70</sup> Thomsen came to the depressing (for him) conclusion that in this settlement "Mohomedanism" had "much revived" since the arrival of the Christian missionaries.<sup>71</sup> He and other missionaries were to come to the same judgement elsewhere in the colony. On

moving to Singapore, Thomsen found himself to be among what he called “the most violent class of Sunnites – Traditionalists – followers of Imam Shafei” and that these people declared that “to reason of Religion, i.e. Mohomedanism, whether it be true or false, is mental apostasy”.<sup>72</sup> There may be some truth in Thomsen’s comment on Shafi’i legal views;<sup>73</sup> what is most significant for understanding the historical background of *Al Imam*, however, is the way in which the comments of missionaries corroborate the view of Munshi Abdullah.

Christian missionary observations on the sultanates were also in agreement with those of Abdullah. It is true that the missionaries considered the sultanates to be ideologically authoritarian: one missionary considered that the Malay ruler possessed such influence, that if he “ordered” his subjects to do so they would “be of any religion good or bad”.<sup>74</sup> Yet from the Christian perspective the way Islam was practised in the *kerajaan*, the actual doctrines endorsed by the sultans, seemed relatively tolerant or moderate. In the *kerajaan* polities, for instance, the missionaries described Malay villagers requesting and actually reading Christian tracts.<sup>75</sup> One “respectable Malay” is said to have listened to a missionary “with attention and apparent delight” on the subject of redemption.<sup>76</sup> The Sultan of Trengganu himself was reported to have discussed with a visiting missionary, the “judgement day and the world to come”.<sup>77</sup> Even crews on the many trading *prahus* which arrived in the port of Singapore from the sultanates seemed immeasurably more willing than Singapore Malays to speak to missionaries and to receive their proselytizing literature.<sup>78</sup> Whenever Malays came within range of the Muslim community in the different settlements of the colony, however, it seems that the grounds for missionary optimism soon disappeared. The missionaries reported that although the Malay crew members visiting Singapore tended to be initially receptive to Christian overtures, as soon as “these people came on shore they [were] always cautioned not to go near us”.<sup>79</sup> In Thomsen’s experience, the “Hajies of Singapore refuse[ed] themselves, and prevent[ed] others as far as they can from receiving or reading [Christian literature]”.<sup>80</sup> Thomsen’s successor in Singapore, Benjamin Keasberry, arrived at similar conclusions. He described the Malays from the east coast of Sumatra, for instance, as being “far less under the influence of Mohomedan bigotry than the Malays in Singapore itself.”<sup>81</sup>

Thomsen may have been partially correct in linking the “revival” of Islamic “bigotry” (might this best be seen as a code word for Fundamentalism?) to the Christian missionary campaign. It must be remembered that although the propagation of Christianity was permitted in the colony, it was by no means an officially endorsed religion. There was no prohibition, that is to say, against Muslim groups responding with

their own propaganda to the Christian challenge.<sup>82</sup> Thus Thomsen noted in one letter that "some of the ghatibs or scribes employ the same method for inculcating and promoting Mahomedanism which they have seen successfully employed by us for promoting Christianity."<sup>83</sup> Thomsen persistently referred to the "vigilance" of the "Mahomedan Priests and the Hajies".<sup>84</sup> Later, when Keasberry thought he had achieved the actual conversion of a Muslim to Christianity, he seems to have been astonished at the extent to which the event "excited strong prejudices among a great many, especially the Hajies".<sup>85</sup> We have seen that Munshi Abdullah himself appears to have attracted comment and even suspicion because of his close involvement with the Christian missionaries.

In Penang, the vigilant Thomas Beighton provided plenty of additional evidence of Muslim "Priests" consolidating their influence among the people in defence against his own determined preaching. "A few Mahomedans," he remarked in 1833, had "lately expressed their belief in the Gospel and wished to be further instructed." But this development "excited the wrath and enmity of their friends and relatives and I fear they are gone back with the exception of one." Beighton claimed he had "never before witnessed such enmity and Mahomedan prejudice".<sup>86</sup> (I shall return to the question of decoding such emotive phrases.) Further, when he issued Christian tracts which argued tenaciously against Islam, committees of Muslims were formed to answer him and their written responses described the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, as "ridiculous" and pointed out that Mohammed was "the last and seal of all the Prophets".<sup>87</sup>

To comprehend the Muslim perspective in these religious debates on the basis of Beighton's passionate reports is far from easy. Yet it is significant that at the time this missionary was in Penang a colonial government official, Thomas Newbold, commented on a growing Muslim resentment on the island toward the missionaries. Newbold was acquainted with missionary activity in India also and was clearly influenced by the fact that in certain regions of that country the "natives [had been] aroused to a state of bigotry and jealous alarm" by the "injudicious" propagation of Christianity.<sup>88</sup> He might have made numerous other comparisons. In many regions of the Muslim world, such Christian campaigns provoked an Islamic "resurgence" which often involved the adoption of Christian techniques like street preaching and tract distribution.<sup>89</sup> (Europeans persistently write of Islamic "resurgence" or "revival", as they do of Christian revivalism, as if outbursts of piety are inevitably a repetition of some early expression of spiritual purity.) Even the famous founder of the modern Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hasan al Banna, had early in life been a member of societies

formed to combat Christian missionary influence.<sup>90</sup> But if missionary provocation was a factor in promoting a particular seriousness of Islamic practice in the Straits, it must have been merely a part of the explanation. Other developments are likely to have presented Islamic leaders in the colony, the predecessors of *Al Imam's* editors, with challenges and opportunities which were not present in the *kerajaan*. The way social and political conditions in the Straits contrasted radically with those in the sultanates is likely to be especially significant.

The Straits Settlements, as has been stressed, were in one sense enclaves in the Malay world, territories where people could advocate certain values and doctrines which might be suppressed if proclaimed within one of the surrounding sultanates. The freedom offered in these enclaves, of course, was in certain directions severely limited. It would not have included, for instance, freedom to undermine the colonial regime; nor, clearly, did it preclude certain religious and other groups within society bringing a wide range of pressures to bear on individuals. One liberty which the colonial system did endorse, directly or indirectly, was the freedom to criticize the political and religious systems of the surrounding Malay states. It was this opportunity of which Abdullah took advantage when he wrote his subversive texts. One could argue that another product of the colony's freedom from royal authority was the strengthening of Islamic institutions and of specifically religious leadership. In this sense a new liberty encouraged new forms of authority and discipline, forms which were to be advocated by the type of *shari'ah*-minded *ulama* who were to become editors of *Al Imam*.

The strengthening of 'shari'ah-minded' Islam in the Straits Settlements, outside the sphere of *kerajaan* control, appears to be an instance of a phenomenon which occurred on a far wider scale. One example arises from the termination of royal authority in the Malay state of Patani (north of Kelantan). When this northern Malay state came under Thai rule early this century, its Malay rajas were replaced by Siamese officials. In the context of sudden freedom from royal control, there were again signs of the "intensifying of religious activity". Islam, according to an historical account of the period, became "an increasingly important ingredient of the Malay-Muslim identity"<sup>91</sup> and religious scholars began to be "regarded as leaders in the secular sphere when the traditional nobility was displaced".<sup>92</sup> In Patani, presumably, these scholars were in some cases the opponents of the "princes" who (as Raffles described it) defended the "old Malay usages". Under Thai rule, the Islamic religious and legal officials would not be required to show allegiance to a 'Shadow of God on Earth'; the people who now filled the senior religious posts in the community would not be (as they often were in *kerajaan* polities)<sup>93</sup> court nobles who held also such

pre-Islamic titles as 'Temenggong' or 'Bendahara'. Islamic law and practice need no longer be subsumed within the structure and ideology of the sultanate.

In the Straits Settlements this kind of liberation of Islamic leadership is documented to some extent in the writings of the Christian missionaries who, of all Europeans, had the greatest professional interest in analysing the progress of Islam. In considering the independent Malay states, the missionaries were so confident of the predominant role played by the sultans in the religious life of their subjects that they sometimes hoped to make use of royal patronage in their propagation of Christianity.<sup>94</sup> (This may well have been the strategy used by Muslim missionaries some four centuries earlier.<sup>95</sup>) Beighton tried to gain the confidence of the Sultan of Kedah. Benjamin Keasberry succeeded in establishing close relations with the court of Johore and it will be noted that at least a portion of his teaching was highly influential.

When the Christians turned their attention to the Straits Settlements, they perceived a radically different type of society. The Johore aristocracy, it was true, continued for some time to provide an element of leadership for some Singapore Malays. And when the Thais conquered Kedah in the 1820s, the exiled ruler of that state stayed in Penang with some of his entourage.<sup>96</sup> But the figures whom the missionaries and other British observers persistently portrayed as leaders of the Muslim Malay community in the Straits Settlements were the "Hajies" and "Priests". It was the "Hajies" who were described by the Singapore missionary, Thomsen, as the "leading men in our discussions with the people".<sup>97</sup> A "Priest" in Penang was said to be accompanied by "large numbers of followers";<sup>98</sup> another was termed "the chief" of a village. It is explained that this "chief" was "what the Mahomedans call their spiritual leader: he has charge of the young and all difficult matters are referred to him for decision".<sup>99</sup> In Penang, also, the commands of the *Kadi* (today usually defined as a Muslim judge) were described as being "generally obeyed with fear and trembling by the poor and ignorant".<sup>100</sup> In this settlement an actual hierarchy of control was reported to be in existence in the 1840s: "A Kali [*Kadi*] or head priest governed the whole country, appointed his own prelates ... and stationed them in every village, those only that had warrants from the Kali were recognized by the people as their spiritual chiefs."<sup>101</sup>

The exceptional esteem shown in Penang toward "Priests" and "Hajies" (dressed in "turban and flowing robes") is persistently commented upon by Europeans. In 1837 the Governor himself acknowledged the "unbounded respect" which the colony's Malays paid to "all Mohomedans who have performed the Pilgrimage to Mecca".<sup>102</sup> A description of the Malays of Penang by a more junior government

official also noted that it was "extraordinary how the Malay respects a Haji"<sup>105</sup> and one again has the impression that this admiration was particularly acute in the colony. When Europeans sought the assistance of men of influence in the Malay community of the colony, it is noticeable how they frequently turned to religious leaders. Seeking students for a government-supported school in Singapore, for instance, British officials employed the prestige both of the "sons of the late Sultan" (of Johore) and of the "Priest or Imoum [*sic*] of the important Malay settlement, Kampong Gelam".<sup>104</sup>

What these fragmentary accounts of the Straits Malay community suggest is that, just as in the case of Thai-ruled Patani, commoner religious officials achieved an authority and status which they were unlikely to exercise in the *kerajaan*. To a large extent this development would have occurred independently rather than through any explicit policy on the part of the colonial government. In so far as the British exercised an influence, it was generally of an indirect nature.

In Malacca, for instance, British actions against the customary leadership may have indirectly assisted the authority of religious officials. In the Naning district of Malacca, after a small but extraordinary war in the 1830s, the British abolished the traditional form of government. In a manner reminiscent of Thai-ruled Patani, a religious hierarchy, headed by two *kadis*, or judges, soon assumed a new prominence in the region. A British account of this period also remarks on the amount of respect given by the people "to the external forms of Islam".<sup>105</sup> Even in the 1890s, the great influence in that region of the *kadis*, in contrast to the secular *penghulus*, (headmen) was emphasized.<sup>106</sup> In the Naning case, the connection between British actions and a possible strengthening of Islamic authority is far from proven. It would not be surprising, however, if (just as in Patani) the curtailing of aristocratic or other 'traditional' powers by the British assisted the claims of an alternative leadership in Malay society. Writing of another region of the Straits Settlements, John Gullick has noted the "stress" which could occur when the Malay community "lacked indigenous political leadership".<sup>107</sup> In such a situation, an opportunity would present itself to the type of "hajies" and "priests" who had in the *kerajaan* struggled against the "Princes" and their "old usages". The *Al Imam* editors, of course, were among those who took greatest advantage of that opportunity.

Apart from the possibilities offered by freedom from royal control, and the stimulus which hostile Christian propagandists might provide, the "vigilant" and "bigoted" *ulama* of the Straits Settlements (especially Singapore) must have found spiritual nourishment in the busy pilgrim traffic. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of pilgrims travelling from Singapore, but in the 1820s one British observer noted some 800

pilgrims leaving from Singapore every year in "Arabian vessels".<sup>108</sup> During the nineteenth century, the number appears to have grown considerably. In the middle decades, for instance, some 2,000 departed annually from the Dutch East Indies and the majority of these are reported to have travelled via Singapore.<sup>109</sup> The fact that they departed from the British colony reflects the anxiety of the Dutch government about the political consequences of the *haj*. There is certainly evidence that some of the returning *hajis* promoted what the historian Harry Benda has referred to as "a more orthodox" religion in their home countries.<sup>110</sup> Considering that (as a percentage of total population) a larger proportion of Malays than of Indians, Persians or Turks went to Mecca,<sup>111</sup> and also that a large temporary population of pilgrims stayed in Singapore, the contribution to 'orthodoxy' in the colony must have been substantial. It is no wonder that the persistently forlorn missionary, Claudius Thomsen, complained of the powerful influence of the "hajies".

Thomsen had reason, too, to regret the Arab presence in the colony. The growing number of Arabs in the Straits Settlements would have stimulated the intensification of religious rigour and their impact, as we have seen, entailed the propagation of Wahhabi doctrines. Singapore by the 1880s was said to possess the "most flourishing" Arab community in the archipelago.<sup>112</sup> The city became an Islamic centre of high reputation where, according to Roff, vast numbers of students came to sit at "the feet of itinerant scholars from the Hadhramaut, and from Patani, Aceh, Palembang and Java – most of whom had themselves studied in Mecca".<sup>113</sup>

The traffic in immigrants and pilgrims, of course, was not the only type of trade taking place in the Straits Settlements. Singapore and Penang<sup>114</sup> in particular were major centres of commerce in Southeast Asia, and students of Islam have suggested that it is precisely in this type of economic and social context that the religion thrives. Above all, a connection is frequently made between commercial entrepreneurialism and the type of Islamic piety that demands a "more vigorous, more intense, and purer adherence to what it regards as 'the true spirit of the Koran and the Hadith'".<sup>115</sup> We have noted earlier the possibility that a commercial spirit, and also an urban environment where "each individual" might be "conscious of himself", tends to generate sympathy for the type of views expressed by Munshi Abdullah and his liberal successors. But Islam also offered an ideology that expressed a tolerance toward individualism which was absent in the *kerajaan*.

The Fundamentalist Muslim "priests" or *ulama* certainly had much to offer the new "hawkers", traders and "wealthy Hajies" who were described as being prominent members of the colony's Malay

community.<sup>116</sup> Removed from the obligations and the security of rural, traditional custom, and from the authority of royal laws and leadership, Muslim immigrants in the Straits Settlements were susceptible to new communal forms and authority offered not only by the liberals but also by Islam. Indeed, as will be explained in the next chapter, a form of community which was grounded in their own religion of Islam must have had an immediate competitive advantage. Like the liberal bourgeois philosophers, the Islamic ideologues too had something special to offer the traders. To quote A.H. Johns, the Straits Settlements entrepôts were part of a "new series of economic impulses ... which resulted in a wider scope for a more individualistic work ethic." Islam, as we shall note, offered a viable alternative system within which the individual could thrive. It also provided a legal system with "clear guidelines, broad range of applicability, concern with contracts, and easily enforced sanctions".<sup>117</sup>

The attractiveness of the Straits Settlements from the point of view of any propagandist of social reform is evident. However, the Christian missionaries who had seen opportunities for themselves soon acknowledged the strategic superiority of their rivals, the "vigilant" "hajies" and "Priests". The competition between Christian and Muslim missionaries, whatever its significance in the development of Islamic behaviour, furnishes valuable documentation of one further type. The missionary letters provide a selection of vignettes which throw light on certain individual, non-aristocratic Islamic leaders who were the predecessors of the *Al Imam* editors. Moreover, to repeat the phraseology used in an earlier chapter, the derogatory language which the missionaries often employed to describe Muslim activists sometimes reveals elements of the Islamic consciousness they intended to deride.<sup>118</sup>

Such terms as 'prejudice' and 'bigotry', are suggestive of the *shari'ah*-minded spirit which characterized demands for reform in many parts of the nineteenth-century Muslim world. The presence of this Fundamentalist spirit is evident, for instance, when Thomas Beighton (in 1841) reported that a "Perseyite Mahomedan Priest" in Penang town was making a "great stir", enjoining "by every means in his power a strict attention to the Mohomedan customs." Beighton said that he carried a rattan cane "with which he at times beats the floor and makes the poor creatures quake with fear".<sup>119</sup> An account a decade or so later refers to the establishment in Penang of an Islamic "league", the followers of which "bind themselves by an oath to obey implicitly the teaching of the Koran, and on no account to neglect the ancient usages of the Mahomedan." The account records that "nothing beyond the pages of the Koran" was "received" by members of this "league".<sup>120</sup> Reports such as these immediately provoke comparison with the "hajies



and other religious persons” whom Raffles considered to be in “constant struggle” against the Malay royal courts. Phrases such as “strict attention to the Mohomedan customs” and the “ancient usages of the Mohomedan” are reminiscent of Raffles’ reference to the “Laws of the Arabs” which he believed those Islamic spokesmen were trying to impose all over the archipelago. They remind one too of the East Sumatran ruler’s fear of the Wahhabi-influenced *Paderis* who forced people to “be obedient to all their peculiar laws”.

One such Islamic ideologue is depicted in more favourable light in a Malay text written in Riau in the late nineteenth century. This text (the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*) describes an *ulama* who possesses an explicit connection with the reformist doctrines of Wahhabism. Sheikh Ismail, according to the *Tuhfat*, visited both Singapore and Riau in the 1850s. In these places he is said to have answered “questions about law, concerning what is valid and what was not, what was permitted and what was forbidden.” (Would judgements along such lines be described as ‘prejudice’ and ‘bigotry’ in a missionary document?) We are told he used books of the Muhammadiyah brotherhood and we know that the Muhammadiyahs had themselves responded to the Wahhabi challenge by condemning doctrinal “accretions”.<sup>121</sup> Sheikh Ismail, therefore, seems to be an example of the type of *shari’ah*-minded ideologue who was engaged in religious struggle in the Malay archipelago of the nineteenth century.

In a sense the Christian records portray such men more vividly and effectively than do the Malay texts. The missionaries present their rivals in a combative pose and that is how they are likely to have been perceived also by many Malays. From the court perspective, the Christian references to “vigilance” and “rigour” might convey effectively the mood and ambition of certain of the *ulama* of the Straits Settlements and the sultanates. When Europeans described such “priests” and “hajies” as passionately invoking Islamic law (even beating the floor with a cane), and as “struggling” against the defenders of Malay tradition, one senses the presence of an ideological movement. It is in the context of this movement, which was able to thrive in the sanctuaries of the Straits Settlements, that the writings of *Al Imam* might best be examined.

When we consider *Al Imam*’s condemnation of the *kerajaan*, particularly its declared desire to enforce Islamic law and its intolerance of the ceremonial preoccupations of the Sultanate élite, we do so indeed within a long tradition of *shari’ah*-mindedness. From the first arrival of Islam in the Malay world, it would seem the potential existed for deep religious division over the concept of kingship. That division, as has been seen, became increasingly apparent during the nineteenth century. To write of Islam as a social “amalgam” in that period conceals

a dynamic tension which was to have a profound affect on Malay society. There are indications that the ideological distance which lay between the *shari'ah*-minded and the *kerajaan* was as great as that which separated Munshi Abdullah from the royal courts. It was, to use Partha Chatterjee's terms, a thematic distance.

The Islamic scholars described by early nineteenth-century Europeans, just like those who later wrote for *Al Imam*, sought to establish a community based primarily on religious affiliation not royal allegiance. They intended that that community live not by the fiat of a *raja* or according to some local tradition, but by the Divine Law of God. The translation and commentary carried out over the centuries by the *ulama*, in retrospect at least, may be seen as a long-term process of laying foundations. These scholars (sometimes with the actual support of devout sultans) were establishing an alternative template for Malay social and religious life. Only occasionally did the contradictions existing between this template and the *kerajaan* surface in the historical record in the form of social division. In the journal *Al Imam*, produced in the relative safety of the British colony, *ulama* hostility toward the *kerajaan* is unambiguous. The *ulama* condemned not just the "despotism", the non-Islamic ceremony and the luxury of the royal courts, but also the conceptual foundations of the royal ideology. The *shari'ah*-minded rejected a world in which the *raja*, even in formal terms, might be perceived as the arbiter of what is true or what is honourable. For *Al Imam*, as the article on 'Honour and Dignity' suggests, reality of any type was not to be understood primarily in the idiom of rajaship. Like the *shari'ah*-minded of earlier periods, the authors of this and many other *Al Imam* articles claimed to base their authority on the Word and the Law of God.

The 'Honour and Dignity' essay, however, raises a further issue. It condemns not just the *kerajaan* but also certain features of the modern society of the colony. What is more, even in its own analysis of "honour", the essay employs concepts such as that of "rationality" in a manner which may suggest an awareness of the categories of contemporary European thought. *Al Imam*, although in part a product of the *shari'ah*-minded tradition, is nevertheless in important ways a twentieth-century journal. Its editors possessed objectives never contemplated by their *ulama* predecessors. They had new enemies and, despite the persistent citing of Islamic authority, new ideas. They also wrote in a medium which was not easily accessible to the "priests" and "hajies" who in Raffles' time had advocated the "Laws of the Arabs". In the next chapter we examine *Al Imam* not in dialogue with the *kerajaan* but as a contender for the allegiance of the new Malay middle class. What programs and arguments did *Al Imam* develop in particular in response

to such very political ideologues as the editors of the *Utusan Melayu*? The answer will alert us once again, but in a new sense, to the significance of *shari'ah*-mindedness.

### Notes

- 1 M. Yegar, *Islam and Islamic Institutions in British Malaya* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 269.
- 2 J.M. Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of Western Malaya* (London: Athlone, 1965), 139.
- 3 B.W. Andaya and L.Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 55; see also W.R. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 67.
- 4 Yegar, *Islam*, 56; see also R.J. Wilkinson, 'Papers on Malay Customs and Beliefs', *JMBRAS*, xxx, 4, 6.
- 5 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, especially 56-67; Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al Imam: Its Role in Malay Society 1906-1908*, Master's thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1981; Abdullah bin Jahi Jaafar, 'Al-Imam', in Khoo Kay Kim and Jazamuddin Baharuddin (eds), *Lembaran Akhbar Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980), 7-32; B.W. Andaya, 'From Rum to Tokyo: the Search for Anticolonial Allies by the Rulers of Riau, 1899-1914', *Indonesia*, 24 (1977), 123-56; Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1942* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973). I am especially grateful to Ustaz Abu Bakar Hamzah for his suggestions regarding the translating and interpreting of passages in *Al Imam*.
- 6 For a discussion of "fundamentalist style" in Islam, see J.O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Boulder: Westview, 1982), 30.
- 7 Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam*, 217-18; Noer, *Modernist Muslim Movement*, 33.
- 8 *Al Imam*, 12 July 1907.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 27 September 1908.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 4 February 1908.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 12 July 1907.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 5 March 1908.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 12 July 1907. The article's author seems to be Syed Sheikh Ahmad Al-Hadi.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 5 January 1908.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 27 September 1908.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 27 September 1908.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 12 July 1907. On these celebrations see H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers (eds), *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden and London: Brill and Luzac, 1961), 367.
- 22 *Al Imam*, 12 July 1907.
- 23 A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, Association of Asian Studies Monograph, 1982), 63.
- 24 *Al Imam*, 4 February 1908.
- 25 R.J. Wilkinson, *Kamus-Jawi-Melayu-Inggeris* (Melaka: Baharudinjoha, 1985 (orig. pub. 1903)).
- 26 R.J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary* (Romanized) (1932) (London: Oxford, 1959); H.C. Klinkert, *Nieuw Maleisch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek* (Leiden: Brill, 1930).
- 27 Wilkinson, *Kamus-Jawi-Melayu-Inggeris* (1903); Wilkinson, *Malay-English* (1932); Klinkert, *Woordenboek*.
- 28 Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971), 314.

- 29 Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge: London, 1976), vol 1, chapter 2.
- 30 For further discussion of this issue, see A.C. Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1 (1981), 46–70. Another version of the essay (examining the issue in a Southeast Asian rather than more narrowly Malay focus) is "Islam and the Muslim State", in M.B. Hooker (ed.), *Islam in South-East Asia*, (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 23–49.
- 31 Quoted in Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 53.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 I discuss these in 'Islam and the Muslim State'.
- 36 Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1974), vol. 1, 238.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 471. On Ibn-Taymiyyah's late influence, see *ibid.*, vol. 3, 160; E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam and the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 13.
- 39 Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 57.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.* Anthony Reid, however, has drawn my attention to the critical comments made by the fifteenth-century writer Ahmad ibn Majid about the customs of Muslims in Malacca; see G.R. Tibbetts, *A Study of the Arab Texts Containing Material on South-East Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 206. On the question of reliability of Ibn Majid as a fifteenth-century witness, see Tibbetts, *Arab Texts*, 12, 14.
- 42 Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 57. Ibn Battuta certainly noted the unorthodox behaviour of Muslims in the Maldives; H.A.R. Gibb (ed.), *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325–1354* (London: Routledge, 1929), 250.
- 43 Quoted in Milner, 'Islam and the Muslim State', 29.
- 44 Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 49.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 46 See the discussion in V. Matheson and A. C. Milner, *Perceptions of the Hajj: Five Malay Texts* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), chapters 2 and 3.
- 47 Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 59, 69.
- 48 Winstedt, *Classical Malay Literature*, 161.
- 49 G.W.J. Drewes, 'Indonesia: Mysticism and Activism', in G.E. Von Grunebaum (ed.), *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955), 278, 308.
- 50 A.H. Johns, 'Islam in Southeast Asia: Reflections and New Directions', *Indonesia*, 19 (1975), 42; see also A.H. Johns, 'Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World: In Search of a Profile', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 259–60.
- 51 Winstedt, *Classical Malay Literature*, 146–7.
- 52 Syed Othman bin Yahya, *Manhaj al-Istiqamah Fi-al-din Bisalamah* (Singapore, 1880), 50. I should like to thank Ustaz Abu Bakar Hamzah for drawing my attention to this statement. See also C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 272.
- 53 Johns, 'Islam in Southeast Asia', 131. For further references to the works of the *ulama*, see Winstedt, *Classical Malay Literature*, chapter IX; Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 286–7; Mohd. Nor bin Ngah, 'Some Muslim Writing of the Traditional Malay Muslim Scholars found in Malaysia', in Khoo Kay Kim (ed.) *Tamadun Islam de Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980),
- 54 I should like to thank A.H. Johns for discussing with me the role of 'emphasis' in these Islamic writings.
- 55 See Winstedt, *Classical Malay Literature*, Chapter IX for an overview of this compilation; see also M. Van Bruinessen, 'Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script used in the Pesantren Milieu', *BKI*, 146 (1990), 226–69. The religious literature was often

- written in a different style from court literature; see A. Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 27, 159, 184, 195–6, 199, 306.
- 56 See chapter 8 below.
- 57 Quoted in Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 59.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 See, for instance, J. Tomlin, *Missionary Journals and Letters written during eleven years residence and travels, etc.* (London : James Nisbet, 1844), 70; T. Braddell, 'Notes on a Trip to the Interior from Malacca', *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, 7 (1853), 89.
- 61 Rosenthal, *Islam*, 13.
- 62 Johns, 'Enriching the language of the Tribes', 41.
- 63 Christine Dobbin, 'Islamic Revivalism in Minangkabau at the turn of the Nineteenth Century', *Modern Asian Studies*, 8 (1974), 337.
- 64 W.R. Roff, 'South-East Asian Islam in the Nineteenth Century', *The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 166.
- 65 Quoted in Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 59.
- 66 H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1947), 27.
- 67 W.R. Roff, 'The Malayo-Muslim World of Singapore in the Late Nineteenth Century', *JAS*, 24 (1964), 75–89.
- 68 C.M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements 1826–67* (London: Athlone, 1972), 103.
- 69 Kassim Ahmad, *Pelayaran*, 125.
- 70 Thomsen to Directors, 5 December 1821, Malacca 2/1/C.
- 71 Quoted in A.C. Milner, 'Notes on C.H. Thomsen: Missionary to the Malays', *Indonesia Circle*, 25 (1981), 47.
- 72 Thomsen to Directors, December 1827 (no day is given), Singapore 1/4/B.
- 73 See the entry on 'Taklid' in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 563–4.
- 74 Beighton to Directors, 4 September 1835, Penang 4/2/B; see also L.E. Browne, *Christianity and the Malays* (London Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1936), 69–71.
- 75 Thomsen to Directors, December 1827, Singapore 1/4/B; Thomsen to Directors, 24 November 1829, Singapore 1/5/A; Beighton to Directors, 3 July 1829, Penang 3/1/B; Beighton to Directors 24 January 1833, Singapore 1/6/B.
- 76 Beighton to Directors, 20 July 1821, Penang 1/3/B.
- 77 Medhurst, 'East Coast of the Malayan Peninsula', 155; also 192. In Penang, Beighton established close relations with the Sultan of Kedah, then in exile, and hoped through him to introduce Christianity into Kedah; see Milner, 'Sultan and the Missionary', *passim*.
- 78 Thomsen to Directors, December 1827, Singapore 1/4/B; Thomsen to Directors, 14 August 1828, Singapore 1/4/C.
- 79 Thomsen to Directors, 24 November 1829, Singapore 1/5/A; see also his letter of 20 January 1826, Singapore 1/4/A.
- 80 Thomsen to Directors, 24 November 1829, Singapore 1/5/A; see also his letter of 29 October 1829, Singapore 1/5/A.
- 81 Keasberry to Directors, 2 April 1843, Singapore 2/3/A; see also the comments of E.B. Squire (27 May 1837) to the Directors of the Church Missionary Society, quoted in J.M. Haines, *History of Protestant Missions in Malaya during the Nineteenth Century*, PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1962, 191–2.
- 82 On British official aloofness regarding religious matters, see Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 102.
- 83 Thomsen to Directors, 5 December 1821, Malacca 2/1/C.
- 84 Thomsen to Directors, 20 January 1826, Singapore 1/4/A.
- 85 Keasberry to Directors, 15 September 1839, Singapore 2/1/C. See also Keasberry to Directors, 2 April 1843, Singapore 2/3/A.
- 86 Beighton to Directors, 21 September 1833, Penang 3/5/B.
- 87 Beighton to Directors, 20 August 1840, Penang 4/4/D. The British Library holds certain of Beighton's anti-Islamic tracts; Annabel Teh Gallop, 'Early Malay Printing: an Introduction to the British Library Collections', *JMBRAS*, lxiii, 1 (1990), 96.

- 88 T.J. Newbold, *British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (1839) (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971), vol. 1, 93.
- 89 T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (London: Luzac, 1935), 285.
- 90 G.H. Jansen, *Militant Islam* (London: Pan, 1979), 148.
- 91 Omar Farouk, 'The Historical and Transnational Dimensions of Malay-Muslim Separatism in Southern Thailand', in Lim Joo-Jack and S. Vani (eds), *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1984), 236.
- 92 *Ibid.*; see also V. Matheson and M.B. Hooker, 'Jawi Literature in Patani', *JMBRAS*, 61, 1 (1988), 7; Omar Farouk, 'The Muslims in Thailand', in Lupti Ibrahim (ed.) *Islamika*, (Kuala Lumpur: Sarjana, 1981), 110.
- 93 Milner, 'Islam and Malay Kingship', 47; Gullick, *Malay Society*, 246ff, 283, 294. In the case of Java, Sartono Kartodirdjo notes a comparable type of colonial impact. Under the impact of Westernization and secularization the religious leaders "lost much of their political influence and credibility at the elite level" but largely displaced the Javanese élite "in exercising political authority over the peasantry"; 'Agrarian Radicalism in Java: Its Setting and Development', in C. Holt (ed.), *Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1972), 89.
- 94 See note 74 above.
- 95 See Milner, 'Islam and the Muslim State', *passim*.
- 96 Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 37, 102; J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London: Smith, Elder Co., 1865), 136; Milner, 'Sultan and the Missionary', *passim*.
- 97 Thomsen to Directors, 24 November 1829, Singapore 1/4/C.
- 98 Beighton to Directors, 5 November 1841, Penang 4/5/A.
- 99 Beighton to Directors, 24 March 1841, Penang 4/5/A.
- 100 J.D. Vaughan, 'Notes on the Malays at Penang and Province Wellesley', *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, New Series 2 (1858), 152.
- 101 *Ibid.*
- 102 Governor to Secretary to Government, India, 13 November 1837, Boards Collections (India Office Records), 74268, p. 51.
- 103 Vaughan, 'Notes on the Malays', 151.
- 104 Singapore Institution Free School Report 1837-1838 (Singapore: 1838), 4.
- 105 Newbold, *British Settlements*, vol. 1, 240; see also Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 263-7.
- 106 Gullick, *Malay Society*, 115; also 287.
- 107 *Ibid.*, 291.
- 108 D. Tyerman and G. Bennet, *Journal of voyages and travels by Rev. D.T. and G.B. Esq., etc.* (London: David Bogue, 1831), vol. 2, 269.
- 109 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 38.
- 110 H.J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun* (The Hague: Van Hoeve, 1958), 20; Sartono Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants Revolt of Banten in 1888* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 151-2; Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka*, 219-20, 243.
- 111 Wilkinson, 'Malay Customs and Beliefs', 6. He was writing in 1906.
- 112 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 40.
- 113 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 114 For a general introduction to the trade of the Settlements, see Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, chapter IV.
- 115 Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1970), 150; see also Johns, 'Islam in Southeast Asia', 37.
- 116 Newbold, *British Settlements*, vol. 1, 138; Cameron, *Tropical Possessions*, 135.
- 117 Johns, 'Islam in Southeast Asia', 126-7.
- 118 See chapter I, note 3.
- 119 Beighton to Directors, 24 March 1841, Penang 4/5/A.
- 120 Vaughan, 'Malays at Penang', 153; also 164; Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 103.
- 121 Matheson and Andaya, *Precious Gift*, 285.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Answering Liberalism: Islamic First Moves*

In developing an Islamic answer to liberalism the *shari'ah*-minded writers of *Al Imam* drew upon the new philosophy itself. They drew, in particular, from the language or, more precisely, the discourse encountered in such writings as the *Utusan*. Even when *Al Imam* delivers what appears to be an effective rebuttal of liberal claims – and it is certainly capable of rising to the ideological occasion – it enters debate, perhaps unwittingly, in such a way as to promote new, and not markedly Islamic, ways of thinking about society. It partakes, in fact, in the constituting of what was to become the discourse of politics. To understand the dynamics which led to these ideological shifts on the part of *Al Imam*, it is necessary, first, to take note of the ideological distance between the Islamic journalists and such writers as Eunos. This distance is seldom evident in historical studies of the period. The fact that such studies usually give priority to the development of nationalism tends to influence the way they perceive *Al Imam*.

One article, for instance, calls the journal “a first step in the Malay nationalist movement in Malaya”.<sup>1</sup> William Roff, although acknowledging *Al Imam*'s religious orientation, assesses the journal primarily in the context of his investigation into the origins of Malay nationalism. He deliberately teases out its specifically social and political concerns. Although noting that the journal does not express “an explicit form of political nationalism”<sup>2</sup> he chooses to emphasize *Al Imam*'s concern with the “state of Malay society”.<sup>3</sup> The *Al Imam* editors, he explains, were members of an Islamic élite which in the course of the colonial period offered “an implicit challenge to the traditional *status quo*, and hence to the traditional élite, in the interests of a specifically Malay nationalism”.<sup>4</sup> As we have noted at an earlier point, Roff wrote in the 1960s when most so-called ‘third world’ studies were preoccupied with nation-building and nationalism. Today, ‘nationalism’ is a concept undergoing

rigorous deconstruction and, in the case of the Malays of Malaysia, the historian is more likely to focus on the processes of division than on those promoting unity. In particular, we are influenced by the growing religious tensions within Malay society. We want to know how and when these divisions first developed. What were their origins? At a time when increasing numbers of Malays seem to be rejecting both Malay 'custom' and Western liberal-nationalist doctrines in favour of what they consider to be a more faithful adherence to Islam, and when a sizeable proportion of Malay voters continue to choose a party (Parti Islam), led by *shari'ah*-minded' *ulama*, it is the 'anti-nationalism' and 'anti-liberalism' of *Al Imam* which we are likely to find most intriguing.

In this respect, the relationship between *Al Imam* and the *Utusan Melayu* is instructive. First of all, the papers defined themselves differently. Just as the *Utusan* declares in bold terms that it was "not a religious newspaper" so, in an article which actually discusses the inauguration of the *Utusan* in 1907, *Al Imam* stresses its own uniqueness. The Islamic journal, its editors proclaim emphatically, could be compared with no other paper in the Straits Settlements.<sup>5</sup> The material published in the two papers, as one would expect from such pronouncements, often differs in subject and in viewpoint. It is these contrasts which are focused upon in this chapter. There were, of course, areas of overlap as well. *Al Imam* too was concerned about the threat of alien races and its articles discuss Malay "backwardness", at least as an element in a larger "backwardness" of Muslim people.<sup>6</sup> Both papers admired *tamadun*, or 'civilization', and acknowledged it as a criterion for estimating a people's position in the world.<sup>7</sup> *Al Imam* certainly agreed that Japan had a claim to be 'civilized', especially considering its spectacular military victory of 1905 over a European country, Russia. *Al Imam* even published a book on Japan, a translation from an Arabic original, which told of the country's adoption of European institutions, including a *Majlis al Nawab* or parliament. (The word 'parliament' is placed in parentheses.)<sup>8</sup> In this book, as we saw in chapter 4, the Japanese love for their nation (*watan*) is emphasized and so is the spirit of progress and the energy displayed by Japan's leaders.<sup>9</sup> A further area in which *Al Imam* and the *Utusan* possessed an element of common purpose was in their criticism of the ideology of the *kerajaan*. They both argued doctrines which contradicted or transcended the conceptions of 'man' and 'community' expounded in *kerajaan* philosophy.

Where the *Utusan* and *Al Imam* differed was in the character of the ideologies they proposed as substitutes for the *kerajaan* system. Unlike Eunos' paper, *Al Imam*'s first concerns were not with the Malay *bangsa* ('race') or with the inculcation of modern liberal values. As noted in the last chapter, *Al Imam* did in a sense share the liberal concern for the



human person. It identified the individual human essence (*zat*) behind formal social status in a manner which reminds one a little of the growing tree image which Munshi Abdullah employed to counter *kerajaan* perceptions of the person. But in *Al Imam's* essays, the human person is expected to be fulfilled in a very different manner and context from that expounded by either Abdullah or the *Utusan*.

A good deal can be learned about *Al Imam's* perspective by examining the first issue of the journal.<sup>10</sup> As with much Malay writing (and here *Al Imam* itself is sometimes a significant exception), the aims of the editors are set forth in a matter-of-fact manner which disguises their contentious quality. The opening sentence is taken from the Koran: "Invite everyone to the way of our Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching" (XVI: 125). Here in this simple injunction lay the principal purpose of the journal. A group of Islamic leaders in Singapore had seen the potential of a new medium of communication, the newspaper, for the education and leadership of the Islamic community. Following this Koranic quotation, the article begins to elaborate on the justification and purposes of the journal:

there is one matter which will not escape the notice of all those who observe the movement of this universe by examining the history (*tarikh*) of people in the past, and who use these observations as their guide (*murshid*), as a flare which throws light on all events. It is known by these people that the community (*umat*) is divided into two parts. First, there are those who are active, performing good works for the advantage of their group in the future. People of this part of the community do not limit their perspectives to their own affairs. People of the second part of the community possess concerns which are limited to themselves and their own homes. There is no doubt that it is the first part of the *umat* which follows the injunction of God and thus obtains whatever is promised by Him.

There is also no doubt that the editors of *Al Imam* considered themselves to be members of this first group. The article continues:

History has already shown us that every community (*umat*) which has been unable to rise from degradation, unable to escape a position of humiliation, unable to achieve its desired level of honour and its portion of greatness, has failed in these respects because it has failed to obtain education (*pelajaran*).

These first few sentences of *Al Imam* are more than a plea for education, a plea with which we are now familiar. They are also an attempt to formulate several concepts which were to underlie the *Al Imam* message. The novelty of these concepts, and perhaps their problematic character also, is suggested by the fact that it is considered necessary to

explain in parentheses three of the key words – all of Arabic origin – used in this opening passage. These words are *umat*, *tarikh* and *murshid*.

### *Umat*

In its use of *umat* the journal defines its audience, or at least the community which is to be the object of its reforming zeal. It is not the same community with which the *Utusan Melayu* had been concerned. *Umat* probably implied both the ‘community of Islam’ and (following its more general meaning in the Koran) all those bodies of people who are the ‘objects of the divine plan of salvation’.<sup>11</sup> *Al Imam* itself defines *umat* simply as ‘community’ or ‘collections of groups of people’ (*perhimpunan kaum*) but it is highly likely, considering the way *umat* is used in the journal, that the word generally implies the narrower notion of the “actual and potential community of Islam”.

In discussing *umat* it is important to stress first what the word does not imply. By focusing on *umat*, *Al Imam* was using a word which possessed referents which were not primarily political or geographical, but rather religious. By foregrounding *umat*, the journal was playing down other types of unity or social grouping. It was not, for instance, concerned primarily with either the *kerajaan* or the Malay race (*bangsa*). In this *Al Imam* differs markedly, of course, from both *hikayat* literature and the writings of Abdullah and his successors. *Al Imam* generally expresses anxiety about the plight of the entire Islamic community existing throughout the world; only sometimes does it address specifically the plight of that small portion of the community which was located in the Malay region. What strikes the reader immediately about the journal is the relative absence of a consistent, specific, geographic focus. Problems tend to be discussed in its articles in a generalized manner and solutions appear to be intended to relate to Muslims located not merely in Singapore and the Malay lands but also throughout the Islamic world. Thus, when *Al Imam* directs criticism against the *kerajaan*, it does so in terms that have wide applicability.

The consideration of Malay problems in such generalized Islamic terms, and also the privileging of *umat*, must have been to some extent encouraged by the experience and ethnic origins of the journal’s editors and, presumably, a proportion of its readers. In their upbringing and careers, the editors were products not so much of Malay society as of an international (and that word itself begs questions about how Muslims view human organization) Muslim unity. Shaykh Mohd. Tahir Jalaluddin, born in West Sumatra, had lived twelve years in Mecca and studied in Cairo. Sayyid Shaykh b. Ahmad Al-Hadi had a Malay-Arab father, lived as a boy in Trengganu and Riau and travelled to Mecca and

Egypt on several occasions. Haji Abbas b. Mohd. Tahir, born in Singapore, spent most of his early years studying in Mecca<sup>12</sup>. This editorial group wrote frankly about its ethnic identity: "we are not of the same direct descent as the locals here," declares one article, "but we love their country and consider it our homeland"<sup>13</sup>. As we shall see, the time was not far distant when the rise of a *bangsa*-consciousness, already strongly advocated in the *Utusan Melayu*, would lead to a rejection of the *Al Imam* type of ideology and leadership precisely because it was not local in descent and not more explicitly local in cultural orientation.

In the quotation above concerning the origins of the editors, the reference to "homeland" suggests an important aspect of the foregrounding of *umat*. The Islamic writers do not attempt to deny other types of communal identification. The significance of *umat* is argued by means of emphasis rather than by an explicit rejection of alternative forms of unity such as ethnicity or nationalistic sentiment. Certain articles even identify benefits that may flow to nations and races if the type of reforms urged by *Al Imam* are implemented. Among the few articles with a local focus, one discusses the depressed state of the Malay race in Singapore,<sup>14</sup> and another deals with the way Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore created a kingdom (*kerajaan*) on behalf of his 'race' and the descendants of his own family.<sup>15</sup> An article from Langkat in Sumatra refers to the sons of the soil (*anak bumiputra*) in that country.<sup>16</sup> This same essay also uses the term *watan*, or 'homeland', which had only recently been introduced to Malaya from the Middle East where it had become fashionable because of European influence. The *Al Imam* editors underlined the novelty of *watan* when they considered it necessary to provide a definition for their readers. They defined *watan* as *tanah ayer* which we have seen was one of the other relatively new expressions employed in the *Utusan*. In future decades, some Fundamentalist writers in Malaysia and elsewhere were to consider the commitment to *watan*, 'homeland', as antagonistic to the principles of Islam. There is no such extreme statement enunciated in *Al Imam*.<sup>17</sup>

The way in which this Islamic journal hints at a tension between *umat*, on the one hand, and nationalistic and ethnic loyalties, on the other, is primarily in the specific stress which it persistently places upon *umat*. Even in the first issue of the journal *umat* is given centrality in numerous ways. In what is described as an "open letter" to "all *ulama*", the purpose of *Al Imam* is declared to be to "call upon the Muslim *umat* to perform good works and habits which are directed by God". Another article is entitled: "The Proper task: what is most needed by our *umat*". When *Al Imam*, in its first issue, urges the scholars (*ulama*) to take a more active role in society, it is the *umat* to which the journal addresses its message: "If only our learned men will rise to guide our people ...

surely our *umat* will return to its past greatness and glory". In a later issue, a contributor praises *Al Imam*'s own *ulama* editors, again in the context of the *umat*. The community, he says, has been blessed by the work and success of *Al Imam*.<sup>18</sup> A final illustration from the journal's first issue is rather more revealing of the unease existing between the concepts of *umat* and *bangsa*. Here *Al Imam* specifically addresses members of races (*bangsa*), agrees that they "have obligations . . . to their race" and then reminds them, quoting the Koran, that they are above all members of the *umat*: "We are the *umat* Islam which is spoken of in the Koran as follows: 'Let there arise out of you a community (*umat*), Inviting to all that is good.' (III: 104)." In these sentences *Al Imam* comes close to a forthright insistence on the secondary significance of 'race' in contrast to *umat*. The manner in which the tension between the two concepts is resolved, not surprisingly, is reminiscent of the responses of the Egyptian Reformers. In the Middle East, over a number of decades, advocates of political change had faced the problem of "how to reconcile the claims of a universal brotherhood (*umma*) with the demands of a territorial fatherland (*watan*)".<sup>19</sup> Although the notion of *watan* was known to have been borrowed from European writers, especially La Bruyère,<sup>20</sup> the idea of patriotism began in the late nineteenth century to achieve a strong influence in the heartlands of Islamic civilization. The Reformers of the Egyptian *Al Manar* give the impression of having themselves been stirred by the rising ideology of nationalism, particularly in the early 1880s when Egypt was in crisis. These reformers, however do not seem to have gone further than to acknowledge the "need for the Muslim to be a good citizen of his nation as long as he remembers that he simultaneously belongs to a larger community".<sup>21</sup> The Singapore-based editors of *Al Imam* also acknowledged the potency of 'race' and 'nationhood' and yet, if the journal is compared, for instance, with the *Utusan Melayu*, the secondary role played by the concepts in *Al Imam* is immediately evident. The *Utusan* praises "love" of *bangsa*. It urges its readers to lift the *nama* of their *bangsa* and to make their *bangsa* "great" and "powerful". By contrast, *Al Imam* directly addresses the *umat*, speaking of its future and of the need for its reform. Furthermore, although *Al Imam*'s distribution was restricted (as a consequence of the use of the Malay language) to the Malay archipelago,<sup>22</sup> it has been observed that many of its articles give the impression that the audience might be located anywhere in the Islamic world.

For the present purpose, the identification of key concepts operating in *Al Imam*, it is sufficient to juxtapose *umat* with *bangsa* and other terms. At a later point we will see what each concept brought or did not bring to the movement away from *kerajaan*.

### *Tarikh*

The second term which *Al Imam* defines in the opening passages of its first issue is *tarikh* or 'history'. It is described by the journal as the 'movement' or 'course' (*perjalanan*) of people in the past and the word 'movement' certainly gives a clear impression of the dynamic view of the past which we encounter in *Al Imam*. The reader is asked in these opening pages to situate himself or herself within the movement of history. The reader is invited to observe certain features of historical development, in particular the fate which tends to befall peoples who do not acquire education. We saw that in Abdullah's writing and in the *Hikayat Dunia* there exists a distinct sense of historical movement. Certain races are described as being "on the move". Later on, the *Utusan Melayu* describes in unambiguous terms the decline of the East, the rise of Europe, and, finally, the new spirit taking hold in Asian countries during the opening years of the twentieth century. The march toward modernity (*moden*) or civilization (*tamaddun*) is alluded to often in the *Utusan*, as is the gathering pace of Chinese immigration which it considers so threatening to the Malays. The dynamic historical perspective into which *Al Imam* draws its readers conveys above all the idea of dramatic and beneficial transition. Like the *Utusan*, the Islamic journal too speaks of *moden* and *tamaddun*, of Japanese success and of parliaments. It draws attention to the invention of electricity and the telegraph and reminds its readers that in 1906 events taking place 7,000 or 8,000 miles away might be known within a day.<sup>23</sup> Such a process of invention and change is in *Al Imam* connoted by the term *tarikh*.

The Arabic term *tarikh* had not always conveyed the modern meaning of 'history'. In Arabic it originally meant 'dating' and only later acquired the further meanings of 'chronicle, historical work, history'.<sup>24</sup> It is in the nineteenth century that 'the evolutionary concept of historical development'<sup>25</sup> was beginning to influence such Middle Eastern thinkers as Mohd. Abduh. In earlier years, events of the past were used as a means of moral instruction or an instrument of dogma. There was a significant European contribution to this change. For example, we know that in the late nineteenth century Mohd. Abduh not only read but actually lectured on François Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe* which had been translated into Arabic in 1877. From Guizot, he appears to have gained a strong sense of historical movement, of people "pressing forward...to change...their condition".<sup>26</sup> As Albert Hourani explains in his elegant analysis, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Mohd. Abduh acquired a sense of progress as "individual development", as the improvement of "man's faculties, sentiments and ideas".<sup>27</sup>

The particular discussion of *tarikh* in *Al Imam*, therefore, alerts us to the presence of elements of 'modernity' in the thinking of the editors. Despite the fact that they drew heavily upon the ideological or theological resources of Islamic tradition, the *Al Imam* writers might also be viewed in an important sense as modern men. Although their criticism of the *kerajaan* and their stress on the *umat* ought to be considered in the context of a long-established, *shari'ah*-minded tradition, they seem to have been conscious as well of the critical concepts which underlay European modernity. Their consciousness of history, of development through time, provokes one to speculate about whether the concern about personhood (of what they called *zat*), which was discussed in the last chapter, was also influenced by an acquaintance with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European doctrines. Some authors insist that the concern for "man as man and individual self"<sup>28</sup> is implicit in Islamic thinking. It is undeniable, however, that such a concept of the person was at least muted in many Muslim societies including that of the *kerajaan*. In the case of the Malays, we have observed that Munshi Abdullah played a part in awakening a sharper sense of individuality. The *Al Imam* editors were among the many readers of Abdullah.<sup>29</sup>

The other obvious point of contact with European thought, the Egyptian Reformists, would also have been significant in *Al Imam*'s handling of 'individuality', just as they had an impact on the journal's perception of 'history'. The fact that *Al Imam* insisted there was a dynamic individual present beneath or behind the formal statuses of the *kerajaan* indicates a familiarity with the type of European notion of 'individual development' enunciated by Guizot, who was read by Mohd. Abduh. The privileging of the concept of rationality (*akal*) in *Al Imam* is likely to have had similar origins. In chapter 2 above, it was noted that during the nineteenth century, and especially following the appearance of the Reformists' writings, 'reason' was given a far greater significance in Islamic thought. Here too the encounter with European philosophers who "tried to apply the methods of the natural sciences [as they conceived them] to human nature"<sup>30</sup> was an important stimulus.

Taken together, therefore, a sense of historical movement and of a dynamic and rational individuality, along with a knowledge of concepts not only of race but also of nationhood, tend to indicate the *Al Imam* editors were in significant respects the products of late-nineteenth-century European thinking. Even where they designed programs of reform primarily from the fabric of established Islamic doctrine, it would seem they perceived issues and problems partly in modern, European terms.

### *Murshid*

The third term explained in the inaugural issue of *Al Imam* is *murshid*. Although this word is not persistently repeated in the journal it announces a theme which is ever present. *Murshid* is defined by the journal as "something which gives direction" (*yang memberi pertunjuk*), that is, as 'guide'. *Al Imam* explains that history acts as a 'guide', but the term has an additional significance for understanding the aims and function of the journal. The title *Al Imam* itself conveys the idea of 'leadership'. In the Koran, *Imam* means 'sign, indication, model, pattern, leader'.<sup>31</sup> The editors of *Al Imam* considered themselves, as we have seen, to be members of that part of the *umat* which performs "good works for the advantage of their group". The critical activity of education, so strongly proclaimed in the opening sentences of *Al Imam*'s first issue, is of course an essential part of this 'leadership' or 'guidance'.

The longstanding tradition in Islam of education and guidance by the *ulama* (scholars) is suggested by the Koranic quotation with which *Al Imam* commences its mission: "Invite everyone to the way of our Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching". At the end of the nineteenth century, there were special reasons for stressing the leadership role of the *ulama*. Reformists from outside the Malay world such as Mohd. Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani considered that the Muslim community was in a condition of stagnation and corruption. They wished to reinvigorate the *ulama*, to inspire them to adopt what has been called an "action-oriented spirit".<sup>32</sup> Al-Afghani himself was described as the "Awakener of the East".<sup>33</sup> The translation of the journal title *Al Manar*, is 'The Lighthouse'. In *Al Imam* itself the *ulama* are constantly appealed to: they are urged to step forward and to prepare the community to face the challenge of the new world. They are implored not to confine themselves "to mere teaching in the mosques" but should make prescriptions for every aspect of life including the sciences, literature and craftsmanship.<sup>34</sup> The journal, *Al Imam*, is presented as an organ of the *ulama*. In the "open letter to all *ulama*" in the first issue, the journal reminds *ulama* that it is their duty to contribute. They are urged to write to the journal and by this means to convey their words to the *umat*. With some exaggeration, *Al Imam* advises the *ulama* that "all governments" in the region recognize freedom of religion and thus they have no excuse for inaction.

Such a stress on *ulama* guidance or leadership might understandably have been perceived as a challenge by the *kerajaan* élite, or by those such as Eunoes of the *Utusan* who were proposing alternative reform programs for Malay society. Not only does *Al Imam* declare that it is

“essential for rulers always to be close to *ulama*”,<sup>35</sup> but the *ulama* are also called the “heads of religion”.<sup>36</sup> It is even stated in one article that the *ulama* “rule over the *umat*” and that “if examined closely it is they who are the rajas in Islam”.<sup>37</sup> The most serious challenge presented by the *ulama*, however, lay in the fact that they possessed the potential to propagate doctrines capable of transforming virtually every aspect of Malay life.

The importance of the *ulama* and the theme of *murshid*, ‘guidance’, are reiterated not just in the opening issue of *Al Imam* but throughout many of the following issues of the journal. Education and knowledge stand at the core of *Al Imam*’s message. Although (after our discussion of Abdullah and the *Utusan*) the sentiment is familiar by now, certain elements in *Al Imam*’s thinking and language are new. The opening article in the first issue, having defined *umat*, *tarik* and *murshid*, explains that knowledge (*ilmu*) is the “foundation on which every pillar of victory stands”. Knowledge is “the sun which obliterates the utter darkness of night”. Nearly every attractive feature of human existence seems to accompany “knowledge”. Tranquillity, festivity, profit and high rank depend upon knowledge. It is also said that knowledge is the “channel of perfection and the light of *akal* (‘reason’)”. What, in the case of *Al Imam*, is “knowledge” expected to entail? It is not, explains the journal, merely a matter of knowing what is forbidden and what is permitted in the religion of Islam. The journal considers such issues important but it indicates that “knowledge” involves understanding all “matters which are brought into being by God in ourselves, on the earth and in the sky”. Knowledge (*ilmu*) comprises everything which leads us to fear God. As stated in the Koran: “Those truly fear Allah among His servants who love knowledge (XXXV: 28)”. Grounded in such broad claims, the range of topics and fields of study covered by the term *ilmu* is also extensive. As *Al Imam* explains the matter, knowledge includes such subjects as psychology, biology, sociology, economics and commerce. Significantly, in the case of each of these a description from the Arabic language is used.

It is particularly this use of Arabic which distinguishes *Al Imam*’s discussion of “knowledge”. Before examining the specific character of *Al Imam*’s approach to “knowledge” and to education, however, it is revealing to consider in greater detail the grounds upon which *Al Imam* based its calls for education and reform. Like Eunoo of the *Utusan* (and for that matter the editors of *Al Manar*), *Al Imam*’s editors were struck by the relative “backwardness” of their community (although the “communities” of the *Utusan* and *Al Imam* were not coterminous). It would seem to be this “backwardness”, in fact, that created in the minds



of the editors of both papers an urgent need for new 'guidance' or leadership. To some extent this anxiety provided the incentive for inaugurating *Al Imam* itself.

Of all the foreign peoples possessing a comparative advantage over the Muslim Malays, the *Al Imam* considered Europeans and Japanese especially successful. It explains this success in terms of superior knowledge. Indeed, those who know about the world, *Al Imam* suggests, understand that the Europeans were only able to expand through the East because they possessed "knowledge" and the same might also be said of the Japanese who (in the Russo-Japanese War) had just achieved victory over a nation "made up of hundreds of millions of people". At first glance this concern to compare European and Japanese success with Muslim failure seems distinctly secular. So in addition does the particular anxiety expressed in one of the rare articles to focus specifically on the future of the Malays and the Arabs, in competition with other peoples, in Singapore. A quarter of a century ago, the article explains, the Malays and Arabs lived in the central area of the city: "then the rentals increased and so did the prices of houses and land so that these people withdrew to [such outer districts] as Tanjong Pagar and Kampong Gelam". If the retreat continued, *Al Imam* concludes, "we may finally be forced to Papua and other places where the people are naked".<sup>38</sup>

When *Al Imam* considers this "backwardness" of the Muslims in its first editorial it expresses mock puzzlement: "Are we not all men? Do these other races have perfect bodies while we lack certain limbs?" Surely, they argue, we are not backward because of our religion. It is the "best religion ever revealed". What Muslims lack, they conclude, predictably by now, is "knowledge". But it is knowledge specifically about the "meaning of mankind (*manusia*)", the "meaning of life (*hidup*)". Europeans and Japanese, *Al Imam* observes, had worked (*berkerja*) and striven (*berusaha*) to answer these questions. Muslims had been negligent. Yet history (*tarikh*) offers encouragement in that "peoples who have lived in degradation for hundreds of years have eventually abandoned laziness" and "lifted their *umat*". (In this stress on 'industry' and 'energy' we are reminded again of the *Utusan Melayu*.) Such peoples, says *Al Imam*, have usually been led by devoted individuals, leaders with whom *Al Imam's* editors evidently identified. The opening years of the twentieth century, *Al Imam* proceeds to explain, offered the opportunity for the people of Islam to recover their former stature. The point is stressed that the article is written in an exciting period, an age of invention, a "period when there has been opened a market of knowledge". *Al Imam* asks the rhetorical question:

“Shall we give up now at a time when so much is available in so many fields? No! No! No!”

It is here that the journal's *ulama* editors stake their claim to leadership. “What we must do is preach to our *umat*.” We need, they add, to attempt to rid the people of laziness and of disputes. With this aim, explains the editors, they had chosen to establish a magazine which might be circulated to all teachers and “members of states (*negeri*)” in the region. They would explain in this magazine the “obligations of each person to himself and to his *bangsa*” and also (as has already been noted) the fact that “we are all members of the *umat* Islam,” the “community of Islam” which is “spoken of in the Koran”. The statement is strengthened with a Koranic quote (III, 104):

Let there arise out of you a community (*umat*)  
 Inviting to all that is good  
 Enjoying what is right  
 Forbidding what is wrong  
 They are the ones to obtain felicity.

The editorial in the first issue of *Al Imam* now ends with the information that the journal will be published monthly, and also with a request for God's help in the work of saving the *umat*.

The reference to “members of *negeri*” and “obligations to *bangsa*” in *Al Imam*'s discussion of its educational role, as suggested above, is an indication of overlap between the postulated audiences of *Al Imam* and the *Utusan*. It may suggest, too, the element of competition between the two papers. *Al Imam* is addressing not just the general Muslim population of the different states and settlements in the region but also singling out those people who had already begun to consider themselves to be members of a Malay *bangsa*. Such people would in effect be following Abdullah's advice in perceiving themselves not as subjects of a *kerajaan* but as members of a race. They were precisely the type of readers to whom the *Utusan* was directed. In noting “obligations to *bangsa*”, *Al Imam* recognized the growing significance of the concept in Malay society but conveyed no suggestion that the paper hoped itself to bolster *bangsa*-mindedness. *Al Imam*'s concern was to advance the rival consciousness of *umat* and of Islamic obligations.

From the perspective of their reading audiences, the most important contrast between the educational roles of the two papers would have been in the programs of reform which they urged. The contrast was sharpened because of the fact that both papers were addressing the problem of social “backwardness”, and both expressed genuine interest in the new forms of knowledge and education as well as the new

political developments which were emerging in the opening years of the twentieth century. The *Utusan* and the Islamic journal, therefore, would be seen by their readers to react to essentially the same political and other realities of the contemporary world. To some extent the two papers answer similar questions, but the strategies they propose are fundamentally different.

### Strategies of reform

For both papers, the strategy was focused upon what we today would call the 'psychological' or 'cultural' sphere. If the Malays (or Muslims) wished to overcome their 'backwardness', both papers insist, they must change their attitude of mind. For the *Utusan* (influenced in important ways by Abdullah's writing), this seems to have entailed the development of an individualistic attitude, particularly in work and in education; literacy (and not necessarily religious literacy) would promote a new mode of thought, it would foster the development of reason (*akal*). Work for wages would free Malays "from their neighbours". Bank loans, bureaucratic jobs and rubber sales would provide other opportunities for fostering Malay industry, an industry which would contribute to the promotion of the interests of the *bangsa*. *Al Imam*, as its first editorial makes clear, also considered it necessary to inquire into what it termed the "meaning" of mankind (*manusia*), life (*hidup*) and society (*perhimpunan*) if Muslims were not to go on being left behind. The Islamic journal, moreover, also examines these issues in a modern context: when it expounds its perception of the person beneath the title, when it considers and compares different types of social unity and when it conveys a sense of the dynamism of history, the journal seems to situate itself in a modernity shaped by the liberalism of Europe.

Furthermore, just as was the case with the *Utusan*, *Al Imam* often gives the impression of responding and reacting to certain social developments occurring in the Straits Settlements and on the Peninsula. In observing that they lived in a period of rapid change, the *Al Imam* editors seem to acknowledge the fact that, just like Eunus, they addressed a community in which many people were in the process of extracting themselves from the hierarchical obligations of the *kerajaan*. A considerable portion of their readers would indeed have been experiencing new forms of education, property ownership, commercial life and urban existence. They would also have been considering the possibility of adopting new types of communal identification. From the point of view of the long struggle of the *shari'ah*-minded in the Malay world, this was in many ways a novel audience. Nevertheless such

problems as the 'meaning' of man were, in a sense, traditional and appropriate matters for religious contemplation. Moreover, the main themes of the journal's response are firmly grounded in Islamic doctrine.

The fact that the rhetoric employed by *Al Imam* is never obviously European is an essential component of the journal's reform program. In contrast to the *Utusan*, the articles of *Al Imam* seem to take pains to convey the impression that they are not borrowing from European thought. Thus, as mentioned above, when a list is given of the types of knowledge which should be acquired by Muslims, and even includes such fields as psychology, *Al Imam* gives each of the subjects or disciplines an Arabic title.<sup>39</sup> By the same token, when the journal uses such terms as *watan*, *akal* and *zat*, the idea is again conveyed that the new knowledge being introduced to Malays is essentially Islamic rather than European. Although *watan* is the 'motherland' and *akal* can connote the 'rationality' of modern liberal thought, both terms are Arabic and, thus, in Malay thinking also Islamic.

In *Al Imam*'s discussion of the significance of the individual in society, a discussion which does not differ radically from many statements to be found in Abdullah's writing, the journal's analysis would again have seemed to Malay readers to possess powerful theological characteristics. Not only is the Arabic *zat* used for 'person' but also numerous Koranic quotations are employed. The actual mode of expression too would have seemed markedly Islamic. Unlike the case of the *Utusan*, there is little evidence here of the impact of the English language. Where there is foreign influence – for instance, the long sentences which are additive or parenthetical in style (somewhat rambling to an English reader) and also the vivid imagery – it seems to come from Arabic.<sup>40</sup> From the point of view of Malay readers, for whom Arabic was above all the language of their religion, this style of writing is likely to have suggested Islamic piety. The new ideas, therefore, even when they were influenced by the Enlightenment philosophy of the contemporary West, would seem to Malay readers to have been communicated as elements not of European but of Islamic culture. That is, where *Al Imam* did indeed introduce novel ideas into Malay writing it presented these ideas in an Islamic milieu.

A further way in which *Al Imam*'s answers to questions about man, life and society seem grounded in Islamic tradition is in their stress on 'purification'. That is, the journal often advocates the reform of Muslim thinking in terms of a challenge to strip away what Islamic *shari'ah*-minded thinkers believed had been accretions accumulated over the centuries around Islamic doctrine. (We have seen that the *kerajaan* leaders of the Malay world were considered to be responsible for

numerous of these accretions.) The title of one article published in the journal encapsulates the spirit of this approach: 'Education and its relationship to the very purest *shari'ah*'.<sup>41</sup> As *Al Imam* in general presents the matter, the 'purified' doctrine offers the real answers to modern problems. It is an approach which is characteristic of reformist thinking among the groups in Egypt which *Al Imam* admired and, of course, it also possesses antecedents in the longstanding *shari'ah*-minded tradition in Muslim society. The Egyptian Reformers themselves quoted the fourteenth-century, *shari'ah*-minded theologian, Ibn-Taymiyyah, and acknowledged as well that they shared common ground with the eighteenth-century Wahhabis.<sup>42</sup>

Once again, in this appeal to Fundamentalism on the part of the reformists, there are suggestions of the stimulus of European intellectual history, and it is a stimulus which is relatively well-documented in the Egyptian case. When Al Afghani and Mohd. Abduh read the French Protestant historian Guizot, for instance, they learned that the Christian Reformation was, as Guizot explained it, a "great movement of the liberty of the human mind" and the "dominant fact of the epoch". The Reformation, Guizot insists, was the "cause" which "dominates over all particular causes" in the introduction of a great period of European political and cultural triumph.<sup>43</sup> By learning to perceive European success in this way, the Islamic reformers came to see Martin Luther's achievements as an inspiration. Just as the Christian Reformation, in returning to the Holy Scripture of Christianity, brought about the "renewal and regeneration of the human mind"<sup>44</sup> so, the Muslim reformers were encouraged to believe, a return to the fundamentals of Islam might bring regeneration to Muslim minds.

The *Al Imam* editors, to a large extent, encountered this stimulus second hand, by means of their relationship with the Egyptian thinkers. It is more than a remote likelihood, however, that the Protestant missionaries in the Straits may also have fostered at a local level some interest, if not in Puritanism, at least in the 'purifying' of religion. In the tradition of the Reformation, the missionaries displayed disdain for the 'accretions' of the Church of Rome, especially the use of "outward rites or ceremonies" as a means of "purchasing heaven".<sup>45</sup> We do at least know (see chapter 3) that the stress they placed on personal salvation was considered by his contemporaries to have been an inspiration for Abdullah. It is possible that debates with such Christian fundamentalists as Thomas Beighton of Penang (discussed in the last chapter) influenced Muslim *ulama* to treat the authority of the Muslim hierarchy (especially if it was royally endorsed) with a new scepticism. The Christian missionaries, as I have suggested, did possess some prestige in

Malay society at that time and it may have been the case that the Muslims whom they provoked into debate began to examine with a new intensity the 'fundamental' writings of their own religion.

Whatever the inspiration behind *Al Imam's* advocacy of "purification" or "fundamentalism", it was certainly consistent in many respects with early proclamations of orthodoxy among the Muslim community of the archipelago. The journal's reform program must have been reminiscent of the determined efforts of the "Hajies, and other religious persons" whom Raffles had described as attempting to introduce into the Malay lands "the laws of the Arabs". When *Al Imam* spoke of the need to strip away the web of accretions which prevented men perceiving the true nature of things, the reader would have had no doubt that the titles, the ceremonies, the pomp and the presumption of the *kerajaan* formed a part of this web. Among other aspects of Malay custom, *Al Imam's* articles take issue, for instance, with all those people who "count the rosary or sell talismans or who are specialists in confusing the minds of women".<sup>46</sup> The *Al Imam* authors were aware that a number of these innovations (*bida'ah*) tended to be justified in Islamic terms. The journal denounces "some established customs in our region, customs that are deemed by certain people to be useful or to be an integral part of Islam".<sup>47</sup> A letter from a correspondent in Patani provides a specific instance. The author asks the editors to give an opinion of a mystical association (*tarekat*) in that region, and the answer is that it is an "erroneous innovation" and that it is therefore obligatory for an Islamic ruler to take action against such an organization.<sup>48</sup> In such editorial statements, one detects something of the attitude of mind of the "Perseyite Mohomedan Priest" in Penang who (as noted in the last chapter) was described by the Christian missionaries as brandishing a rattan cane and enjoining by "every means in his power a strict attention to the Mohomedan customs".

In its desire for purification, for a return to fundamental doctrine, *Al Imam* was concerned also about the sort of negligence that arose from a preoccupation with worldly matters. As explained in the last chapter, *Al Imam's* article on 'Honour and Dignity' was directed not just against the *kerajaan* but also against some members of the new bourgeois class. The latter, it is argued, were wrong to believe that honour might arise entirely from material possessions such as "large godowns, finely decorated houses, graceful horses, large numbers of servants, beautiful clothing and jewellery". The perception of such worldly ambitions in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberal writings, of course, was rather different. Abdullah was concerned that in the Malay states there was no security of property and he advocated a society in which ordinary people had the opportunity to achieve "great" things and live

in royal style. The *Utusan Melayu* also gave sympathetic attention to the problems faced by Malays who were engaged in the accumulation of money. The discussion of issues relating to banking and investment is an indication of this. Both the *Utusan* and Abdullah certainly urged their readers to dedicate themselves to serving the community as well as their own personal welfare; but the community they stressed was the *bangsa* rather than the religious *umat*. A similar division must have existed in the field of education. The *Utusan* and *Al Imam* are likely to have been equally concerned about the consequences of European education for some members of the middle class, that is, for the type of Malay who might wear “stiff shirt collar and polished black shoes”. But the *ulama* leadership of *Al Imam* would have been far more worried about children forgetting their religion than about their loss of race.

Even in the military sphere *Al Imam* asserts the supreme effectiveness of a return to the fundamentals of Islam. In one instance an illustration is taken from history. The history of the Arabs, it is explained, is instructional for those concerned about Muslim backwardness in the early twentieth century. Before the arrival of Islam in the seventh century, the Arabs had simply followed their “instincts”. They lacked reason. Later the Arabs achieved greatness and did so entirely because of the Islamic religion. The Arabs were:

not frightened by the strength of the Roman people and the Persians; and they did not hesitate to ride their horses to the East to China, or to cross the Straits of Gibraltar and climb the mountains of the Pyrenees in the West. [The Arabs] were not afraid of people who outnumbered them. Nor were they afraid of people who were well equipped with weapons while they [the Arabs] had nothing in their hands other than knowledge of the *shari’ah* and nothing to bind them together other than the rope of religion.<sup>49</sup>

In this quote *Al Imam’s* perception of the *shari’ah* as standing at the core of Islamic thinking is made plain, as is the significance in the mind of the author of the danger which can be presented by a strong and alien people. Here in the *shari’ah* seems to lie the fundamental doctrine to which allusions are persistently made. Moreover the *shari’ah* is, in this passage, explicitly portrayed as the the key to *Al Imam’s* strategy of reform.

### ***Shari’ah*-mindedness**

The centrality of the very purest *shari’ah* is indeed encountered time and again in *Al Imam*. An article written by an Islamic official in Johore, for instance, declares that *rajas* should work closely with *ulama* because they will then be able to rule in accordance with the *shari’ah*.<sup>50</sup> We saw in

the last chapter that, according to the journal, "honour" ought to be defined not by the royal bestowal of titles or the possession of luxurious goods but by the *shari'ah* "as confirmed by all people of *akal*". In insisting on the far-reaching significance of the Divine Law, *Al Imam* was obviously declaring far more than that the *shari'ah* provides a list of specific rules and injunctions by which to live. The journal indeed might best be understood as suggesting that it is in the *shari'ah* that a person can find answers to questions about the 'meaning' of man, life and society. Not only does the Divine Law explain man's relation to God and to His community (*umat*), but, so the journal suggests, the actual experience of encountering the *shari'ah* is capable of developing the mind. It is perhaps in this sense that the return to the fundamentals of Islam allows Muslims to acquire (as the Arabs had once done) a new consciousness capable of preparing them to compete even militarily with the progressive people of the world.

Such a perception of the *shari'ah* is expressed with particular clarity in an *Al Imam* essay written by an *ulama* from Sumatra. The *shari'ah*, explains this article, is "the most effective light for increasing the gleam of *akal*"; it "serves to direct *akal* toward the understanding of truth" and also toward the "proper solutions of problems". The "drill of the science of *shari'ah*" is able to "foster a spirit and disposition that allows *akal* to rise to truly noble levels and to be able to know the highest sciences".<sup>51</sup> The perception of the Divine Law as more than a compendium of rules could not be more plain than this. The *Al Imam* article seems to be treating the *shari'ah* as a trainer in rationality. The *shari'ah* as God's Word is necessarily a rational system and thus merely to come into contact with it stimulates the rationality of the human mind. Such an encounter with the "pure *shari'ah*" conjures up again the contrast with the web of custom and superstition which can confuse Muslim thinking. Munshi Abdullah, of course, had alluded to the "stupid and useless" customs with which he considered Malays were besotted; *Al Imam* provides an equally vivid account of the ways such beliefs could distract minds.

When Sayyid Shaykh in one essay asks "What is the reason for the state we are in?" he replies that his people are not merely lazy but are persistently interested "in superficial things, relying upon fantasies and confusion. [We] neglect to enter a house through the door, to examine things in terms of their causes".<sup>52</sup> Here again, just as in the discussion of the person (*zat*), the imagery is one of getting beneath the surface to essentials. However much this argument may have been influenced by European concepts of rationality and of religious reformation, the message conveyed to the reader is that the "essentials" themselves, even the essential nature of reason (*akal*), are grounded firmly in Islam.



If we look back once again at the writings of Abdullah and Eunus, it will be remembered that, when they confronted the problems of altering Malay consciousness, both authors focused on the development or the fostering of *akal*. They emphasized the importance of education in general terms and in particular of literacy. Abdullah pressed Malays to question the "stupid" and "useless" customs of their ancestors and learn as quickly as possible about the novelties and inventions of the new age. Like Francis Bacon he appeared to be urging his readers to "begin anew". In respect to literacy, the *Utusan* explained that knowledge learned "by mouth" was only "remembered in the head"; when we read it is possible to understand with "our reason". *Al Imam's* contribution to this critical discussion about the development of *akal* was to recommend a peculiarly powerful and Islamic technique. *Al Imam* insists that it is necessary not just to strip back the superstitions which muddle the mind, but also to experience an encounter with the Word of God, in order for the *akal* to "shine". Not surprisingly, statements of this type are also to be found in the writing of the Egyptian, Mohd. Abduh. The Koran, he explained in his *Theology of Unity* (1897), "speaks to the rational mind and alerts the intelligence". Islam is the "first religion to address the rational mind, summoning it to look into the whole material universe, giving it free rein to range at will through all its secrets saving only therein the maintenance of faith".<sup>53</sup> We obtain a further hint of the sort of process of interaction between mind and *shari'ah*, alluded to in *Al Imam*, in a recently published study of the education of an Iranian *mullah*. Even in "attempting to reconstruct the subtext of premises and methods of reasoning" that underlie the legal writings of religious scholars, a student *mullah* is said to "reconstruct the mental processes of the authors and, ultimately, to read the mind of their inspirer, the True Legislator, God".<sup>54</sup> In the case of the Koran, the student obviously has a far greater opportunity to communicate directly with the mind of the True Legislator.

In such a far-reaching *shari'ah*-mindedness, in urging this type of return to the fundamental elements of Islam, *Al Imam* was proposing its own program for the invigoration of Muslim society in the Malay world and elsewhere. Just like the reforms proposed by the liberal writers, the *Al Imam* program had the capacity to antagonize the traditional authorities of the Malay community. Quite apart from the obvious differences in detail, the addressing and shaping of the rational mind has a democratic significance which possesses implications for all types of human authority in Muslim communities.

In the liberal and *Al Imam* presentations, the legitimacy of ideas does not depend on their being endorsed by those in authority, be they *ulama* or *rajas*. In an important sense, the individual alone is the arbiter.

Abdullah's condemnation of the *kerajaan* was founded in a perception of the individual as a growing tree which could not be contained by the ceremonial rigidities of the *ancien régime*. On its part, *Al Imam's* concern with the individual mind and its relation to the Divine Law is also radically opposed to *kerajaan* thinking. It contradicts, for instance, the understanding of Islamic faith which one finds in the *Malay Annals* where the subjects of Malacca are described as being 'commanded' to become Muslims by their *raja*.<sup>55</sup> *Al Imam* does not merely judge the *kerajaan* against the injunctions of the Divine Law (as many *shari'ah*-minded scholars had done over the centuries).<sup>56</sup> It also chooses as its analytical point of departure the mind of the individual subject rather than the authority of the *raja*. That is, it follows Abdullah's democratic tendency in privileging the individual subject rather than the ruler.

Little common ground exists, however, in the attitudes which *Al Imam* and its liberal rivals take to personal freedom and the control of that freedom. When Abdullah discussed the development and fulfilment of the individual he did so partly in terms of the *homo economicus* of Adam Smith and Raffles. He presented the individual as working to achieve "something important"; every individual has the potential to "live like a raja". For many Malays this type of formulation must have raised difficulties. Injunctions against "making oneself important" are powerfully expressed in traditional Malay writings and would continue to be influential. Although significant numbers of Malays at the turn of the century might have considered the idea of subjecting the individual to the *kerajaan* to be discredited, it does not follow that they were comfortable with what a modern Malaysian sociologist has described (and criticized) as the reliance in Western society "upon the powers of human reason alone to guide man through life".<sup>57</sup>

As suggested in chapter 4, such anxiety about the sovereignty of the individual may help one to understand the determination with which Abdullah and Eunus persistently exhorted their readers to serve their race (*bangsa*) at the same time as they advance themselves as individuals. It is in *Al Imam's* proposals for the control of the individual, or what Europeans had once called the control of the passions, that the Islamic journal offers an answer to the anxiety about individualism which was provoked by liberal thinking. Both *Al Imam* and the liberals agreed that the only means of ensuring such control lay with the fostering of *akal*. In explaining exactly how this might be achieved, however, we have seen that the liberal writings convey a tone not just of experimentation but also of uncertainty.

By contrast, the Islamic journal appears to offer a confident answer which firmly establishes the process of perfecting *akal* in Islamic

doctrine. The “gleam” of *akal* increases as the individual is brought into contact with the *shari’ah*. Thus, the ideology set forth in *Al Imam* in a certain sense recognizes the personhood alluded to by Abdullah and Eunus, but in doing so, almost simultaneously subsumes the phenomenon within its *shari’ah*-minded doctrines. That is, in *Al Imam*, Islam, in particular the *shari’ah*, is presented as being able to guide and harness the new individual freedom which could be achieved in the social setting of ‘British Malaya’. Malays escaping from the hierarchical constraints of the old *kerajaan* (people such as those arriving in Singapore in the *prahus* which missionary Thomsen had initially approached with unwarranted optimism) would indeed be subjected to a new form of discipline. Where there developed a consciousness of individuality rather than hierarchical status it was neither denied nor suppressed. Rather, through encounter with Islamic doctrine it would be translated into a devoted obedience to God’s Commands. In this way a particular realization of individuality could be experienced as a religious act and one which did not weaken but necessarily strengthened the *umat*, the community of God within which men lived their lives.

Such a manner of accommodating, or channelling, individualism by means of Islamic teaching had an obvious implication for the reforming of Muslim society. It radically affected the way in which individual initiative and action might be generated. When Muslims struggled to achieve great things – and this type of individual action was encouraged by *Al Imam* as much as by the liberals – they would not be perceived to do so in order to “make themselves important” or out of a desire for “grand houses” and other material rewards. In *Al Imam*’s terms, these enterprising individuals would be seen as striving for God and for the Islamic community. From the point of view of the growing Malay middle class, concerned perhaps about the dangers of individualism and other forms of social disruption arising from British economic and educational policies, the *Al Imam* message would have been especially attractive. The Islamic response to the rise of individualism, as presented in *Al Imam*, is reminiscent of the Puritan message in the circumstances of the social dislocation of seventeenth-century England. Those experiencing a sense of anomie and rootlessness in Malay society, no less than the English people presented in Michael Walzer’s *Revolution of the Saints*, would have found “a new master in themselves and a new system of control in their godly brethren”.<sup>58</sup>

### Answering liberalism

The last pages have been concerned with identifying the distinctive features of *Al Imam*’s strategy of Muslim reform, and have done so in

part by means of comparison with the doctrines argued by Abdullah and, later, Eunos. The analysis sometimes runs beyond the texts in that we have drawn out implications which are alluded to only in the most subtle terms in the Islamic journal. In *Al Imam*, it might be said, the proponents of the "Laws of the Arabs" were only just beginning to struggle against the modernists as well as the *kerajaan* "adherents of the old Malay usages". We shall see that it was in the 1920s that the religious reformers argued in a more explicit manner against the proponents of a liberal philosophy. What *Al Imam* does reveal with clarity, however, is the type of distance that existed between the two ideological positions. *Al Imam* offered answers to questions such as how to foster individual dynamism and judgement which were also raised by Abdullah and Eunos, and it did so in a manner which challenged certain of the fundamental doctrines both of the *kerajaan* and of liberalism. One can only speculate about whether Abdullah would have found *Al Imam*'s answers convincing. It is unlikely that he encountered a 'shari'ah-minded' response of the precise type that *Al Imam* offered, but we have noted the possibility that he may at least have been attracted to, and influenced by, a growing stress in Islamic teaching on 'reason'.

What may well have struck Eunos about *Al Imam* – though he would not have used this expression – is the particular thematic space separating him from the views expounded in the journal. In their rhetoric, their prose style and the actual arguments they presented, *Al Imam*'s editors cited a reality which was fundamental to the ideologies of neither the royal courts nor such liberals as Eunos. When a *kerajaan* legal text, for instance, proclaims that its mixture of *shari'ah* and *adat* clauses were "handed down" by royalty, and that to contravene them involves treason to the ruler rather than to God, it displays exactly the type of "confused thinking" condemned by *Al Imam*. Equally it might be expected that the Islamic journal's editors would consider almost incomprehensible the aims which Eunos gave his paper. How could it be possible, they might ask, for the *Utusan* at one moment to declare its intention to help Malays "understand matters taking place each day" in the world and, at another, to declare adamantly that it was not a religious paper. *Al Imam* did not ground the education or guidance it offered in an abstract 'rationality' or a certain scientific thinking. *Al Imam* did not by any means turn its back on such modernity, but the principles upon which it based its response were always founded in the authority of Islam.

Partly because of these Islamic epistemological credentials, the doctrines propagated by *Al Imam* were capable of rivalling and undermining the ideologies advanced both by the sultanates and the liberals. *Al Imam* offered a vision for life in the new era and a strategy of reform

to redress the social “backwardness” of its readers. It addressed not a specifically Malay but a larger Islamic readership. It insisted that reform and, in fact, social activity in general, ought to operate not in communities defined by race or nationality, or allegiance to a secular leader, but in the community of Islam. Finally, the journal sometimes boldly suggested that the “real rulers” of that community ought to be the *ulama*, the scholars of Islam who, like the editors themselves, were those people best acquainted with the Word of God. *Al Imam*'s program anticipated a society dramatically different from that either of the *kerajaan* or of the type of *bangsa*-based structure which was beginning to be envisaged by such writers as Eunos. It is a distinctly radical program and yet its proponents were able to insist that it was based on Islamic principles of knowledge, and thus endorsed by the religion of their readers and listeners. In future years advocates of the Malay *bangsa*, just like defenders of the sultanates, would face what they perceived to be a religiously based subversion from within their own communities. In the manner of the nineteenth-century sultan from East Sumatra who feared the *Paderi* revolution taking place in his region, these two élites were to be challenged by *ulama* determined to impose “all their peculiar laws”.

#### A new discourse

To conclude this chapter, however, by embedding *Al Imam* entirely in the *shari'ah*-minded tradition is misleading. A significant ideological distance separates the Islamic journal not only from its liberal rivals but also from earlier Islamic writings. We have noted that the *Al Imam* editors were, in an important sense, modern men. In their journal the religion and law of Allah are enunciated in a new idiom. To some extent, in fact, *Al Imam* and the *Utusan* actually participate in the same language or discourse. In this sense the fact that they both employ concepts of race, personhood, statehood and social change demands the utmost attention. Like the *Utusan*, *Al Imam* communicates a dynamic view of history as well as a fascination with the technological and intellectual novelties of the age. *Al Imam*, no less than liberal critics, claims to be concerned with “things as they really are”. It describes temporal events which occurred in secular time. Its editors persistently express an awareness of themselves as participants in a specific and critical moment in history. Like Eunos, they write not as members of an ahistorical *kerajaan* which might transcend time, but of a society which faces seemingly inevitable processes of change. *Al Imam*, like the *Utusan*, appears to perceive society as a community of rational individuals. Indeed it views its own readership in these terms. The journal's programs

of reform are designed for the attention and for the benefit of such a rational community.

In their vision of a community of rational arbiters participating in a process of communication and even discussion (for both papers encouraged correspondence), *Al Imam* and the *Utusan* imagine a reading public very different from the community of the *kerajaan*. The new public was not to be a passive community. In this community, government – as Habermas expresses it – “would have to be defended and not merely ‘represented’”. Both *Al Imam* and the *Utusan* postulate an active public sphere. If *Al Imam* does not speak specifically of citizenship it nevertheless assumes that its readers would speculate as individuals on what was just or unjust government. Like the readers of the *Utusan*, they are considered to be capable of making decisions about the future. The articles in both newspapers assume that more than one blueprint for change is being laid before this public. Both papers seem quite aware of the competing claims of *kerajaan*, *bangsa* and *umat*. (*Al Imam* even uses the relatively abstract term, *perhimpunan* – ‘assemblage’ or ‘community’ – to facilitate its discussion of different types of social formation.) In participating in the new public sphere, both papers also seem to claim priority for their views in a manner which suggests some expectation of debate.

In the next chapter we will consider the way in which their common rival, the *kerajaan*, entered that debate. The *kerajaan*, as has been stated, faced challenges at several levels. The *Utusan* and *Al Imam*, not merely in their specific criticisms and proposals but also in their assumptions about individual rights and needs and in their sometimes unintentional promotion of a new political sphere, were persistently subverting the *kerajaan*. Until this point, we have given little attention to the sultanates’ actual reactions to this assault. The following chapter will explain how different royal courts responded in different ways. In particular, we will examine the Sultanate of Johore which, as has been seen, had established close contacts with the new educational institutions of Singapore. This Malay court had specific reasons for identifying opportunities as well as threats in the developing contest of ideologies. In fact, in 1908 an official in the Johore court wrote a text which, despite its conventional-sounding title, was a pioneering document. This text, the *Hikayat Johor*, displays ingenuity in its appropriation of certain elements of the language and conceptual armoury of liberalism. In appropriating these elements the author aimed to strengthen the particular sultanate which he served. Such innovation, however, is also risk-laden. Driving the sultanate forward into the new politics of Malaya, the *Hikayat Johor*, whatever its impact may have been on the fortunes of the Johore dynasty, presented a more dangerous

challenge to the old *kerajaan* ideology than that offered by either the *Utusan* or *Al Imam*.

### Notes

- 1 Abdullah bin Haji Jaafar, 'Al-Imam', in Khoo Kay Kim and Jazamuddin Baharuddin (eds), *Lembaran Akhbar Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Pensatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980), 31.
- 2 W.R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 65.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 248.
- 5 *Al Imam*, 8 October 1907.
- 6 See, in particular, *ibid.*, 12 July 1907.
- 7 B.W. Andaya, 'From Rum to Tokyo: the Search for Anticolonial Allies by the Rulers of Riau, 1899–1914', *Indonesia*, 24 (1977), 141.
- 8 Abdullah bin Abdul Rahman, *Matahari Memancar: Tarikh Kerajaan Japan* (Singapore: Al Imam, 1906), 56, 111.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Al Imam*, 23 July 1906.
- 11 H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953), 603.
- 12 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 60–4; Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973); Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al-Imam: Its Role in Malay Society 1906–1908*, M.Phil.thesis, University of Kent at Canterbury, 1981; Tan Seng-Huat, *The Life and Times of Sayyid al-Hadi, BA thesis*, University of Singapore, 1961; Mohd. Sarim Haji Mustajab, *Islam dan Perkembangannya dalam Masyarakat Melayu di Semenanjung Melayu 1900–1940*, MA thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan, 1975.
- 13 *Al Imam*, 23 July 1906.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 12 July 1907.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 4 February 1908.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 9 September 1907; also 14 May 1907.
- 17 The journal discusses the word in *ibid.*, 14 May 1907.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 6 December 1907.
- 19 E.I.J. Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern National State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 38.
- 20 Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt – A Critique of Al-Afghani, 'Abduh and Ridha* (Slough: Open Press, 1976), 15.
- 21 Rashid Rida (one of the *Al Manar* group), quoted in James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 79; see also Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *Reformers of Egypt*, 16.
- 22 See chapter 5, note 7 above.
- 23 See, for instance, *Al Imam*, 12 July 1907; 27 September 1908.
- 24 *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 578. The nineteenth-century text, the *Tuhfat Al-Nafis*, refers to *tawarikh* (plural of *tarikh*), but the translator translates the word as 'dates'; see Virginia Matheson Hooker (ed.), *Tuhfat Al-Nafis Sejarah Melayu Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991), 128; Virginia Matheson and Barbara Watson Andaya (transl.) *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat Al-Nafis)*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 12.
- 25 H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1947), 128; also 125, 126.
- 26 Albert H. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 114–15. For a translation of Guizot, see F. Guizot, *The History of Civilization from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the French Revolution* (London: David Bogue, 1846).

- 27 *Ibid.*, 132.
- 28 Syed Muhammad Al-Naguib Al-Atas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978), 141.
- 29 *Al Imam*, 29 August 1908.
- 30 Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 143.
- 31 *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 165.
- 32 Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 222; also 185.
- 33 Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *Reformers of Egypt*, 1.
- 34 *Al Imam*, 30 July 1908.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 4 February 1908; 30 July 1908.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 4 February 1908.
- 37 *Al Imam*, 1 July 1908.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 12 July 1907.
- 39 See note 10 above.
- 40 I should like to thank Dr Virginia Hooker for discussing with me the style of this writing.
- 41 *Al Imam*, 9 September 1907.
- 42 Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam*, 34, 35; Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *Reformers of Egypt*, 43, 45, 49.
- 43 Guizot, *History of Civilization*, 220; also 217. For Mohd. Abduh's comments on the Reformation in Europe see his *Theology of Unity* (1897) (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), 149–50.
- 44 Guizot, *History of Civilization*, 221. On the influence of Guizot, see Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *Reformers of Egypt*, 6, 8; Hourani, *Islamic Thought*, 114, 132.
- 45 Thomas Beighton, quoted in A.C. Milner, 'A Missionary Source for a Biography of Munshi Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, liii (1980), 118.
- 46 *Al Imam*, 12 July 1907.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 3 April 1908, 327.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 3 April 1908, 327; 1 June 1908, 390; 4 February 1908, 255ff.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 9 September 1907, 87–8.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 14 February 1908, 252–3.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 9 September 1907, 86–7; "...Yang menimbulkan cahaya akal dengan berbagai khidmat dan yang menunjukkan bagi akal itu kepada mengenal yang sebenarnya". For further discussions of the *shari'ah*, see, for instance, *ibid.*, 4 February 1908, 252ff.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 12 July 1907.
- 53 Muhammad Abduh, *The Theology of Unity*, 151.
- 54 Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet, Learning and Power in Modern Iran* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), 108.
- 55 See chapter 6.
- 56 In this respect, see the English translations of certain writings by Ibn-Taymiyyah: Omar A. Farrukh, *Ibn Taymiyya on Public and Private Law in Islam* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966); *Ibn Taymiyya, Public Duties in Islam* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1982); see also the "catechism" of the Wahhabis, printed in J.L. Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys* (London, 1830).
- 57 Syed Muhammad Al-Naguib Al-Atas, *Islam and Secularism*, 141.
- 58 Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 313.



## CHAPTER 8

### *Kerajaan Self-reform: Chronicling a New Sultanate*

At the opening of the twentieth century only certain members of the *kerajaan* élite retreated from the challenges of modernity. Others saw genuine opportunities arising from the political and economic consequences of British colonialism. In the state of Johore, for instance, there occurred a relatively well-documented attempt to respond in a creative manner both to the British Raj and to the type of liberal doctrines about politics and the state which were being expanded in the newspaper, *Utusan Melayu*. A royal ideologue from Johore, Haji Mohd. Said bin Haji Sulaiman, wrote a narrative account of his sultanate which displays ingenuity in grappling with essentially hostile ideas. By accommodating and even reformulating certain elements of a rival philosophy, this author helped the immediate fortunes of the Johore dynasty. The long-term consequences, however, may have been very different.

Haji Mohd. Said, who was the personal secretary of the Johore Sultan, wrote his study at about the same time as the *Utusan* and *Al Imam* were being published. It was first printed in 1908 and republished in 1911, 1919 and 1930. A clear indication of the contents of this work is suggested by the title, the *Hikayat Johor dan Tawarikh al-Marhum Sultan Abu Bakar* (The Account of Johore and the History of the Late Sultan Abu Bakar).<sup>1</sup> In the manner of much earlier *kerajaan* literature, the *hikayat* focuses on the state's ruling family. In other ways too it is reminiscent of traditional writing. It has a strongly panegyric tone, often uses the established language of court literature and tends to be preoccupied with ceremonial matters. Despite these features, however, the *Hikayat Johor* is innovatory in highly significant ways. Like the *Utusan* and *Al Imam*, it comments in its own manner on the consequences of the British presence. Moreover, the idiom in which the text is written is

intriguingly different from that of the courtly *hikayats* which Abdullah had condemned a half-century earlier.

### **The *kerajaan* in retreat**

In what context was the *Hikayat Johor* written? Before comparing it with other *kerajaan* literature, and bringing it into dialogue with the liberal and Islamic writings produced in the Straits Settlements, something further needs to be said of the historical circumstances of the Malay courts at the opening of the twentieth century.

When *Al Imam* had praised Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore (d. 1895) for rescuing his state from the “jaws of a savage tiger”, it suggested the way at least some Malays saw the expansion of British power into the sultanates of the peninsula. Over the previous century, the British had established possession of the Straits Settlements and then begun to exercise a gunboat diplomacy in many regions of the archipelago. Beginning in the 1870s, from the perspective of the royal courts, the British had bullied a series of peninsula sultanates into accepting a British adviser whose advice was to be “asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom”.<sup>2</sup> In the last decades of the nineteenth century, these advisers (or ‘Residents’) had established elaborate bureaucracies and fostered a sophisticated tin and rubber industry.

The advance of British power and of capitalism did not entail, of course, the direct imposition of colonial rule. Unlike the situation in Burma, for instance, the Malay rulers did not lose their thrones and their sovereignty. If the sultans had glanced over their shoulders at the neighbouring British presence in that nearby Southeast Asian country, they might even have considered themselves fortunate. After the conquest of Burma, the king had been exiled and the institution of kingship abolished. In Burma (as in the Straits Settlements colony), British officials governed rather than advised.<sup>3</sup> In the Malay states, the sultans retained not merely their thrones but also the power of pardon in criminal law. As “rulers-in-council”, they continued to be the only source of legislative authority in their states, and it was they who formally appointed officials and bestowed titles. Much of Malay royal court ceremony was also maintained and court chronicles were still composed. As the heads of the Islamic religion in their states, the sultans had the authority to control religious teaching or publishing. In fact, their power to prohibit all types of opposition was often commented upon. The people did not get “mixed up in politics” before the Second World War, William Roff was told, because they were “afraid of the Sultan”.<sup>4</sup>

In these ways the Malay rulers were indeed fortunate. They even had reason to be confident that they would retain this type of British support. We know from the administrative records in the British archives that the colonial officials were wary of tampering with established social systems in Malaya. Fearing the expense of war or police suppression, and perhaps remembering the turmoil which followed the abolition of monarchy in Burma, the British believed (in the words of one senior official) that without the sultans the "Malays would become a mob".<sup>5</sup> But although such British sentiments made the sultans relatively fortunate in terms of the colonial situation in other regions, it is unlikely that their actual perception of the future reflected this optimistic judgement. They may have been reassured to some extent by their continued possession of sovereignty, and of certain specific powers, but other developments would have seemed genuinely threatening. The danger of exile or even of the imposition of a Burmese-style colonial government must always have been feared. The fate of the ruler of Perak, the first state to receive a British Resident, was probably stamped on the collective memory of all Malay royalty. The Perak Resident had been murdered by some of the Sultan's men. As a result, the British sent a military force, exiled the Sultan and executed the Malay officials considered directly responsible for the Resident's death. In the state of Pahang, some fifteen years later, Malay resistance was again crushed by British force.<sup>6</sup>

In the light of such demonstrations of imperialist tenacity, the royal courts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century would have wished to manage the British relationship with diplomacy and even guile. From the point of view of many rulers, the period of British influence was seen as a time of prudent but distasteful compromise. Occasionally, the colonial records reveal the type of changes which such monarchs must have abhorred. It was observed in 1891 that after the introduction of British "protection", Malay commoners had become "far less submissive to ill treatment".<sup>7</sup> Reports from Selangor and Pahang in the early twentieth century indicate a decline in the particular practice of commoners squatting on the ground as a ruler passed<sup>8</sup>. As Gullick has pointed out, the power of the sultans to punish crime was also much restricted and even in the formulation of personal law – marriage rules for instance – they were compelled to pay respect to colonial advice. When the rulers in the Federated Malay States, for instance, attempted to introduce a Muslim code in the last years of the nineteenth century, it took some eight years of negotiations with the European administration before the "Mohammedan Law Enactment" was passed in each state council.<sup>9</sup>

In a more general way the rulers witnessed a dramatic transformation of their states, a transformation largely organized by outsiders. As Emily Sadka has observed in her examination of the last decades of the nineteenth century, the

populations, industries, administrations and chief towns had become predominantly alien ... [the] intrusion of the world economy was accompanied by the growth of a large and highly-developed administration, directed and staffed by non-Malays, paid for by non-Malay taxation and largely serving non-Malay commercial interests."<sup>10</sup>

Various studies emphasize that these great changes bypassed the Malays in nearly every sense. Colonial Malaya is said to have been a dual society. On the one hand there existed what was described as a "bustling commercial outfit" and on the other a "Malay museum".<sup>11</sup> Yet Malay society was a museum only in relative terms. The very presence of the huge Chinese and Indian populations – however socially distant they may have been from the Malays – was a persistent preoccupation of Malay newspapers. This immigrant population, together with the capitalist economy and all the emblems of British supremacy, such as the massive public buildings and extensive railway system, must have convinced the Malay rulers, no less than the editors of the *Utusan* and *Al Imam*, that they had entered a New Age. The Sultan of Perak, who travelled to London in 1902 for the coronation of Edward VII, perceived this fact with clarity. Overwhelmed by the sight of the spectacular military review, he considered that his ancestors had, by contrast with himself, lived as "frogs beneath an inverted cocoa-nut shell who dreamed not that there was any world beyond the narrow limits in which they were pent."<sup>12</sup>

Even when the late nineteenth-century rulers directed their attention specifically to their own Malay communities they would have been confronted by certain unmistakable indications of social change taking place behind the façade of the "Malay museum". Some Malays were receiving new forms of education and moving into new, urban-based, occupations. Others had responded to fresh commercial opportunities and taken advantage of the innovations in land law. By the end of the century, at the latest, we know that a section of the *kerajaan* élite recognized the threat arising from these developments. They saw the necessity to respond not merely to British imperialism but also to the emergence of new middle-class élites propounding hostile doctrines. Haji Mohd. Said's *Hikayat Johor* is an example of a text which confronts both types of challenge. Moreover, in struggling with these challenges, the author develops a strategy which is both resourceful and imaginative.

## Johore

The polity of Johore was in a curious situation in relation to the British.<sup>13</sup> It did not receive a British “adviser” until 1914 but for almost a century before that time the state had functioned and grown in the shadow of the rapidly growing colony of Singapore. To use *Al Imam*’s language, Johore must persistently have felt the breath of the British tiger, and in its own way the *Hikayat Johor* expresses this anxiety. The island of Singapore had itself once been subject to Johore, and the British, when acquiring the island, became much entangled in the dynastic politics of the Sultanate. In the nineteenth century the peninsular territories of Johore had increasingly fallen under the personal control of the family which held the title ‘Temenggong’ in the hierarchy of the polity. These officials, the Temenggongs, had initially administered this region on behalf of the Sultanate (based on the island of Lingga). But they saw opportunity as well as threat in the British presence in the region, and thus when they assumed an actual formal control of the peninsular territories in the 1850s, they did so with the approval of the British governor in Singapore. As the island sections of Johore – those in the Riau archipelago and on Sumatra – slipped beneath Dutch sovereignty, the new peninsular dynasty began to fashion a Malay polity which might gain British respect and, thus, non-interference. In this sense, Johore was reacting to British authority and policies even before the first Resident was appointed in Perak in 1874. As we saw in earlier chapters, one way in which Johore reacted was to participate in the colony’s program of European education.

Johore was unusual in its openness, or perhaps vulnerability, to ideologies imported either from Europe or from the Middle East. It was in a sense a new kingdom, or principality, and one whose rulers possessed questionable genealogical credentials. The process by which the Temenggong family took control of peninsular Johore was gradual. It took a number of decades for them to assume control of the state and, even then, they did not immediately adopt the title ‘sultan’. Only in 1868 did Temenggong Abu Bakar – the central figure of the *Hikayat Johor* – take the title of ‘maharajah’. In 1885 he assumed that of ‘sultan’. (Two years later one of his most senior officials announced that the new Sultan intended to make Johore “the greatest Malay power, to keep her free and to make her rich.”<sup>14</sup>) Temenggong Abu Bakar’s ascension was seen by some Malays to have been that of an upstart, and his Bugis (Sulawesi) blood was ridiculed. A mischievous *pantun* (poem) of the time declared that just as the “kris is drawn from a wooden sheath, the Temenggong has become a Sultan though his royal forebears are Bugis.”<sup>15</sup>

The genealogical claims of the Johore Sultans were thus somewhat suspect and, perhaps partly as a result, their diplomatic, administrative and commercial talents (and also their longevity) were not to be ridiculed. The observation applies not merely to Ibrahim (1841–62) and Abu Bakar (1862–95), but also to Abu Bakar's son, again named Ibrahim (1895–1959). As Carl Trocki has explained, these rulers forged an alliance with the British, becoming unofficial policemen on behalf of the Singapore government on the peninsula. Following Malay traditional administrative methods, they asserted control over the vigorous Chinese communities in the region, drawing income from their highly profitable gambier/opium economy.<sup>16</sup>

The Johore line won respect from many sides. *Al Imam* praised these rulers both for maintaining the independence of a small Islamic state and for promoting Islam and religious education in their realm<sup>17</sup>. British officials, on the other hand, considered Abu Bakar in particular, to be "civilized". In "tastes and habits", according to one English acquaintance, he seemed "an English gentleman". He was even reputed to have succeeded in amusing Queen Victoria whom he visited in England. Abu Bakar obtained the high imperial honours of GCMG (Knight Grand Cross of the order of St Michael and St George) and KCSI (Knight Commander of the order of the Star of India) from the British government; he was also awarded the Royal Prussian Order of the Crown, the Commander of the Cross of Italy and the Commander of the Cross of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.<sup>18</sup>

The policies of Sultan Abu Bakar's new state contained much that may have been designed to win praise, not just from the British but also from the liberal and Islamic critics of the *kerajaan* who were gaining influence in the Malay community. The fact that the Temenggong Sultans welcomed Islamic teachers of repute, assembled appropriate legal texts and organized a regular religious hierarchy,<sup>19</sup> may help to explain the praise they received in *Al Imam*. The rulers' eyes, however, were never focused on a narrow segment of potential critics. Sultan Abu Bakar told the Singapore governor that he had revised his state's legal code to make it "more conformable to European ideas".<sup>20</sup> Perhaps again to impress Europeans and their Malay admirers such as the editor and readers of the *Utusan*, the Sultan formed a police force modelled on the Singapore police<sup>21</sup> and provided the state with what a contemporary described as "well-laid out roads...large airy hospitals, waterworks, and wharfs". The palace too displayed many European influences. It was "filled up with every European comfort and luxury."<sup>22</sup>

In the field of education, as we have noted, the Johore rulers again acted with special energy. Temenggong Ibrahim gave financial

assistance to Keasberry's school and co-operated with the Governor in setting up the Malay schools at Telok Belanga and Kampong Gelam.<sup>23</sup> This Temenggong was said to have told the British in 1855 that he was "fully impressed with the importance of imparting Education to Malayan Youth".<sup>24</sup> He even agreed to send two of his sons – one of whom was Abu Bakar – to the Keasberry school. The Governor concluded that, as a result, the boys would gain "together with a perfect knowledge of their own language, some degree of insight into European knowledge and science and probably... a fair acquaintance with the English language."<sup>25</sup> Other members of the Johore élite were also trained at the Keasberry school and when the old missionary died in 1875, Temenggong Abu Bakar had a monument erected over his grave.<sup>26</sup> Abu Bakar also continued to assist the Telok Belanga school, offering it accommodation in one of his former palaces and allowing his private secretary to join the teaching staff.<sup>27</sup> A British government report of 1888 declared that at the Telok Belanga school "the influence of H.H. The Sultan of the State and Territory of Johore, has always been actively exercised in favour of education." According to this report, it was the best Malay school in the Straits Settlements.<sup>28</sup> Its graduates, again "due to the influence of H.H." (the Johore ruler), sometimes went on to higher education at the Raffles Institution.<sup>29</sup> As we saw in the case of one of those graduates, Eunus of the *Utusan*, this educational experience might have had a significant impact in the ideological sphere.<sup>30</sup>

The author of the *Hikayat Johor*, Haji Mohd. Said, was not one of those members of the Johore élite who studied at the Keasberry school. Like Eunus, he attended the Telok Belanga school and the Raffles Institution.<sup>31</sup> As they were born in the same year (1876), Haji Mohd. Said and Eunus may well have attended the same classes. They differed greatly, however, in the careers which they followed. Haji Mohd. Said, who died only in 1955, spent most of his life in the service of the Sultan. He was private secretary to the Sultan, a major in the Johore Military Forces and for a time the head of the Post Office. He travelled to Europe and East Asia with the Sultan. He was a prolific author who, like Eunus, was concerned to introduce English terminology and style to Malay. Not all of Haji Mohd. Said's contemporaries praised his writings. Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba), the prominent Malay writer of the inter-war period who had good reason for resenting the *kerajaan* élite, commented with disdain that the Johore author's aim seemed "to be primarily to add number and quantity to Malay literature".<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, as his *Hikayat Johor* text reveals, Haji Mohd. Said clearly had some talent for innovation.

### The text

At one level, the *Hikayat Johor* is a survey of the history of Johore under the rule of the Temenggong's family and with a particular emphasis on Sultan Abu Bakar. The concern with this ruler is such that the text actually concludes with his funeral in 1895. Because the *Hikayat* is written from the *raja's* perspective, contains much other 'traditional' subject matter, and employs a good deal of courtly language, it has been called a "conventional eulogy".<sup>33</sup> Yet even the form of presentation of the book is an indication of its departure from traditional style.

Unlike most *hikayats*, especially those of an earlier period, the Johore text possesses a preface and a table of contents; each chapter has a prominent heading providing both title and chapter number. The preface sets out the author's aims and makes a comment on what we might call the methodology of the book. It opens with the statement: "This is a short account (*hikayat*) which tells with brevity the story of the affairs of the state of Johore." The term *hikayat*, of course, suggests the text might be a conventional court document: court prose texts from many regions of the Malay world – texts which explain and celebrate the institution of kingship – are generally described as *hikayat*. But the *Hikayat Johor* is not, in fact, presented as a *hikayat* of a ruling house. Although the text is usually preoccupied with Sultan Abu Bakar, it is spelt out specifically that this is the *hikayat* of the "state (*negeri*) of Johore." That is, its subject is not a ruling house but a territorial state. Even in the *Hikayat Pahang*, a text written a few years after the Johore text (and perhaps a Pahang attempt to compete with the Johore rulers), the declared focus is the traditional one of the *raja*.<sup>34</sup> The late nineteenth-century Riau text, the *Tuhfat al Nafis* also pronounces itself a "narrative of the Malay and Bugis kings".<sup>35</sup> The Johore account's concern with the *negeri*, therefore, suggests similarity with the geography (the *Hikayat Dunia*) and Abdullah's writings rather than with most *kerajaan* texts.

After declaring this interest in the *negeri*, the preface then signals another innovation in the way in which it introduces the British. The *hikayat*, it is explained, will not only relate the tale of how the Temenggong obtained Johore. It will also inform its readers about Singapore and about how the English race "opened up" that settlement. The story of Johore, that is to say, is to be related to some extent in the context of British colonial expansion. Such a perspective is novel for a *hikayat* but hardly surprising at a time when the presence of a growing British power would have been the dominant political development in the region. Finally, in this discussion of purposes, the preface observes that the book will be concerned in particular with



Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, from his birth until his burial on 7 September 1895. As this statement suggests, the largest portion of the book is indeed devoted to this ruler.

The methodology of the book is now described. Just as the emphasis on the *negeri* rather than the ruling family reminds one of Abdullah and the geography, so in this discussion of 'approach' there are again echoes of the mid-nineteenth century, Straits Settlements' writings. As a student of the Telok Belanga school, Haji Mohd. Said, like Eunus, would almost certainly have read these works. The preface of the *Hikayat Johor* explains that the stories related by the text "are gathered from various recollections and reports which have been proven to be true, and also from printed books". For this reason adds the text, "it is to be hoped that [the stories] will satisfy those who read them." The stress given to "printed books", which suggests the somewhat magical authority which print was able to bestow on knowledge, is not found in the mid-nineteenth-century writings. Nevertheless, this methodological testimony makes similar claims to those we encountered in the geography, which, it may be recalled, declared its intention to "investigate" all types of sources and to see "things as they are in the world." In declaring its method in such a manner, the *Hikayat Johor* aims at a new type of responsibility and authority. It also makes far-reaching concessions to the ideologies which rivalled that of the *kerajaan*.

The preface now proceeds to establish common ground with both the *Utusan* and *Al Imam* in its use of the word *tawarikh* (history). This *hikayat* has been written, explains the preface, in the knowledge that there is not yet a "*hikayat* which might be compared with a history (*tawarikh*)" about the great Malay *raja*, Sultan Abu Bakar. The term *tawarikh*, as noted in our discussion of the *Utusan* and *Al Imam*, had only been introduced to Malay in recent times. In the early 1900s it conveyed a strong sense of the empiricism and historical process so characteristic of contemporary European approaches to the writing of history.

The following section of the preface anticipates themes which are pursued in the rest of the text. Some of these again reflect an awareness of the issues raised in Straits Settlements' Malay writings of the preceding half-century. The themes are announced in the context of a summary of the principal qualities and achievements of Sultan Abu Bakar. He is said to be a *raja* famous for his skills, good disposition and manners – a conventional compliment in much *kerajaan* literature. He is also reported to have obtained several ranks and insignia from great states, a reference to the honours which he received in England, Europe and Southeast Asia. Finally, Sultan Abu Bakar is described in a passage rich with significance as having been "energetic" in "raising the

reputation (*nama*) of the *negeri* and *kerajaan* of Johore and also of its subjects who are of the Malay race.” He had created modern (*moden*) institutions and had also been “clever at handling foreign governments (*kerajaan*), especially the English government, so that he was able to leave Johore to his son and heir in peace and freedom (*kemerdekaan*).” The quality of “energy” or “industry” which the Sultan is said to have displayed, is that constantly stressed in the *Utusan*. The use of the traditional concept, *nama*, however, is deceptive. It is not merely the *nama* of the *kerajaan* which is raised (as a conventional eulogistic text might suggest). Rather, just as in the *Utusan*’s phraseology about service to the state, the Sultan’s success raises the *nama* of the *negeri* and of its Malay subjects.

The actual linking of *kerajaan* and *negeri* is particularly noteworthy. It instantly indicates the felt inadequacy of the word *kerajaan* to describe the Johore ‘state’. In the manner of the Straits Settlements writings, the *Hikayat Johor* implies a certain distinction between the ruler (Sultan Abu Bakar), the government (*kerajaan*), and the state (*negeri*). Furthermore, in referring to Johore’s “subjects who are of the Malay race”, the *hikayat* places the Malay people of Johore in a broad, Malay community, a community far more extensive than that generally designated in court writings. That is, the subjects are not referred to merely in terms of the *raja* or the ‘state’, but also as members of the Malay race. In fact, the ruler himself is described in the *hikayat* as a “Malay raja” and here too the emphasis on ‘Malay’ tends to imply that his triumphs might bring credit to a wider social group than that of Johore. This *bangsa Melayu* (Malay race) was also a preoccupation of the author’s old classmate, Eunus.

The *Hikayat Johor* follows the *Utusan* once again in its concern with *moden*, a term which was itself very modern in Malay. In the text the Sultan’s success in raising the *nama* of his state and people seems to flow from his achievements in establishing *moden* institutions in Johore and in what might be called foreign policy. In drawing attention to the Sultan’s maintenance of the “freedom” of his state, the *Hikayat* again conveys a *moden* tone by using a word, *merdeheka*, which we have noted was in vogue in the Straits Settlements at that time. Like the concepts of “energy”, “state”, “race”, and “modern”, it is introduced in the preface and elaborated later in the book.

The prominence given to Sultan Abu Bakar’s handling (or manipulation) of the British is an obvious indication of the British context in which the new Johore polity was formed. In boasting of a skilful and ‘modern’ government, the text suggests the way the Johore rulers worked to impress, and to keep at arm’s length, the British in Singapore. But these boasts in a Malay document written in Jawi script are

unlikely to have been intended primarily for British readers. Nor is there any reason to assume that the book was merely a typical *kerajaan* attempt to compete by means of *hikayat* writing with neighbouring and rival sultanates, though this may well have been one motive for producing the text. The *Hikayat Johor* might also be viewed as an answer to some of the ideological challenges presented in the *Utusan Melayu* and other writings directed at certain sections of the Malay community in that period. The *Hikayat Johor* may have been composed in particular as a reply to the Malay groups which were beginning to question the monarchical system. In adopting some key terms in the vocabulary of the liberal and *bangsa*-minded writings, the Johore text, commencing in the preface, announces in effect that it sets out to justify Malay monarchy within a new discourse.

The final paragraph of the preface deals with matters which are familiar to readers of many books, especially academic books, written today. This paragraph contains the author's 'acknowledgements'. He thanks, first, the reigning Sultan (Sultan Ibrahim succeeded Sultan Abu Bakar in 1895) and, secondly, Dato Mohamed Mahbub (State Secretary of Johore 1911; appointed Chief Minister in 1920).<sup>36</sup> Homage to the Sultan, of course, is hardly novel in *hikayat* writing but (as was indicated in our discussion of Abdullah's style) a personal statement from the author is not a feature of *kerajaan* literature. Although Haji Mohd. Said does not use the very personal and familiar *aku* for 'I', but rather the more formal *hamba*, he concludes the preface by stating his own name, together with the place and date of completion. The place is "Johore Bahru" and the date is given not in the Arabic calendar but in the calendar of the colonialists across the Straits in Singapore.

Those reading the *Hikayat Johor* – and they included school students, because the author actually thanks Sultan Ibrahim for approving of the use of the *hikayat* in "places of education" – would realize even by reading the preface alone that the *Hikayat Johor* was a new type of royal text. They would see that in its way the *hikayat* was addressing issues of relevance to literate Malays in the Straits Settlements as well as Johore during the opening years of the nineteenth century. In the *Hikayat Johor*, too, so the preface suggests, the world is perceived in terms of *bangsa* and *negeri*, of races and territorial states; modernity is presented as a desirable object of government policy and the Johore state is portrayed as actively pursuing that same "freedom" or "independence" which, according to contemporary newspapers, was so much desired in many other parts of Asia.

Quite apart from the actual content of the text, the mode in which it is written would also have seemed amazingly different from that of most *kerajaan* literature. Not merely is the individual author explicitly present

but the readers might soon recognize in the *hikayat* numerous elements of the style of writing and analysis which was gaining respect among the middle-class readership of the colony and the states under British 'protection'. In the *hikayat* the individual author addresses his readers directly, assuring them that the book they are about to commence is based on "truth". The author explicitly and personally distances both himself and his intended audience from the apparently fantastic and anonymous world created in traditional courtly writing.

### Audience

Not all of Haji Mohd. Said's *kerajaan* audience, it must be stressed, would have been startled by the novelty of his *Hikayat*. The concerns, the themes and the epistemology alluded to in the preface, together with the language employed, would already have been encountered by members of the Johore court. We know that, for instance, a number of the Johore élite, including the future Sultan Abu Bakar, had been educated in the Keasberry and other Singapore schools. Indeed, certain other Malay books from the late nineteenth century suggest the *Hikayat Johor* was, to some extent, the product of an intellectual court circle, a group of people who perhaps gained confidence from sharing ideas with one another. *The Voyages of Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi* is another of their products.<sup>37</sup>

The author of this travel account, Mohd. Ibrahim (1840–1904), who was a son of Munshi Abdullah, was educated at the Keasberry school at the same time as the young Sultan Abu Bakar and later served the Johore dynasty in several high offices<sup>38</sup>. The printing of Mohd. Ibrahim's *Voyages*<sup>39</sup> was actually arranged by the author of the *Hikayat Johor*. Like his father, Mohd. Ibrahim wrote in a matter-of-fact style and in the first person. The descriptions of places, events and individuals are all authenticated in the observations of the authorial 'I'. Although presenting himself in a traditional manner as a loyal subject of the Sultanate of Johore, Mohd. Ibrahim also portrays ordinary people telling risqué stories, listening to bird calls in the jungle, "talking, laughing and joking".<sup>40</sup> The *Voyages* of Munshi Ibrahim are less didactic in tone than those of his father but they, too, deal with the Malays as a community and not merely as subjects of sultans. Mohd. Ibrahim is pleased, for example, to find that in Malacca "the Malays live by their own efforts." These people, he says, are "all hard working, not like Malays elsewhere".<sup>41</sup> In the manner to be assumed later by Haji Mohd. Said, Mohd. Ibrahim also adopts the practice of quoting from "printed books". He took material for instance, from John Cameron's *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, published in 1865, and from the English language newspaper, the *Singapore Daily Times*.<sup>42</sup>

A further student of Keasberry, Mohd. Salleh bin Perang (1841–1915), was also writing at the turn of the century about the modernization of Johore government.<sup>43</sup> He too rose to high rank in the sultanate's administration. In a book of 1894 he wrote about the establishment of a Johore police force and about making "laws appropriate for a country which was adjacent to European territory".<sup>44</sup> In an account of his lineage and his life, Mohd. Salleh describes Johore being "opened up" by the government. Roads were constructed, and he gives an account of the process of "surveying and determining boundaries"<sup>45</sup> between land holdings. He himself was put in charge of surveying and claims that "after more than three years, the map of Johore was complete." That map, he adds, "was pronounced correct by the head surveyor in London".<sup>46</sup> Considering that Mohd. Salleh was a professional surveyor, it is not surprising that his writings stress the physical aspect of the State of Johore. The stress is clear even in a metaphor which he employs to describe his own life. When he compares himself, in the spirit of *kerajaan* literature, to a plant living on a giant tree "spreading myself over it and winding myself around every branch and fork", the tree is not the ruler but the state (*negeri*) of Johore.<sup>47</sup>

In their use of modern political concepts, together with a relatively 'realistic' style and an explicit authorial voice, the writings of Mohd. Salleh and Mohd. Ibrahim must have helped to establish the canons and vocabulary which are encountered in the *Hikayat Johor* and distinguished this text from most court *hikayat*. These earlier writings would also have prepared a certain number of readers within Johore for the innovations which were to appear in Haji Mohd. Said's work.

The innovatory themes and features which are anticipated in the preface of the *Hikayat Johor*, as suggested already, frame the rest of the text. The *hikayat* is divided into twenty-six chapters of which Chapters 6 to 26 are concerned with the reign of Sultan Abu Bakar. Chapter 1 introduces the *kerajaan Johor*, and at this point *kerajaan* is used in the old sense to imply the 'country' as well as the 'ruler' and 'government'. (As if to mark the dawning of a new era, *kerajaan* begins to convey only 'government' when the narrative reaches the nineteenth century.) It is certainly the country, the physical state of Johore, which is introduced to the reader in the opening pages. In a manner which conflicts completely with traditional *hikayat* (but is consistent with Keasberry's geography) the text records the size, population and boundaries of the state. It then relates briefly the history of Johore: again the focus is on the *negeri* although the *hikayat*, just like so many earlier royal texts,<sup>48</sup> also presents a legitimizing case for the reigning dynasty.

After the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511, the text explains, Johore became the head *negeri* – the *kepala negeri*. (This is a concept quite new to Malay political thought but is used in Keasberry's *Hikayat*

*Dunia* to describe Brunei's position in Borneo.) In relating the history of Johore, Haji Mohd. Said reveals his sources. He refers to several Malay texts, such as the *Malay Annals* and the *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis* (The Genealogy of the Malays and Bugis), and also cites the evidence of old gravestones. In discussing these materials, the text communicates a sense of that earnest verification of sources which was promised in the preface. Having emphasized the greatness of Johore in early times, the *hikayat* now traces the advance of the family of Sultan Abu Bakar. The death of Sultan Mohamad of the old Malacca ruling line in 1699 is – as has often been emphasized by scholars of Malaysian history – a decisive turning point.<sup>49</sup> It is stressed that this Sultan is replaced not by one of his own blood but by his *Bendahara*, or 'Chief Minister'. This particular succession, at least in an indirect manner, is of great significance to the Temenggong dynasty. The Temenggongs of Johore (Sultan Abu Bakar's family), just like their former *suzerains*, the sultans, take their descent from this Bendahara Sultan of 1699 and so are able to claim an equal genealogical status.

The next chapter of the *Hikayat Johor* describes the actual break-up of the old Johore empire and the coming of English government to Malacca. From this point onwards, events are described in the *hikayat* as occurring in the context not merely of the state and royal government of Johore but also of the British empire. Malay leaders, for instance, are now judged in part by their ability to get along with the British. Sultan Abu Bakar's grandfather is praised on this account, and in discussing him, the *Hikayat Johor* specifically quotes the *Hikayat Abdullah*.

### Ibrahim and Abu Bakar

The next three chapters deal with Ibrahim, the father of Abu Bakar. It was Temenggong Ibrahim who obtained sovereignty of most of the peninsular territory of the earlier Johore royal line (with whom, in fact, he shared the blood of the 1699 Sultan). Not unexpectedly the *Hikayat Johor* gives a highly favourable description of the way Ibrahim consolidated his position on the peninsula. He is portrayed as possessing the traditional qualities of fine manners and generous disposition and as being much loved by his people. He is said to have won friends among the British. With Ibrahim commences the tradition of Johore rulers receiving imperial honours from the British Crown. As signalled in the preface, the obtaining of ranks and insignia from foreign states is a principal concern of the text. The British empire in particular is portrayed at times almost as a new field in which to advance the *nama* of a Malay ruler.

The *Hikayat Johor* also presents Temenggong Ibrahim as seeking and promoting education. This claim is sometimes made for rulers in traditional *kerajaan* literature.<sup>50</sup> In the Johore text, however, it is not the scholarship of Islam or the learning of traditional culture which is emphasised, but Western education. The Keasberry school is explicitly referred to as a “place of education” where children learnt “writing and other knowledge”.<sup>51</sup> The possession of superior knowledge, in fact, is even revealed to be a key to the explanation of how Ibrahim was able to take possession of peninsular Johore. The concern for this particular type of knowledge also suggests the presence of a new view of government in the *kerajaan* Malay world. Members of the Sultan’s family are described in the *hikayat* as handing Johore over to the Temenggong because they “do not know how to organize the affairs of the country and its tributaries”.<sup>52</sup> This statement, it is clear, alludes to more than knowledge. Thus, just as the preface stressed the ‘energy’ of Sultan Abu Bakar, we are again given a sense of government as a dynamic, ‘organizing’ activity.

The distinction made between traditional and modern government by the joint authors of the survey, *In Search of Southeast Asia* (published in the 1970s) throws some light on this innovatory perception of government in Johore. Although the distinction is somewhat overdrawn, it is nevertheless helpful in examining Malay sultanates to contrast the traditional ruler whose main function was “to be, symbolizing in his person an agreed upon social order, a cultural ideal, and a state of harmony with the cosmos”, with the modern type of governments (usually colonial) which “existed primarily to do, providing themselves with a permanently crowded agenda of specific tasks to accomplish”.<sup>53</sup> The lethargy of governments in traditional Southeast Asia, of course, ought not to be exaggerated: the acquisition and defence of kingly authority often demanded much vigorous activity. The Johore leaders, however, at least as portrayed in the *Hikayat Johor*, appear to have acknowledged such a distinction and were obviously inspired by the British model of a “to do” government. They might well have learned of this type of administration not merely from the example of the colonial government itself but also from such writings as Abdullah’s books and the geography. Like these works, the *Hikayat Johor* judges ‘government’ in terms of the ability to deliver solutions to what it presents as practical problems. In this text’s presentation, it is not because of superior birth-right or the possession of special regalia that the Temenggong is able to take over Johore but rather because he is able to deliver what we might today call “good government”.

The narrative now continues by explaining that after an agreement involving a regular financial payment to the old Johore Sultan, the

Temenggong assumes control and the “energy” of his government is immediately apparent. With “diligence and energy”<sup>54</sup> he brings people to Johore to open up plantations, attracts the capital of Singapore merchants and negotiates a border agreement. Such a governmental agenda is very different from that, for instance, of the contemporary *kerajaan* leadership of Pahang. At least this is the impression given by a comparison of the Johore text with a Pahang royal *hikayat* written at about the same time. The rulers of Pahang, as portrayed in their chronicle, were still judged by the quality of their manners and of the ceremonies over which they presided.<sup>55</sup> Just as in Abdullah’s time (it may be recalled that he was especially critical of Pahang), the Pahang court seems to continue to neglect the practical matters which the Munshi thought were the real business of government. If Abdullah had toured the Malay states in the late nineteenth century rather than the 1830s, he would surely have been impressed by the hospitals, gaols and police of Johore. He would certainly have approved of the administrative agenda which the *Hikayat Johor* attributes to Temenggong Ibrahim and his successors.

Chapter 6 of the Johore text turns to Abu Bakar, who succeeded his father in 1862. The *hikayat* explains that Abu Bakar, born in 1833, studies ‘appropriate behaviour’ (*adab*) and religion (*agama*) and then proceeds to Singapore to attend Keasberry’s school. After finishing his education in Malay, Abu Bakar studies the English language. At this time he acquires the power of reason (*cukup akal*). In Abu Bakar’s education, the prominence of the Keasberry school is unmistakable. We will need to return to the question of why his Islamic religious education is given far less emphasis than his European training (even in the matter of fostering *akal*) in order to understand something of the Johore court’s reaction to the second (Islamic) type of critique.

The remaining chapters of the *Hikayat Johor*, chapters 7 to 26, relate the details of Sultan Abu Bakar’s career: his involvement in the Pahang wars which took place in the 1850s and 1860s; the creation of the state capital of Johore Bahru; Johore’s role in the extension of British power into other parts of the peninsula such as the states of Perak, Selangor and Pahang; the Johore ruler’s overseas travels; his assumption of the new titles of “maharajah” and, later, “sultan”; the writing of a constitution for Johore; the death of the Sultan and the arrangements for his funeral. In presenting this narrative, the *hikayat* retains in significant ways the perspective encountered in most *kerajaan* literature. In these twenty-one chapters, Sultan Abu Bakar is always at the centre of the text; the story of his life and deeds gives a unity to the narrative. He is certainly described in eulogistic terms and some of the qualities attributed to him are traditional ones. Just as in the preface, his



speaking voice is said in these chapters to be “sweet”; his disposition “sincere”. Some of his royal tasks are those commonly said by *kerajaan* texts to have been performed by Malay rulers. In particular, he bestows titles on people who “do service to the raja or to the *kerajaan*”<sup>56</sup>. Even the emphasis on the Sultan’s own achievements in obtaining foreign titles or orders seems an indication of the presence of a “courtly” perspective.

### Comparing texts

Despite these continuities with traditional *kerajaan* literature, these chapters also display the kind of novel features encountered in the earlier section of the book. It is revealing again to compare the *Hikayat Johor*’s account of Sultan Abu Bakar’s life with the way his contemporary, Sultan Ahmad of Pahang, is presented in the Pahang text which was also written in the opening years of the twentieth century. The differences between these two texts, particularly in their style of presentation and analysis, are considerable. It is true that the texts share some common ground. Like the Johore *hikayat*, the Pahang chronicle lacks mythical elements, gives careful attention to the arrival of the British and takes obvious pride in the award to the Pahang Sultan of a KCMG (Knight Commander of St Michael and St George) from “Edward, King of Great Britain and Emperor of India”.<sup>57</sup> (The imperial awards bestowed on the neighbouring Sultan Abu Bakar are unlikely to have passed the attention of the author of the *Hikayat Pahang*.) But the comparison goes little further. The Pahang text possesses no preface, no statement of a modern epistemology, no clear suggestion of modern concepts of state and government.<sup>58</sup> It is both anonymous and focused on a royal family rather than a polity or the Malay race. It differs again from the *Hikayat Johor* in being almost devoid of dates. Where the Pahang text does use dates is in its last few lines and it provides only the major dates of the life and reign of Pahang’s Sultan Ahmad. It also employs the Islamic calendar. The *Hikayat Johor* (again suggesting a more pronounced European influence) is punctuated with dates based on the Christian calendar and written in both Roman and Arabic figures.

The contrast between the Johore and Pahang texts – a contrast revealed in their respective styles of presentation as much as in any specific statements – is an immediate indication of just how different the Johore court was from some of its neighbours. The traditionalism of the Pahang work also tends to confirm the suggestion in European accounts of the period that the Pahang court exhibited a degree of conservatism not present in Johore. The *Hikayat Pahang* was produced in a court where we know British imperialism and European ideas were

not welcomed. The voice in which the text is written is consistent with the image which contemporary British accounts provide of an old Sultan brooding in the interior of his state, resentful of the British presence and unco-operative. He had only reluctantly accepted a British Resident in the 1880s, insisting then and later that the colonial officials “not interfere with the old customs of our country which have good and proper reasons”.<sup>59</sup> He persistently defended these “old customs” against British administrative encroachment and when conservative chiefs led a rebellion against the British, the Sultan appears to have offered it tacit support.<sup>60</sup> Later, he retreated up river. Surrounded by a household of hundreds of female domestics, and maintaining a *joget* dance troupe which often won the praise of European visitors,<sup>61</sup> Sultan Ahmad seems to have withdrawn into Malay tradition. It is not surprising that a court of this type sponsored a text such as the *Hikayat Pahang* which, even in the opening years of the twentieth century, asserts the primacy of long-established Malay literary and social tradition.<sup>62</sup>

The modernity of Sultan Abu Bakar’s court is also evident when it is compared with that of the state of Selangor. The ruler of Selangor may well have perceived the changes introduced by the British administrators very much as the Pahang ruler had perceived them. Sultan Abdul Samad (d. 1898) declared that he never:

fired an English gun in his life nor wished to fire one; that he preferred walking to driving, and eating with his fingers, according to Malay custom, to the use of forks; that wine was forbidden by the Koran and that he did not know how to play the piano.<sup>63</sup>

In Perak, by contrast, Sultan Idris (1889–1916) would seem to have had much more in common with Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore. The Perak ruler lived in a European house, travelled to England and employed an English tutor. He admitted that Perak was “a tiny country”, and his observations on its connection with Britain are reminiscent of the *Hikayat Johor*’s perception of the British Empire as a field for royal advancement. “It is a splendid thing to think that one belongs to such an Empire”, he declared. “None of my forebears, stowed away in their forests, enjoyed the greatness that is mine, in that I am a portion of something so very great.”<sup>64</sup>

Such sentiments suggest that had a *Hikayat Perak* been written during Sultan Idris’ reign it would have had much in common with the *Hikayat Johor*. Looked at in comparative terms both the Perak and Johore courts were pioneers in ideology-making. Like the Johore text, a Perak *hikayat* might also have appropriated key analytical concepts used in European and European-influenced writings. It too would not have taken an

entirely negative view of the British empire. As will be revealed in chapter 9 below, some three decades later, in the 1930s, the Perak court did indeed commission a text which adopts many of the perspectives of the *Hikayat Johor*.

### Coping with the British Raj

In contrast with many of the other Malay monarchs, the Johore and Perak rulers took a positive and even innovative approach to the British Raj. It is true that the Perak Sultan, who enjoyed the sensation of being a “portion of something so very great”, could have been exaggerating or concealing his real sympathies concerning the British empire. Yet he was almost certainly genuine in being awed by its “greatness”. Similarly, a prominent feature of the Johore text’s presentation of Sultan Abu Bakar’s reign is the earnest attention it gives to British power and British achievements. And it is just as clear in this *hikayat* as in the newspaper, the *Utusan*, that the British presence was believed to offer opportunities as well as dangers. British influence is seen to be everywhere. European officials are frequently mentioned. Much is said of the Sultan’s visits to England. Even celebratory feasts held by the Johore court are sometimes described as being in the “European style”. The *hikayat*, however, is concerned to describe not only the British themselves but more especially the Sultan’s actual response to the imperialist challenge. Thus, Abu Bakar is praised (just as he had been in *Al Imam*) for maintaining the independence of his state. In particular, his energy and diplomacy are emphasized. On a visit to England he “does not dawdle” but seeks ways to strengthen the position of his country. His “cleverness” and “skill” in handling Europeans is constantly applauded. There is a special tone of pride in the Johore text’s handling of Abu Bakar’s relations with the “Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the Empire of India”.<sup>65</sup>

The Sultan’s friendly relationship with Queen Victoria has often been commented upon.<sup>66</sup> The *Hikayat Johor*’s account is especially intriguing because it represents one way in which the sultanate’s connection with the Empire was presented to the Johore community. A description of the seating arrangements at a dinner held by the Queen (in England) is especially revealing. In the style of traditional courtly literature, the arrangements are described in some detail. We are told that the Sultan sits on the Queen’s right; Ungku Sulaiman (nephew of the Sultan) sits on her left. The significance in this statement is not that the Sultan holds a position of honour but that the description is presented in such a manner that the Queen, not the Malay ruler, is the focal point. To portray a Malay ruler in such a relation to

another sovereign is not itself a novel development in Malay court literature. Although the centrality of a ruler in his own polity was always asserted, Malay ideologues were not locked into doctrines which insisted on the primacy of a single royal house.<sup>67</sup> *Kerajaan* writers never seem to have denied the existence of other kingships even when they possessed a standing equal to, or higher than, that of their royal patron. Thus, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* speaks with awe of the mighty Ottoman empire.<sup>68</sup> In the same tradition, the Johore text situates its Johore sovereign in a subordinate relationship to the British empress.

The message of the *Hikayat Johor*, however, is not simply that the sultanate is able to accommodate British imperialism in a passive sense. Sultan Abu Bakar is presented as being active in obtaining actual advantages from the European relationship. Indeed, his successful performance within the empire is signalled as one of the achievements of his reign. The text seems almost to boast when the Johore ruler receives imperial honours, implying that as a result he held a special position among Malay *rajas*. The details of ceremonial encounters with British royalty, or with their representatives in Singapore, are also provided, and in a way which enhances Abu Bakar's prestige. In dealing with the mere governor in Singapore, so the text indicates, the Sultan relates not to a figure of power in his own right but only to a representative of the British monarch. Thus, when receiving an award at the Singapore Town Hall in 1876, it is stressed that the Governor gives a "speech on behalf of Her Royal Highness the Queen".<sup>69</sup> A later governor is said to speak on behalf of Queen Victoria on the occasion of Sultan Abu Bakar's death.<sup>70</sup>

Even in the very important business of assuming the title 'sultan' (in 1885), the text suggests that the Johore ruler made use of the British imperial connection. When the assumption of the new title is announced in Johore, it is explained that not only was the move "requested by the royal family and chiefs and subjects of Johore" but also "acknowledged by Her Majesty the Queen".<sup>71</sup> (The term for 'acknowledged' – *diaku* is generally used when Malays speak of 'acknowledging' or 'recognizing' a ruler.) This statement reinforces the impression that in the promotion of the royal *nama* or status, a concern well established in the ideological thinking of Malay courts, the imperial relationship was again efficacious. Both in the collecting of imperial awards and in the critical process of acquiring the title 'sultan', the British Empire is portrayed as being manipulated on behalf of the Johore rulers. Success in such manipulation, moreover, evidently had the effect of bolstering the Sultan's authority over the people of Johore.

Enlisting British recognition and support was an obvious strategy for the insecure Temenggong Sultans. Furthermore, the British

connection also offered new ceremonial opportunities, and this was no insignificant advantage for a Malay sultanate. The ritual of rulership, the niceties of formal communication, and the structuring of ceremonial systems were matters to which Malay rulers and their courts had long attributed great significance. It could be argued, as has been suggested in chapter 1, that ceremony had been the substance of the *kerajaan*. In the face of British political intervention and British cultural influence, some of the Malay royal courts engaged in what John Gullick has described as the “elaboration” of Malay custom. In certain states, “public ceremonies tended to become ever more lavish – and expensive”.<sup>72</sup> In the case of the isolated and rearward-looking state of Pahang (which we have compared with that of Johore) the preoccupation with “the old customs” was a form of retreat from modernity.

By contrast, in Johore and certain other sultanates, ceremony was perhaps used in a resourceful manner as a means of exploiting British colonialism and strengthening the *kerajaan* structure. (As always, the fear of foreign intervention would have been linked to anxiety about internal repercussions.) Integrating Malay and British royal ceremony – giving emphasis, for instance, to British as well as Malay titles – allowed Haji Sulaiman, the Johore writer, to assert the high status of his sovereign within the British imperial galaxy. Stressing the monarchical and ceremonial aspects of the colonial empire also added to the legitimacy of the sultanate’s own ceremonial structure at a time when the *kerajaan* was forced to compete with other concepts of community. Thus, the awarding of honours, the seventeen-gun salutes, the official dinners, the ‘loyal toasts’ and the elegant uniforms of the colonial empire and its distinguished official class would seem a far less revolutionary package than the egalitarian principles propounded by Munshi Abdullah and his successors.

The advantage for the Johore court of the imperial connection, as presented by the *Hikayat Johor*, was therefore twofold. On the one hand, the text claims for Sultan Abu Bakar and his father, Ibrahim, that because of their diplomatic abilities and energy they possessed a particular talent for saving the state of Johore from British imperial rule. On the other hand (and this point initially seems almost to contradict the first), the dynasty’s close relationship with the British is portrayed as actually enhancing the prestige both of the Temenggong Sultans and of monarchical rule in general.

### Government and vocabulary

The appropriation of the British Empire is only one of the ways in which the *Hikayat Johor* portrays Sultan Abu Bakar as exploiting the

British presence. The second type of borrowing is more surprising and more risk-laden. As the preface to the *Hikayat* suggests, Sultan Abu Bakar is also described as adopting key elements of the liberal ideology being propagated in the Straits Settlements. Like his father, Ibrahim, Abu Bakar is represented as the type of ruler whom Munshi Abdullah might have praised. He is described as an energetic, problem-solving ruler. His administration is said to cater not merely to the Malays but also to the growing immigrant population. He is successful in “looking after the Chinese subjects living in the state”,<sup>73</sup> and, at one point, the text offers a description of Chinese and Indians welcoming him home from an overseas journey.<sup>74</sup> In the emerging plural society in the Malay states, the sultans in later years would often claim a particular qualification to rule non-Malay people. Kingship, of course, was capable of reaching beyond race or nationality. To be a subject of a Malay ruler, no less than of a Habsburg, offered the opportunity of being free of nationality.<sup>75</sup>

Apart from the energy of his “to do” government, Abu Bakar is also sometimes described as if he participated in a modern, political, discourse. That is, the text itself uses some of the new vocabulary being enunciated by such papers as the *Utusan* and *Al Imam*, and in doing so attributes a tone of modernity to the Sultan’s administration. This appropriation of the language of a rival ideology is reminiscent of the way Eunos in the *Utusan* employs some of the key terms of *kerajaan* literature to enunciate the concept of the bangsa or ‘race’. In mentioning the aspiration that the “state of Johore” should maintain its “freedom” (*kemerdekaan*), or in referring to the concept of governing oneself (*berkerajaan sendiri*), it seems likely that the Johore text is not just reminding its readers that Sultan Abu Bakar achieved such objectives. It is also announcing that the sultanate had assimilated the doctrines themselves. The *Hikayat*’s author, Haji Mohd. Said, was writing in a language which his old classmate, Eunos of the *Utusan*, respected and used.

Adopting elements of a new mode of thinking about political life raised problems, certain of which the Johore court, or at least the *Hikayat Johor*, was able to solve. The use of the word *kerajaan* is a case in point. Like the newspapers of the colony, the text separates *kerajaan* from *raja* and, as a result, raises questions about the meaning of *kerajaan*. If the term once meant the “condition of having a raja”, it was now, in theory, possible to consider *kerajaan* independently of rajaship. Moreover, the signification of *kerajaan* was pruned back in a second direction. The emphasis in the *Hikayat Johor* on the territorial state as distinct from its ruler also limits the scope of *kerajaan*. It may have been the case that the model of the evolution of the British monarchy was a consideration in making this second distinction between *kerajaan* and

'state'. In England, there was no doubt that Queen Victoria or King Edward possessed a separate conceptual existence from that of the government or the state. The question is how Malay courts would be able to adapt to this new and narrower meaning of one of the key words in their political culture. If both the territorial dimension of the state and the monarch himself were now to be distinguished from the notion of *kerajaan*, how in these circumstances might *kerajaan* be redefined?

In the Straits Settlements, as we have noted, *kerajaan* was beginning to convey the relatively prosaic 'government'. Demoting so potent a signifier in this manner would be far more of a challenge for court writers. Indeed, it seems possible that the *Hikayat Johor* is alluding to what may have seemed to be the increasingly elusive character of this word when it relates Sultan Abu Bakar's attempts to assure the future of Johore. The Sultan is described as working toward "making permanent", "making strong" or "fixing", the "*kerajaan* of Johore"<sup>76</sup> and these phrases suggest the task was not merely diplomatic and administrative, but also, to some degree, conceptual. The task was also the concern of the author of the *Hikayat Johor*. It is in the discussion of the constitution of Johore, proclaimed in 1895, that he confronts the problem of *kerajaan* most directly.

A whole chapter is devoted to the constitution, the first Western-style constitution adopted in a Malay polity. This chapter provides a climax both to the book and to the development of Malay ideology. The constitution (drawn up by a Singapore law firm on the Sultan's behalf) has been described by the American political scientist, Rupert Emerson, as "essentially a statement and a regularization of the political structure of Johore, as it existed at that time, with the addition of certain clearly defined checks on the ruler and his associates, which only slightly impaired the traditional Oriental despotism".<sup>77</sup> In fact, however, the constitution is likely to have been far more than a description of the *status quo*. It was probably a response both to the British challenge and to that of the liberal critics of the *kerajaan* within the Malay community. The fact that one clause actually prohibits future sultans from surrendering any portion of Johore to "any European state or power"<sup>78</sup> immediately suggests the constitution was written in the context of British imperial expansion. But the Johore elite is likely also to have assumed that the possession of a constitution would be seen by liberal critics of the *kerajaan* (European or Malay) as a mark of civilization and modernity. One further reason for writing a constitution may relate to the problem of the term *kerajaan* in the context of a post-*kerajaan* world.

In the language of the *Hikayat Johor*, the creation of a constitution may have been perceived as a way of "fixing" the *kerajaan*. The actual

Malay phrase which the *Hikayat* uses to convey ‘constitution’ makes the point with clarity: it is called an “*undang undang tuboh kerajaan*”. *Undang* means ‘laws’, and *tuboh* is defined as “body in the anatomical sense”.<sup>79</sup> In a literal sense, then, the constitution gives ‘body’ or ‘substance’ to the *kerajaan*. Such a formulation is reminiscent of the way the *Al Imam* article ‘Honour and Dignity’ insisted on the existence behind or underneath a person’s public self of the *zat*, the *batang tuboh* or essence, of the individual human. In the discussion of the state in the *Hikayat Johor*, just as in the delineation of the person in *Al Imam*, it would seem that new perceptions were being grounded or “fixed” in a new reality. Just as the individual could no longer be defined in what seemed like superficial terms, so the *kerajaan* was now to be given new substance or ‘body’ in the form of a constitution. The *tuboh kerajaan*, proclaimed in 1895 and given prominence in the *Hikayat Johor*, would help to establish a new meaning for a word which by now had begun to be stripped of much of its earlier significance. By the same token, it would strengthen the notion of ‘government’ as a phenomenon existing independently of monarchy.

In a sense, then, the Johore translation for ‘constitution’ entailed both a terminological and an ideological innovation. It was one aspect of the author’s reassessment of the *kerajaan* in the light of the new secular and liberal thought about government. As such, it had long-range implications for the development of Malay political culture. To appreciate more fully those implications, it is necessary to examine briefly the *Hikayat Johor*’s treatment of the second type of critique of the *kerajaan*, that of the *shari’ah*-minded.

### Reacting to the *shari’ah*-minded

Although the *Hikayat Johor* responds in numerous ways to the liberal ideas urged by Eunus and his predecessors, the text does not, at first impression, deal creatively with the form of Islamic critique of *kerajaan* ideology offered in *Al Imam*. The *hikayat* certainly stresses the piety of the Johore ruler – Sultan Abu Bakar is full of “faith and devotion toward God”<sup>80</sup> – but such praise is encountered also in traditional court texts. The reader is informed too that when the Sultan mixes socially with Europeans, which he does with such skill, that he never forgets the Islamic prohibitions regarding the consumption of food and drink.<sup>81</sup> The presence at court or at royal ceremonies of Islamic officials such as the *mufti* (judge) is also noted, as is the performance of correct Islamic procedures, for instance in the burial of the Sultan.<sup>82</sup> Although such protestations of pious obedience to Islamic injunction are hardly innovations in court literature, they ought not to be treated lightly. At



least in the years immediately after Sultan Abu Bakar's death (when *Al Imam* commented on Johore), the Johore monarchy was sometimes commended for its religious policies. We saw that in *Al Imam* in 1908 Sultan Ibrahim was praised for encouraging Islamic education, including importing textbooks from Egypt.<sup>83</sup> Despite this compliment, however, the *Hikayat Johor* itself makes none of the concessions to *shari'ah*-mindedness which it makes to liberal doctrines.

In the *Hikayat Johor*, as in so much other *kerajaan* literature, Islam is portrayed in the idiom of rajaship. The Sultan continues to be viewed in the text as the focus of religious activity. His piety is stressed, but the reader obtains no impression of the *kerajaan* being challenged by the sort of rival social doctrines which were enunciated, for instance, by the *ulama* of *Al Imam*. Indeed *shari'ah*-mindedness and its advocates are so completely absent from the *Hikayat Johor* as to raise the possibility that Haji Mohd. Said followed a deliberate strategy of appearing to ignore the Fundamentalist critique of the *kerajaan*. That he could, in fact, have been ignorant of their critique would seem almost impossible.

Malay rulers and their courts always appear to have paid careful attention to religious matters. The opening of the twentieth century, according to both Malay and European sources, was a time of vigorous religious activity. In chapters 6 and 7 we examined the activities of *Al Imam*. In the early 1900s a British official who attempted to assess the religious change taking place declared that "the native" of the peninsula was becoming "less of a Malay and more of a Mussulman".<sup>84</sup> The Johore court is likely to have been well aware of the doctrinal threat posed by this development. Certain of the editors of *Al Imam*, for instance, were well known in royal circles.<sup>85</sup> In writing the *Hikayat Johor*, Haji Mohd. Said also must have been aware of new royal initiatives being taken in Johore and elsewhere regarding religious administration. In the colonial period, the sultans gave the appearance of becoming increasingly committed to Islamic administration. It was at their insistence that in 1903 a 'Muhammadan Laws Enactment' regulating many aspects of religious life was introduced. The rulers also bureaucratized their state religious administrations, creating religious councils or departments and regularizing the legal systems<sup>86</sup>. Some of this activity may have been a consequence of genuine piety: it is difficult, of course, to judge the spirit in which reforms were introduced. Also, a few recent studies suggest that colonialism stimulated much of the royal religious activity. They argue that under British 'protection' the Malay rulers obtained an enhanced status in relation to Islam which compensated them for surrendering certain other powers.<sup>87</sup> Having lost much of their "real power", it is argued, the rulers "not unnaturally turned to the only fields now left open to them, religion and custom".<sup>88</sup>

In particular they are said to have copied British organizational methods in reforming their own religious administration.

A further type of interpretation of the flurry of royal religious initiatives would stress the presence of the ongoing struggle between the courts and the proponents of the "Laws of the Arabs". This interpretation might throw additional light on the strategies of the *Hikayat Johor*. The sultans' reforms of religious administration would be seen not primarily as outlets for administrative energy or demonstrations of Islamic devotion but rather as measures to gain a tighter control over the religious life of their subjects. It is significant, for instance, that the 'Muhammadan Laws Enactment', which the sultans had demanded, included clauses preventing anyone teaching religious doctrine without the ruler's permission. In later years specific regulations were added prohibiting the printing, publishing and distribution of religious books unless they were authorized by the sultan.<sup>89</sup> The establishment of religious councils and departments in many of the sultanates might also have been designed partly to control Islamic critics of the *kerajaan* authorities. The Council of Religion and Custom which was set up in Kelantan in 1915 took over many of the duties of a particularly *shari'ah*-minded *mufti*, a man known for his "steadfastness in pursuing what he saw to be the law of God".<sup>90</sup> The *mufti*, who was inspired by the saying of the Prophet that "obedience to men ceases when it involves disobedience to the Creator", was accused by the Kelantan leadership of being a traitor. The members of the new council, by contrast, were mostly men loyal to the Sultan.<sup>91</sup> In other states too (including Johore), Councils of Religion and Custom were established and generally had a majority of non-*ulama* members, often including people from the royal household.<sup>92</sup>

Like these administrative developments, the writing of the *Hikayat Johor* ought to be considered partly in the context of royal reaction to Islamic Fundamentalism. To quote the Malaysian legal historian, Abdullah Alwi, the sultans were at that time forced to "adjust to a changing environment" that involved not only the advance of European colonialism but also the "threat of Wahhabism".<sup>93</sup> It is possible that the absence of *shari'ah*-mindedness in the Johore text is in its own way an attempt to cope with this environment. The *hikayat* might be seen as replying to the *shari'ah*-minded critique, first by reasserting the authority of the sultan, and secondly, by indicating a preference for liberal rather than Islamic reform. It is in this light that one would read the emphasis given to European rather than Islamic education in the text's discussion of Sultan Abu Bakar's youth. A similar preference is also demonstrated in the stress which the text gives to the Malay 'race'. It would seem that when the *hikayat* expresses concern for

a community beyond the *kerajaan* or *negeri* that concern is directed not at the *umat* Islam but at the Malay *bangsa*.

In making such choices Haji Mohd. Said was signalling a royal willingness to accept reform, but it was reform of a liberal rather than an Islamic type. As a new sultanate anxious about its genealogical credentials and general status in the Malay world, Johore was relatively open to rival doctrines. But although the emphasis on Sultan Abu Bakar's piety in the *Hikayat Johor* is possibly an attempt to reassure potential Islamic critics, it does not entail a fundamental ideological shift. There is no development of a new perspective such as one finds in the case of the text's reaction to liberal attempts. In the opening years of the twentieth century, we might conclude that the people whom the Johore leadership really wanted to understand, and at the same time, to impress and placate, even at the expense of undermining the traditional *kerajaan* polity, were those who urged liberal reform.

### Shifting discourses

It is partly because the *kerajaan* presented in the *Hikayat Johor* seems to hold firm against the advance of *shari'ah*-mindedness that the text's adaptations to liberal thought are so obvious. To cope conceptually with the British Raj itself – as the text does with some skill – seems to have required ideological restructuring of different types. In one area this restructuring was relatively risk-free. The *hikayat* displays ingenuity in the way it all but incorporates the British Empire into the ceremonial processes of the actual *kerajaan* itself. It is when Haji Mohd. Said's text begins to describe the Johore rulers and their state in the type of liberal language used in the *Utusan* by his contemporary Eunon that a degree of ideological danger or tension emerges in the *Hikayat Johor*.

The rulers continue to be described as the bestowers of titles or the linchpins of ceremony but they are also portrayed in the role of modern administrators in a political state. Furthermore, again in line with liberal concepts, the Johore text presents the state and even the constitution and government as entities independent of the figure of the *raja*. It defines the state in terms of its territories and embodies the *kerajaan* in a document rather than a royal personage. The subjects of the Johore government are also no longer defined essentially in reference to their ruler. The *hikayat* does not depict them as so many *nama* embedded in a hierarchical *kerajaan*. They are not represented as mere fragments or particles of kingship dependent ultimately on the royal court to give meaning and purpose to their lives. The subjects of Johore are described in the *Hikayat Johor* as members both of a state and of the Malay race; and the fact that the text is written not by an

anonymous subject but by a named subject (who thanks other individuals in his author's acknowledgements) is an indication that the perception of the subject in the *Hikayat Johor* is compatible with the presentation of individuality enunciated in Abdullah's writing. Just as Abdullah and his successors had advocated, it is implied that individual persons such as this particular author devote themselves to the welfare not merely of their monarch, but also of their 'state' and 'race'.

In these ways Haji Mohd. Said is bringing Malay monarchy into the modern world. But in distinguishing the *raja* from his state, government and subjects, the Johore text is whittling down the claims and the significance of kingship. The fact that it is engaged, probably unintentionally, in an even more fundamental dismantling of the *kerajaan* becomes increasingly obvious when the *hikayat* removes the *raja* from one further sphere. Commencing in the preface, as I have noted, the text makes clear that rajaship no longer possesses its former epistemological significance. As in the mid-nineteenth-century geography and the other Straits Settlements Malay writings, knowledge is not depicted in the *Hikayat Johor* as being dependent on, or as descending via, kingship. Rather, the text implies that knowledge arises from an entirely different type of process in which the rational individual investigates sources "which are proven to be true". That is, the criteria and agency of judgement are now explicitly located outside the *kerajaan*. In this way, too, the text conveys clearly that the *raja's* own performance as a governor, no less than the veracity of sources, is capable of being judged. When the *Hikayat* bases the Temenggong Sultans' claim to rule Johore partly on their administrative ability, it admits the possibility that the dynasty might be rejected on the same grounds. The subject, it is being stressed here, does not owe unquestioning allegiance to a *raja*. He may judge the *rajas* as he judges other matters and determine his allegiance on the basis of that judgement.

The point is expressed with pristine clarity in another Johore text, the actual 1895 constitution which is given so much prominence in the *Hikayat Johor*. When this constitution declares that the subjects of Johore are "not bound to remain loyal" to any future sultan who cedes "any part of the territory of Johore" to a foreign power, the new contractual basis of Johore kingship is unmistakable.<sup>94</sup> The novelty of the post-1895 relationship between ruler and subject in Johore is especially evident when this clause in the constitution is contrasted with a much earlier *kerajaan* statement about the relationship between ruler and subject. In the *Malay Annals*, the founder of the Malacca dynasty is said to have made a pledge never to "disgrace and revile" his subjects with "evil words". This pledge, however, does not imply an actual condition for allegiance because the subjects, on their part, are

described as agreeing “until the end of time”, and even if they endure “tyrannical and evil” rule, never to be disloyal to the *raja*.<sup>95</sup> In the *Malay Annals*, therefore, unlike the constitution of Johore, the ruler’s authority is not portrayed as being explicitly conditional upon his performance (or non-performance) of certain acts. Although some twentieth-century discussions of Malay kingship have occasionally referred to the pledges described in the *Annals* as if they constituted a contract,<sup>96</sup> it is at most, a covenant. The Johore constitution introduces without ambiguity the notion of a contract between ruler and people. In the *Hikayat Johor*, as we have seen, the new notion is not enunciated but it is certainly implicit.

In the 1895 constitution and the *Hikayat Johor*, the ruler is thus not merely presented as standing conceptually apart from his state, government and subjects but also as an individual personage whose royal position and authority is dependent upon the way he serves his people. Furthermore, by detailing and defending that royal service to its readers, Haji Mohd. Said’s *Hikayat Johor* in effect draws the ruler into the new public sphere which both the *Utusan* and *Al Imam*, in their different ways, were in the process of expanding and shaping. In Habermas’ terminology, the manner in which the *Hikayat Johor* presents the Johore ruler acknowledges the presence of a public sphere existing quite independently of the *raja*, a sphere in which the *raja* was no longer merely “represented” or just “display[ed] himself”. The ruler, Haji Mohd. Said seems to imply, defends and justifies his actions before the tribunal of the public. As an agent of kingship, the author of the *Hikayat Johor* was himself in effect placing the ruler’s case before this tribunal. In this Johore text, the royal court participates in a public political arena in which the ruler’s actions and the future of his subjects as a community are expected to be openly debated as matters of political contestation.

In the transformation of Malay political culture, the *Hikayat Johor* is thus a critical document. Although it honours a sultanate as so many *kerajaan* texts had done in earlier years it does so at least partly in new terms. Partha Chatterjee’s distinction between the thematic and problematic dimensions of ideology are significant here and in other aspects of the *Hikayat*’s presentation of Johore. The *Hikayat* not only adopts some of the programs of its liberal critics in accepting the sultan’s new role in the public sphere, it also engages in a more far-reaching ideological innovation. To consider rulers as practical administrators whose actions need to be defended, to understand the sultanate as a territorial and bureaucratic state, entails thematic as well as problematic innovation. At the most obvious level, in the *Hikayat Johor* new “key terms” now appear alongside or, in some cases, in place of the

*kerajaan*, *nama* and *adat istiadat* of traditional Malay culture. The Johore of the Temenggong Sultans is discussed in terms of 'state', 'government', 'ruler', and 'modernity'.

The text examined in this chapter represents an assertion of royal authority in a new sultanate, and at a time when certain commoner élites were attempting to undermine the hegemony of *kerajaan* doctrines. From one perspective, the text is a reminder that the royal courts were far from passive in the period of British advance and indigenous ideological challenge. Reading the *Hikayat Johor* alongside *Al Imam* and the *Utusan* also draws attention to the real extent of ideological contestation taking place within Malay society in the early twentieth century. From another angle, however, the contents of the Johore text suggest the development of an element of consensus in this contest. In respect to certain matters, the royal, Islamic and liberal writers actually seem to use the same vocabulary. There are also signs of a degree of agreement about what were the important issues to be confronted by Malay society in this period. The next chapter, which shifts the time focus from 1900 to the 1930s, and deals with not one but two texts, is concerned to examine further these elements of agreement. In observing the developing relations between the three ideological orientations, in delineating their points of difference, we shall continue to trace the emergence of a common, political discourse.

### Notes

- 1 The edition which I have used is dated 1919. I have not seen the 1908 edition which is mentioned, for instance, in *Mejar Dato' Haji Mohd. Said bin Haji Sulaiman Dalam Kenangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya, 1984), 23; and W.R. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 134. I have also consulted an edition of 1930, published in Singapore by the Malaya Publishing House.
- 2 Rupert Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule (1937)* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1964), 121.
- 3 I have compared the onset of British rule in Burma and Malaya in 'Malay Kingship in a Burmese Perspective', in Ian Mabbett (ed.), *Patterns of Kingship and Authority in Traditional Asia*, (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 158–83.
- 4 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 230. On the exercise of power by Sultans in censorship and other areas see also, Tan Sri Datuk Dr Mohamed Said, *Memoirs of a Menteri Besar: Early Days* (Singapore: Heinemann, 1982), 86, 161–2, 186.
- 5 The official was W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the colonies, who visited Malaya in 1927. He is quoted in Kalyan Kumar Ghosh, *Twentieth-century Malaya Politics of Decentralization of Power, 1920–1929* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1977), 304. J.M. Gullick's *Rulers and Residents: Influence and Power in the Malay States* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992) is an important new study of the position of the Malay rulers during the colonial period. Gullick stresses the contribution of the ruler in the colonial equation. He writes of the "balance of power and influence which, even if it was distinctly lopsided, did maintain a dialogue and provide a foundation upon which further progress towards Malay participation in the new form of government might have been made" (343). In rich detail the book illustrates the workings of this "tacit bargain" (vi) between ruler and resident.

- 6 See Milner, 'Malay Kingship in a Burmese Perspective', 168–72.
- 7 Quoted in J.M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), 79.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 92; Heussler, *British Rule*, 101.
- 9 Gullick, *Malay Society*, 294.
- 10 S. Sadka, *The Protected Malay States, 1874–1895* (Kuala Lumpur and Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1968), 389.
- 11 C. Harrison, quoted in A.J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS monograph, 1979), 31.
- 12 Quoted in H. Clifford, *Bushwacking and Other Asiatic Tales and Memories* (London: Heinemann, 1929), 218.
- 13 On Johore history, see Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggong and the Development of Johore and Singapore 1884–1885* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979); C.S. Gray, Johore, 1910–1941, Studies in the Colonial Process, PhD thesis, Yale University, 1978; Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor Moden 1855–1940* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Muzium, 1978); R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Johore (1365–1895)* (Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS monograph, 1979).
- 14 Quoted in E. Thio, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula, 1880–1910*, vol. 1, *The Southern and Central States* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1969), 108.
- 15 Quoted in Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 204. For a further critical comment on the stature of the Johore ruler, see A. Sweeney and N. Phillips, (eds), *The Voyages of Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), 95.
- 16 Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: the Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore 1784–1885* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1979), *passim*.
- 17 *Al Imam*, 6 December 1907; 4 February 1908; 3 May 1908; see also Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al Imam*, 103–04.
- 18 Thio, *British Policy*, 98. The Johore leadership also sought assistance and approval from Riau; see V. Matheson, 'Kisah Pelayaran ke Riau: Journey to Riau, 1984', in *Indonesia Circle*, 36, 3 (1985), 20.
- 19 Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor*, 88–9, 91, 177; Sarim Mustajab, 'Islam dan Perkembangan dalam masyarakat Melayu di Semonanjong Melayu, 1900–1940', MA thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan, 19; Matheson and Andaya, *Precious Gift*, 285.
- 20 This is what Sultan Abu Bakar told the governor in Singapore; Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 288; Thio, *British Policy*, 97.
- 21 C. Wake, Nineteenth Century Johore – Ruler and Realm in Transition, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1966, 249.
- 22 Contemporary European report quoted in Thio, *British Policy*, 97; see also C. Wake, Nineteenth Century Johore.
- 23 Letter from the governor, 15 December 1855, Series R, vol. 28, no. 164, Straits Settlements Records (Singapore Library, N.L. 74); Chelliah, *Educational Policy*, 59–60; Turnbull, *Straits Settlements*, 231, 288.
- 24 Letter from the Governor, 15 December 1855.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1902), 322.
- 27 Chelliah, *Educational Policy*, 57; also see *Legislative Council Proceedings, Straits Settlements*, Appendix 34, 1873, 'Report on Education', by A. Skinner, cxxxiii.
- 28 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements, 1888*, 108.
- 29 *Report of the Inspector for Schools, Straits Settlements, 1874*, 44.
- 30 See chapters 4 and 5 above.
- 31 Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor*, 88–92; Gray, Johore, 16, 31. On the Johore elite's involvement in the Keasberry school, see A. Sweeney, *Reputations Live On: An Early Malay Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980b), 77; see also *Mejar Dato' Haji Mohd. Said*, 15.
- 32 Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, 'Recent Malay Literature', *JMBRAS*, 19, 1 (1941), 16–17.
- 33 Sweeney and Phillips, *Voyages of Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi*, xxxii.

- 34 This text is discussed in A.C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the eve of Colonial Rule* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press Association of Asian Studies Monograph, 1982), chapters 3 and 4.
- 35 Matheson and Andaya, *Precious Gift*, 12.
- 36 On Dato Mohamed Mahbub, see Thio, *British Policy*, 34; Sweeney, *Reputations*, 20, 21, 55.
- 37 Sweeney and Phillips, *Voyage of Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi*. For the Malay text, see Mohd. Fadzil Othman, *Kisah Pelayaran Muhammad Ibrahim Munsyi* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1980).
- 38 Sweeney, *Reputations*, 18.
- 39 Sweeney and Phillips, *Voyages of Mohamed Ibrahim Munshi*, xxxii–xxxiii.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 15; also 11–12.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 28; also, 29.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 102, 126.
- 43 Sweeney, *Reputations Live On*. For the Malay text, see Amin Sweeney (ed.), *The Tarikh Datu' Bentara Luar Johor* (Berkeley: University of California, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1980).
- 44 Sweeney, *Reputations Live On*, 85.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 88, also 88–89.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 89.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 79; see also Sweeney, *Tarikh*, 37.
- 48 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 39.
- 49 R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Marican, 1968), 141; L.J. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor 1641–1720* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), *passim*; B.W. Andaya and L.Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: Macmillan, 1982), chapter 3. L. Y. Andaya, *The Kingdom of Johor 1641–1728. Economic and Political Developments* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975) 190–1.
- 50 Milner, *Kerajaan*, 86–87.
- 51 Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 6.
- 52 “*tiadalah tahu bagaimana hendak mengatorkan hal daerah taaloknya*”; *ibid.*, 7.
- 53 D. Steinberg et al., *In Search of Southeast Asia* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1971), 217.
- 54 “*rajin dan usaha*”; Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 10.
- 55 See the quotations from the *Hikayat Pahang*, in Milner, *Kerajaan*, 45–7. For the *Hikayat Pahang*, see also Muhammad Yusoff Hashim and Aruna Gopinath, *Tradisi Persejaraan Pahang Darul Makmur 1800–1930* (Petaling Jaya: Tempo, 1992); and Kalthum Jeran (ed.), *Hikayat Pahang* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1986).
- 56 “*... Membuat jasa kepada raja atau kerajaan ...*”; Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 47.
- 57 *Hikayat Pahang* (romanized manuscript), 216. Evidence of the Sultan’s own pleasure at receiving the award is quoted in Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, 237.
- 58 For a short recension of the *Hikayat Pahang*, see Kalthum Jeran, *Hikayat Pahang*. For a Pahang text more comparable with the *Hikayat Johor* see Mohd. Mokhtar bin Haji Moh. Daud, *Singgahsana Negeri Pahang* (Pekan, 1957).
- 59 A quotation from Sultan Ahmad to the Governor in 1900, quoted in Aruna Gopinath, *Pahang 1896–1914: Sultan Ahmad’s Struggle and Failure in his Quest for Power and Political Survival* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, n.d.), 26; M. Yegar, *Islam and Islamic Institutions in British Malaya* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), 36. See also, Swettenham’s comment on Sultan Ahmad’s state of mind in 1902, quoted in Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, 236–7.
- 60 Milner, ‘Malay Kingship in a Burmese Perspective’, 171–2. I disagree with Gullick, *Malay Society*, 31.
- 61 Gopinath, *Pahang 1896–1914*, *passim*; Gullick, *Malay Society*, 31, 44.
- 62 The name of the author of the *Hikayat Pahang* is not known.
- 63 Quoted in Sadka, *Protected Malay States*, 169. Although Sultan Abdul Samad “preferred to live in rural seclusion”, Gullick considers that he “welcomed the stability of colonial rule after the trauma of a long civil war (1867–73)”, *Rulers and Residents*, 355.
- 64 Quoted in H. Clifford, *Bushwhacking*, 219; see also Henry Norman, *The Peoples and Politics of the Far East* (New York: Scribner, 1895), 61–62; Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*,



- 249–50 and *passim*. Gullick notes that Sultan Idris was a reader of the *Utusan Melayu* (340).
- 65 Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 38.
- 66 E. Thio, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula 1880–1910* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1969), 95; Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 154, 200; Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, 246.
- 67 *Hikayat Johor*, 54. It might be fruitful to compare Malay monarchical concepts in this respect with those encountered in other Southeast Asian regions such as Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam.
- 68 See Matheson and Milner, *Perceptions of the Haj*, chapter 2.
- 69 Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 35.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 71 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 72 Gullick, *Malay Society*, 33.
- 73 Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 59.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 75 A.J.P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1809–1918* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 25. On the royal claim to rule non-Malays see chapter 9 below.
- 76 “mengukuhkan kerajaan Johor itu”; “menetapkan kerajaan Johor itu dalam kemerdekaan”; Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 38, 64.
- 77 Emerson, *Melaysia*, 203. The constitution is printed in Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor*, appendix; see also Haji Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Johor* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1971), 262.
- 78 Emerson, *Malaysia*, 204.
- 79 R.J. Wilkinson, *Kamus-Jawi–Melayu–Inggeris* (Melaka: Penerbit Baharudinjoha, 1985 (orig. pub. 1903)).
- 80 Haji Mohd. Said, *Hikayat Johor*, 60.
- 81 *Ibid.*
- 82 *Ibid.*, 76.
- 83 See chapter 6 above. For a note on the implementation of Islamic law in Johore, see Ahmad Fauzi Basri, *Johor 1855–1917. Pentadbiran dan Perkembangannya* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1988), 71, 88, 89. See also Abu Bakar Hamzah, *Al Imam*, 103–04.
- 84 R.J. Wilkinson, ‘Papers on Malay Customs and Beliefs’, *JMBRAS*, xxx, 4 (1957), 40.
- 85 Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, 339.
- 86 Yegar, *Islam*, 190ff; Governor to Secretary of State, 19 May 1902, Colonial Office Records (London) 273, 293; W.R. Roff ‘The Origins and Early Years of the Majlis Ugama’; in W.R. Roff (ed.), *Kelantan: Religion, Society and Politics in a Malay State* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1974); Gullick, *Malay Society*, chapter 12.
- 87 Yegar, *Islam*, 264.
- 88 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 72.
- 89 Yegar, *Islam*, 190ff; Governor to Secretary of State, 19 May 1903.
- 90 Muhammad Salleh bin Wan Musa (with S. Othman Kelantan) ‘Theological Debates: Wan Musa bin Haji Abdul Samad and his family’, in Roff (ed.), *Kelantan*, 157.
- 91 Roff, ‘Majlis Ugama’, 134.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 133; Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism* 74. On the ruler’s authority in Islamic matters see also, E. Sadka, *Protected Malay States 1874–1895* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968), 172–3; Gullick, *Malay Society*, 287–8; Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor*, 138.
- 93 Abdullah Alwi Haji Hassan, ‘Kelantan: Islamic Legal History before 1909’, *Malaysia in History*, 23 (1980), 12.
- 94 Clause 15, see Fawzi Basri and Hasrom Haron, *Sejarah Johor*, 236.
- 95 Winstedt, ‘Malay Annals’, 57.
- 96 See, for instance, P.E. De Josselin De Jong, ‘The Character of the Malay Annals’, in J. Bastin and R. Roolvink (eds), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies: Essays Presented to Sir Richard Winstedt on his Eighty-Fifth Birthday* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 239; I prefer the analysis of Chandra Muzaffar, *Protector?* (Penang: Aliran, 1979) 5–6, who also uses the term ‘covenant’.

## CHAPTER 9

### *Practising Politics in the Mid-Colonial Period*

Is it possible to imagine a conversation taking place in the 1930s between a *shari'ah*-minded *ulama*, the chronicler of a royal coronation and a left-wing Malay nationalist? The prospects for such face-to-face discussion about ideology were remote in the pre- or early colonial period. The way certain *ulama* are ridiculed rather than debated in the *Malay Annals* is one indication of the presence of a type of ideological or discursive block. Another boundary of incomprehensibility is suggested by the terms in which Munshi Abdullah rejected the ideology of the sultanate: the grounds of his critique diverge so radically from the presuppositions of the *kerajaan* as to have made it virtually impossible for him to establish a genuine dialogue with the courts.

It was in the rarefied, colonial context of the Keasberry missionary school that a section of the élite of one sultanate began to take note of the doctrines propounded by Abdullah. In this chapter we must be persistently aware, in fact, of the colonial context. To ask about the possibility of ideological conversation in the 1930s involves consideration of the extent to which colonialism promoted new discursive structures in education and numerous other fields. In one sense this decade witnessed an actual sharpening of ideological divisions. But at a deeper level, the intensification of debate – a debate which continued to take place primarily at élite level – draws attention to the further development of a public sphere in which ideological antagonists shared common space.

In this and the following chapter we juxtapose three texts from the 1930s and early 1940s, each radically different in important ways from the others. The texts, which incidentally contain much data on a range of aspects of Malay society in the inter-war period, comprise a religious disquisition, a royal coronation memento and, finally, a left-wing

analysis of Malaya under colonial rule. Each of these texts possesses precursors in earlier colonial literature, yet read alongside one another the texts suggest that something new was happening in Malay society. Together this apparently ill-suited threesome illustrates not only the sharp lines of ideological division which had emerged in Malay society but also the specific character of the developing contest. Indeed, as will be explained in the final section of this chapter, their ideologue authors might all be described as participating in the new Malay politics.

The political and social context in which the three ideologues wrote had altered in important ways since the early 1900s.<sup>1</sup> Certain of these changes will be examined in more detail in due course. By the 1930s, however, all of the states of what was to be the independent Federation of Malaya possessed British 'Advisers' who were responsible to a governor in Singapore. The colonial education system had been greatly expanded and Malayan economic life had become more fully integrated into the world economy. That economic integration was evident in the most negative terms when international trade depressions brought drastic reductions in the prices of such British Malayan exports as rubber and tin. Alongside the internationalization of the economy and the growth of secular education, there developed such social changes as a vast expansion of newspaper publication and the creation of modern types of social and political organization. A growing concern of the newspapers and the new associations was the expansion in Asian immigration into Malaya. For many Malays the statistics alone were enough to cause panic. They were even more dramatic than in 1900. By 1931, in the Federated Malay States (Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang) the Chinese and Indians made up some 64 percent of the population. In the other, so-called 'Unfederated Malay States' (Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, Perlis, and Johore) these ethnic groups constituted about 29 percent of the total. Putting together the figures from the Malay states with those of the Straits Settlements there were well over one and a half million Chinese.<sup>2</sup> The implications of such figures were powerfully underscored by the well-publicized observations of the British scholar, A. J. Toynbee. He wrote in 1931 that "British Malaya was destined by 'peaceful penetration' to become a new Chinese province".<sup>3</sup> As with the expansion of British colonial power, anxiety about this migrant penetration helped to shape the ideological struggle occurring in the Malay community. In the contest for hegemony – a contest which appears to have accelerated by the 1930s – such issues helped to put on the defensive both the *ulama* and the royal courts.

The social and political circumstances of the Malay community during the 1930s will be investigated further in the next chapter. The

text examined there – the last of our texts – is explicitly concerned to present such an overview of the period. In fact, it is its particular style of sociological and historical analysis which distinguishes that work from the earlier writings which we have considered. The present chapter, however, focuses upon two texts possessing more obvious antecedents in the period around the turn of the century. The first text, *Islam and Reason*, takes us back to the Islamic journal, *Al Imam*.

### Islam and reason

*Islam and Reason* was written by Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi (the former, *shari'ah*-minded, editor of *Al Imam*), and published in 1931. Its contents, however, suggest that by this time the author's preoccupations were different from those which he and the other editors of the pioneering Islamic journal held in the early years of the century. In *Islam and Reason* he continued to urge the claims of the Islamic community (the *umat*) and the *shari'ah*, and to attack *rajahs* who governed "according to their lusts",<sup>4</sup> but it is clear that by now the liberal heirs of Munshi Abdullah were his principal concern. In 1931 he consistently addresses liberal anxieties – thereby admitting their growing significance in Malay society – and explains that it is in the religion of Islam that all such human problems find solution. So sharply does he focus on the type of issue dealt with in the *Utusan* two decades earlier and in later liberal and *bangsa*-minded newspapers that at some points *Islam and Reason* seems to come close to adopting the point of view it seeks to refute.

*Islam and Reason* comprises a series of connected essays, all of which are written in a powerful didactic style. Much of the material in the book is present in earlier *shari'ah*-minded writings; it is the manner of presentation which requires particular attention in an attempt to analyse the emergence of political conversation among the Malays. The influence of the Egyptian, Mohd. Abduh (whose discussion of 'Reason' was referred to in chapters 6 and 7 above) is evident from the first pages of the book. In the preface Sayyid Shaykh declares, in language which Mohd. Abduh might also have used, that he had for a long time wished to write for students and other Muslims a book which explained that the "laws of Islam do not ever contradict Reason". The following chapters (nine in all) expound different aspects of the religion and of its obligations. The book concludes with essays on the Muslim tithe, the fasting month and the pilgrimage. Although these chapters do not present a single, systematically developed thesis they contain a series of trenchant arguments all of which are united in an explicit and coherent point of view. In each chapter, as the preface promises, the discussion

stresses that Islam is consistent with 'Reason'.<sup>5</sup> The book also emphasizes what Sayyid Shaykh persistently calls the religion's "superiority and usefulness".

*Islam and Reason* commences with a one-page statement about the religion of Islam. In a typically long and repetitive sentence it is explained that Islam:

is a religion which is true, permanent and in accord with the reason (*akal*) of rational people; they are people who in every period of the past have investigated and examined minutely every desire and aim, every order and obligation, which the religion contains for the benefit of mankind, for the benefit of every race in every period of the past.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that 'reason' had only in quite recent decades<sup>7</sup> become a central concern of Islamic thinkers is one cause for suspecting this may be an anachronistic interpretation of the Islamization process. The stress which Sayyid Shaykh places on a community of "rational people", however, certainly casts light on the type of readership he anticipated for his book.

The statement continues, explaining that the chapters which follow will confirm the "superiority and usefulness" of Islam. The style is somewhat conversational. The author is persistently present (almost as much as in Abdullah's writings) and he contrives to speak to his readers on a basis of equality. "Come along", Sayyid Shaykh declares, "we will read the verses of the Koran together and take heed of everything they say". Such an authorial tone reinforces the impression that his intended audience is not the hierarchically minded subjects of Malay *kerajaan*. It does not necessarily suggest, however, that he was addressing a primarily religious readership. Some commentators, it is true, have viewed his writing in terms of a specifically religious struggle taking place within the Islamic community. Sayyid Shaykh is described as one of those authors and teachers who led the *Kaum Muda*, a reformist movement seeking to reappraise the wisdom of the fundamental works of Islam, the Koran and the Traditions, and to introduce elements of modern education into Muslim schooling. The traditionalist religious opponents of this group were referred to as the *Kaum Tua*. They included many rural *ulama* and much of the religious establishment of the sultanates. They were suspicious of any re-examination of Islamic doctrine.<sup>8</sup> We will certainly see that *Islam and Reason* offers criticism of this *Kaum Tua*, but there are indications that the book was designed, in the first instance, not so much for a religiously oriented as a possibly sceptical audience.

Sayyid Shaykh seems to speak specifically to a public of “rational” beings, to people who are likely to be convinced not by the authority of an author but by the soundness of an argument. The way he addresses his readers suggests they were expected to include people sceptical of religious authority and even unconvinced about the “usefulness” of Islam in the twentieth-century world. There is no reason to conclude that the audience of *Islam and Reason* was assumed to be especially devout.

One final feature of this postulated “rational” public is the suggestion that it was local in orientation. Here too Sayyid Shaykh distances himself from much other Islamic writing. As in *Al Imam* it is still the Muslim not the narrower, Malay, community to which the book is ostensibly directed, but in *Islam and Reason* we encounter also quite frequent reference to geographic identity. That is, although the author does not generally address his readers as “Malays” he uses such phrases as “the Muslims in Malaya” or the “Muslim community on the Malay Peninsula”.<sup>9</sup> In this way, and in the use of a “rational” style, *Islam and Reason* conveys the sense that it was designed to influence much the same Malay readership – we have termed it ‘middle class’ – which had been fostered by Abdullah and Eunus. The book contains indications as well that Sayyid Shaykh was aware of the problems and issues which, in the inter-war years, occupied the attentions of this culturally transitional audience.

In *Islam and Reason*, the “people of Reason” are constantly urged to understand that Islam provides answers and directions not only in matters concerning the hereafter but also in every aspect of life. Even when raising specific local problems – Sayyid Shaykh is just as concerned as liberal writers, for instance, about the economic decline of the local Malay Muslim community – the book demonstrates the way Islam can offer solutions. Today we might say that Sayyid Shaykh was insisting on the modern relevance of Islam. Furthermore, he did so with a determination and a degree of anxiety which was not apparent in the writings of *Al Imam*.

In chapter 1, *akal* (reason) continues in the foreground. “The religion of Islam”, Sayyid Shaykh explains, “respects *akal* and depends on it to understand the role of Allah and his power in the activity of the world”.<sup>10</sup> In such statements *akal* even appears to be given a priority over God himself until we are reminded that it is Allah who created the world and who “guards” the *akal* of all mankind. This *akal* has long been “asleep” but God “excites” (or “activates”) the *akal* of every man (*manusia*) to “carry out the obligations which he/she has sometimes neglected in the past”. It is God who has “shown the *akal* of every man the way to think on all the things which are contained in all the creations of God”. It is He who has made man think of “the causes of

things as they are". God "aims to activate the *akal* of mankind to debate and investigate the origins of every single matter".

Certain of these sentiments were considered in our earlier discussion of *Al Imam*. They concede the validity, of course, of some of the central principles enunciated by the liberal ideologues and their teachers. To speak of investigating causes and origins reminds one of the Christian missionary determination to teach the natives "to think" and of the epistemology spelt out in the *Hikayat Dunia*. If such statements, however, can be seen as concessions to a rival ideology at one level, at another, arguably deeper level, Sayyid Shaykh grounds the entire enterprise of rationality in the Will of God. It is God who is presented as activating the *akal* which leads one to investigate the things of this world, all of which are themselves His creations. What is more, Sayyid Shaykh gives God a persistent presence in the text itself by continually citing God's Word as revealed in the Koran. It is true that he does not generally give details of Koranic chapter and verse and provides his quotes only in Malay. He admits too that these quotes are only "more or less" exact translations.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of Sayyid Shaykh's audience, however, his translation procedures may have been of only secondary importance. Many of his readers are unlikely even to have known that the word *akal* does not appear in the Koran. It is the rhetoric of *Islam and Reason* which would have had a special impact on this audience. Sayyid Shaykh's presentation would convey two unambiguous messages: first, that, Islam no less than liberalism is impatient with those who do not think for themselves but rather (as Sayyid Shaykh puts it) "follow...what was done by our fathers and ancestors"; and, secondly, that the demand to free *akal* (to allow it to "move with liberty") is grounded in the teaching of Allah. This double message concedes ground to liberalism with one hand and then, with the other, immediately retrieves that ground on behalf of Islam.<sup>12</sup>

Sayyid Shaykh adopted a similar strategy in his discussion of a further Enlightenment concern, that of "equality".<sup>13</sup> In matters relating to rights and obligations, he insists, Islam does not distinguish between "Rajas and commoners, between rich people and poor people, between men and women, between the learned and the ignorant - absolutely everyone in Islam is of one type". There is in Islam "only one type of justice". The ruler in Islam must maintain "equality among all people". Far from being "above the law", he himself must act in all matters in accordance with the *shari'ah*.<sup>14</sup>

In regard to the maintenance of "social unity", too, Sayyid Shaykh recognizes and answers liberal anxieties. In the manner of *Al Imam*, he cites the "history" (both *sejarah* and *tarikh* are used) of the Arabs as a demonstration of the benefits of Islam. By means of Islam, he explains,

a people can leave the state of savagery; they discard customs (*adat resam*) and dispositions which are evil. The Arabs, before Islam, were always at war with one another and this warfare broke up their "social ties and crushed any plans for their welfare as a racial (*bangsa*) and national (*watan*) grouping".<sup>15</sup> In this reference to *bangsa* and *watan* Sayyid Shaykh again addresses issues of immediate relevance to the contemporary Malay 'middle class'. By commenting in so derogatory a way on Arab custom, Sayyid Shaykh (no less than Munshi Abdullah and his successors) also draws attention to Malay *adat* or custom as a possible cause of disunity and retardation among the Malay people.

Proceeding with his homiletic history of the Arabs, Sayyid Shaykh claims (predictably by this stage of our examination of the Islamic critique) that with the arrival of Islam they were "bound together in a brotherhood in equality with one another. They lived in peace and security".<sup>16</sup> Islam, he drums home, is the basis for the "construction of the community", and the word he uses for 'community' is not the Arabic, *umat*. He presents two alternative terms, and they both suggest a more generalized, and neutral, category of 'community' than that conveyed in *umat*. These terms might be best translated as 'society', although this word in its abstract usage was employed widely in England only in the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Sayyid Shaykh uses the concept with a certain tentativeness. Under Islam, the Sayyid continues, the people create a "society" ("*perhimpunan* or *masharakat*") just as they might construct a "building made up of layers of people who have in common the fact they all utter the two testimonial declarations of Islam".<sup>18</sup> (The testimonials, it is well known, are: "There is but one God; and Mohammed is his Prophet".) The fact that Sayyid Shaykh presents alternative translations for 'society' adds to the impression of a degree of hesitance in his approach. Indeed, in the 1920s and 1930s in Malaya neither word is likely to have expressed 'society' with unambiguous clarity. The first, *perhimpunan* (which we saw in chapter 7 was used in *Al Imam*) derives from the Malay *berhimpun*, 'to gather'; the second, *masharakat*, is an Arabic borrowing which can refer to a specific society or company as well as the broader notion. Today *masharakat* is commonly used for 'society'.<sup>19</sup>

In seeking a relatively empty category rather than employing the more concrete and specifically religious term *umat*, Sayyid Shaykh might be seen as probing a new type of social reality and, at the same time, facilitating conversation with a sceptical audience. He was participating, one might say, in a discourse which has more in common with the innovatory, theoretical reflections on 'community' associated, for instance, with Thomas Hobbes than with the specific investigation of Islamic doctrine. In *Islam and Reason* Sayyid Shaykh postulates the existence of a desire for social unity which was not necessarily spiritual



and only then argues that Islam provides such a bond. For Malays who were not yet committed in an exclusive sense to the *umat Islam* the message was that this religion has a practical and even secular “usefulness”, a relevance to the unification of any community. Just as Islam had united and brought peace to the Arabs so it might also bring great advantages to the Malays.

*Islam and Reason* deals next with the issue of progress (*kemajuan*). Here again Islam is highly “useful”. The religion “orders people to be energetic and to work”<sup>20</sup> and the author, as always, quotes several Koranic verses to illustrate this point. God, he explains, has created all manner of things in this world and it is the responsibility of man to exploit them; Islam commands people to be “industrious”, and the expression which Sayyid Shaykh uses to convey the notion of ‘industriousness’, *usaha perkerjaan*, is that often employed in the *Utusan* and later liberal writings.<sup>21</sup>

In the matter of ‘freedom’, again given particular attention in *bangsa*-minded writings, Islam is once more portrayed by Sayyid Shaykh as being instrumental. Islamic doctrine provides a deeper understanding of an issue raised by the Sayyid’s rivals. By means of faith in God, by believing that He alone possesses power, men achieve a real “sense of freedom” (*kebebasan*). He is evidently thinking of the limitations of Western-style liberal thought when he adds that the Islamic concept of freedom is entirely different from the sense of “fear and trembling” which we experience when we believe things “have no explanation”.<sup>22</sup>

The subject of the next chapter is the theme of most of the book: “Islam as a religion for every *bangsa* in every period”. (We will return to his use of the word *bangsa*.) Further categories of “usefulness” are now added to Islam’s practical credentials. “Devotion” (*ibadat*), for instance, has the practical effect of reminding a person not to fall into the danger of following the dictates of animal lust (*hawa nafsu*). ‘Devotion’ encourages people to think not just of themselves (*dirinya sendiri sahaja*) but of their particular community (*perhimpunan kaum*) and of the community of mankind in general (*perhimpunan manusia amnya*). It is not mankind in general, however, to which Sayyid Shaykh gives most of his attention. His continuing concern is with Islamic society, particularly that portion which is located in the Malay world, and it is in this respect that he restates time and again the promise that Islam provides the “medicine” for our “illnesses”. Indeed he argues (and is by no means the only Muslim scholar to do so)<sup>23</sup> that the “progress” (*kemajuan*) and “modernity” (*kemodenan*) of Europe itself were established on an Islamic foundation. (The English word ‘foundation’ is actually included in parentheses.) What is meant (and briefly explained) here is that the Spanish and others learnt much from the

texts of Islamic learning which they translated. It is an argument which provides an answer to the extensive claims made for the superiority of European knowledge. Again Sayyid Shaykh may have been trying to influence the relatively uncommitted middle-class Muslims. He seems to be saying that 'you do not need to look to Europe for ideas of progress and modernity, the Europeans themselves have succeeded because of Islam'. Moreover (as *Islam and Reason* argues here and in many other places), the doctrines of Islam offer the most effective solutions to just those urgent and secular problems which concern the liberal writers who address this same audience.

In chapter 6, Sayyid Shaykh discusses the specific "articles of faith" in Islam – the statement of belief, and also the duty to pray, to pay the tithe, to fast and to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Not unexpectedly by this stage, he stresses the worldly utility of these five articles. He describes their "use for life in this world as well as for the life of one's particular community and for the community of man in general". Prayer, for instance, has particularly "great benefits and uses". It "promotes peace and builds energy and the strong desire to work". In discussing the benefits of Friday prayers, Sayyid Shaykh might actually have had Eunus in mind. *Islam and Reason* was written not long after Eunus had established the Singapore Malay Union, the first Malay political association. Sayyid Shaykh actually notes that, at the time of writing, "people of Reason" were setting up associations with leaders and officials in order to help their community and to "move their race forward" to "greatness" and "strength". Such organizations, he observes, entail much expenditure. The question Sayyid Shaykh now asks is why Muslims do not merely exploit the institutions they already possess. Every Friday, he reminds his readers, all Muslims are summoned to hear speeches. This occasion, he argues, surely offers the appropriate opportunity to lead the people forward in the ways of progress (*kemajuan*). To this end, he insists sermons ought to be capable of being easily understood. Also, they must not be concerned merely with matters which took place 700 or 800 years in the past. (Sayyid Shaykh is here chastising the type of old-fashioned teachers of Islam, the *Kaum Tua*, about whom *Al Imam* had been so critical.)

Just as Friday prayers might be utilized for the promotion of progress – as a gathering point for community discussion – so *Islam and Reason* argues that the Muslim tithe (*zakat*) might be used in productive ways. Funding a college or university of Islam, for instance, could certainly "bring benefits to Muslims". An "Islamic bank" might also "give opportunities to the poor and help with the education of their children".<sup>24</sup> Clearly this was not the way the religious establishment in general thought about *zakat* at the time Sayyid Shaykh wrote. He mentions

Islamic officials (as *Al Imam* had done two or three decades earlier) who were concerned only about their "tithes" and never got the proceeds of the tithes into the hands of the poor.

In commenting next on the fast (*puasa*), *Islam and Reason* again concentrates on what it describes as the "use" rather than the "meaning" of the practice.<sup>25</sup> In the fasting month, it is explained, Muslims are "united, cooperating with one another, giving love and affection to one another and helping each other in practical ways". At precisely the same time of day, people of all ranks and all degrees of wealth are equally hungry. In this way, the fast is able to consolidate the unity of the *umat* of Islam.

Following this train of thought, the "uses" of the pilgrimage, the *haj*, are not difficult to imagine. The *haj*, Sayyid Shaykh argues, is not just an opportunity to gain the title *haji* and to wear a turban. In making the *haj* Muslims become aware of the far-reaching bonds which unite them. In prayers a Muslim is bonded to others in his village or his state (*negeri*). On the pilgrimage Muslims enter a community of mankind which "consists of many races and all sorts of customs". When these different peoples come together, Sayyid Shaykh points out, they do so with one single aim. At the same time, however, they are able to learn about one another and also to make arrangements for trade. Indeed "no [trade] fair in the world can equal that of God in Mecca". The pilgrimage (and this is the last sentence of the book) is a time when people of different backgrounds are able, on the one hand, to learn from each other about "all sorts of matters which add to [one's] knowledge and obtain benefits" for one's life; and, on the other hand, to strengthen the "bonds of brotherhood and affection which are so strongly demanded by Islam".

According to Sayyid Shaykh, therefore, Islam is able to unite a community and to give it purpose, to ensure human equality, to foster habits of industry, to enhance true personal freedom and to promote progress. To the "people of Reason" who were expected to read the book, these qualities, argued in this particularly rational way, could well have been convincing indications of what Sayyid Shaykh persistently refers to as the "usefulness and superiority" of Islam. In arguing that Islam rather than any other belief system provides answers to the questions of the day, the Sayyid draws attention to the continued deep divisions in the Malay community. The way in which he argues, however, suggests a significant area of consensus. His presentation is in a certain sense defensive.

Even more than the earlier *Al Imam*, *Islam and Reason* seems to accept the local, liberal and political agenda. Both *Islam and Reason* and *Al Imam*, of course, privilege rationality. In discussing epistemology they

make statements very similar to those of such writers as Eunos. Just as the Sayyid wrote in the opening years of the century about “fantasies” which are capable of confusing the process of thought,<sup>26</sup> so *Islam and Reason* urges “rational thought and the need to investigate the origins of every single matter”. The 1931 book, however, appears to be particularly designed for a local audience possessing the type of social concerns enunciated by Eunos, his predecessors and his *bangsa*-minded successors. Although often writing in generalized Islamic terms, we have seen that Sayyid Shaykh also speaks of his audience in specific terms as the “Muslims of Malaya”. He recognizes their wish for economic progress and for social unity. He acknowledges the desire to establish associations which will advance the cause of the people. In each of these cases Sayyid Shaykh insists, in the *shari’ah*-minded tradition, that the fundamental doctrines of Islam are the best possible guide to achieving success. But the cases themselves – the issues which he formulates – do not emerge from a specifically *shari’ah*-minded discourse. Insisting constantly on the “usefulness” of Islam, the Sayyid is always privileging a reality external to the religion. In discussing the rational individual, the community, the race (*bangsa*), the ideas of progress and equality and so forth, Sayyid Shaykh employs the conceptual framework of his opponents. More than *Al Imam*, *Islam and Reason* seems to employ this language of reason and utility, this political language of Enlightenment-derived reform. In this way, *Islam and Reason* assumes the appearance of a political text. In its concerns and its manner of argument, the book is not just a religious statement but rather a vigorous Islamic contribution to a political debate. It addresses the political issues of the day and argues in the discourse of its rivals.

Why Sayyid Shaykh moved to enter the new discourse of politics is a question which requires further examination. The exponents of a *shari’ah*-minded version of Islam, it will be seen, are likely to have felt even more vulnerable to the liberal challenge in 1930 than they did in 1900. But before seeking the reasons for this development we will turn to another type of ideologue who may have felt himself to be in retreat in the late colonial period.

#### **A coronation manifesto**

In 1939 a *kerajaan* document was written to mark the coronation of Sultan Abdul Aziz of Perak. The book employs certain of the innovations and strategies used in the *Hikayat Johor* and also displays some of the tension exhibited in Haji Mohd. Said’s text. The Perak document combines a reassertion of the ceremonial prowess of kingship with a list

of further claims to what Sayyid Shaykh might have called the “usefulness” of royalty. In addressing the public sphere the Perak text makes direct appeals of a type only hinted at in the *Hikayat Johor*. In some places, these appeals make the text read less like a coronation memento than an election manifesto.

The *Account of the Coronation*, as the book is titled, comprises seventy-one pages.<sup>27</sup> Edited by Raja Lob Ahmad, a member of the Perak ruling family, the book includes not only the program of events associated with the coronation but also texts of several speeches, biographical records of the new Sultan and other royal personages, lists of the titles and offices of the state of Perak and an account of the government and history of the state. The contents and presentation of the book suggest the influence of British coronation mementos produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>28</sup> The *Account of the Coronation* commences with a “Preface”. It describes the scope of the book and expresses the wish that the book be viewed as a memento “of our loyalty to the Raja”. The preface is written over the editor’s own name. He also calls himself “I” (*saya*) and acknowledges the assistance he received from the “master of ceremonies” for the coronation. In this way Raja Lob follows Haji Mohd. Said, the author of the *Hikayat Johor*, in breaking away from the tradition of anonymity which governed earlier *kerajaan* writing. The introduction, which comes after the preface and is written by the Master of Ceremonies of the coronation, stresses the hope that the book will serve in future years as a “memorandum” or a “memoir”. This statement suggests a fear that procedures of coronation ceremonies were beginning to be forgotten in Malay society. It is a fear which is also expressed in other documents of the period.<sup>29</sup> By merely recording Sultan Abdul Aziz’s ceremony, the introduction implies, the coronation text might help to arrest a decline in *kerajaan* ceremonial and, presumably, *kerajaan* authority. The text developed, however, certain other and more innovative strategies for defending kingship.

Advocating the cause of the Sultanate, of course, is unlikely to have been the sole purpose of the *Account of the Coronation*. The author wrote at a time when many philosophies were competing for attention and the text itself is in part a record of his attempts to come to terms with new concepts. Also, the *Account* was probably designed for several audiences. For many of the élite of Perak, for instance, the mere listing of titles and offices – so essential to the designation of status – is likely to have been of absorbing interest. But if the coronation text, like many of the other documents which we have examined, possessed multiple concerns, the defence of monarchy is nevertheless a persistent theme of immediate interest in the historical development of Malay political culture. As in the case of the *Hikayat Johor*, it is a defence which makes

no attempt to deny the existence of powerful forces of change in the Malay states.

From the opening pages, for instance, the importance of the British is evident. The first section of the book commences with the text of the Sultan's "Declaration of Loyalty" made during the installation ceremony. In this Declaration, he promises to administer Perak "under the protection" of King George VI. The next item in the coronation book is the text of the "Proclamation" delivered during the same ceremony by the British Governor in Singapore (who held the position of High Commissioner in relation to the Malay States). The Proclamation "announces" that Raja Abdul Aziz is now a sultan, and then reminds listeners that he assumes his throne "under the protection" of the King of England. Only after this Proclamation, so the text suggests, does the Sultan ascend the throne as his forefathers had done with all those in attendance crying "*Daulat, Daulat, Daulat*" ("Long Live the Sultan").

As the volume proceeds, the deep impact of the British on the actual administration and society of Perak is readily admitted. The section of the book which deals with the history and government of Perak makes clear that the British presence – though it is described merely as 'protection'<sup>30</sup> – involved genuine innovation in the administration of the country. In "former times", the text explains, "all matters" were "in the grasp" of the sultan: "Nowadays those matters relating to the *shari'ah* and the custom (*adat*) are in the ruler's hands".<sup>31</sup> (The continued subordination of the *shari'ah* to the sultan is worth noting.) But in other areas – the collection of taxes is given as an example – the sultan is "helped by a State Council and by the advice of an English government official called a Resident". (I shall discuss in due course this apparently prolix description of the British colonial equation in Malaya.)

A further section of the book, entitled the "History of Perak", presents a more general account of the development of the polity in the colonial period. The editor acknowledges that this entire section was "plucked" from the Perak Department of Education.<sup>32</sup> Presumably this statement means that the editor used information recorded under the auspices of the British-administered department. As such, there is an implication that in presenting these historical data, the author is citing the authority of the government bureaucracy rather than that of the royal court itself. This is a surprising move to encounter in a *kerajaan* text. It immediately suggests an appeal to new epistemological foundations.

The style in which this historical section of the coronation memento is written conveys a similar suggestion. It is more matter-of-fact, less flowery, than the language used in most of the book. After relating information about some of the earlier sultans of Perak the "history"

explains in straightforward fashion how and why the British intervened in the affairs of the state. (Like the *Hikayat Johor*, the Perak text is concerned with a state and not just a royal family.) The appointing of a British Resident in 1874, his murder the following year and, finally, the British military occupation of Perak are all discussed in a manner favourable to the British. In describing the “administration of Perak after these disturbances” much praise is lavished upon the new Resident, Sir Hugh Low.<sup>33</sup> This official (who served from 1877 to 1889) is described as settling the financial debts of Perak. The text records that he brought about many “new changes” such as the abolition of slavery and the establishment of magistrates’ courts. In his time, the government (*kerajaan*) began to build highways, hospitals and a post office. The tin and mining industries also developed. For all “this loyal service” (the text remarks with apparent satisfaction and a genuine appreciation of the dynamics of royal reward), Sir Hugh Low received from the British monarch the lofty award of GCMG (Knight Grand Cross of the order of St Michael and St George).

In this account of Low, it is evident that imperial awards and titles continued to be an avid interest of the Perak court. Sultan Idris (1887–1916) also received a GCMG from the British and the pride with which the text tells of this achievement is reminiscent of the way the *Hikayat Johor* lists the Johore Sultan’s collection of imperial honours.<sup>34</sup> The coronation book gives the same Sultan Idris considerable praise in respect to the modernization of Perak. In fact, it seems to contrive to associate the Sultan with the “prosperity” which Perak achieved in the colonial period. The text suggests that under Sultan Idris’ administration, and only by implication under the guidance of Low’s successors as Resident, the population of Perak increased and the “state” was “organized in the manner of civilized states”.<sup>35</sup>

These remarks on the “new changes” in Perak provide a valuable context for Raja Lob’s presentation of the Perak monarchy. They demand further analysis. The state, as we know from numerous other records, had developed administratively and economically at a faster pace than most of the other peninsular sultanates.<sup>36</sup> The coronation text’s remarks on this development are so sympathetic to the British that one might suspect they were designed to win favour among colonial officials. The fact that they are written in Jawi Malay, however, suggests they were intended primarily for a Malay audience,<sup>37</sup> a significant element of which must have approved of Perak’s rapid ‘development’. The text’s comments on this ‘development’ are certainly couched in a manner flattering to the ruling family. The way in which the text associates not only Sultan Idris but also later, twentieth-century Perak sultans with this ‘progress’ is particularly

significant. It has the effect of distancing the rulers from the “backward” conditions over which their predecessors presided and, at the same time, tends to soft pedal the contribution of the British and Chinese in the transformation of Perak. The *Account*, in fact, conveys the implication that the state’s development was to a considerable extent actually generated by the royal court. Even to praise the economic and administrative achievements of Perak in a court document has such an effect. It strengthens the image of the Perak royal house as a promoter of modernization. The *Account of the Coronation* is cast, in this manner, as an innovatory book concerned with an innovatory royal family at a time when rival, non-royal élites believed they had better credentials for leading the Malay people.

Such campaigning for monarchy, such updating of the *kerajaan*, is present in more obvious form when the text actually describes the new Sultan and his coronation. The ruler and the ceremonies are portrayed partly in traditional and partly in modern terms. In the manner of so much earlier *kerajaan* literature, for instance, the *Account* describes the new ruler as “sincere” and “just”. The seven pages<sup>38</sup> devoted to a chronological summary of the events associated with the coronation again provides evidence of the persistence of earlier *kerajaan* preoccupations. The installation itself is described as being carried out in accordance with the “customs and ceremonial of Malay rajas of former times”.<sup>39</sup> There is also mention of the long-established ceremony of bestowing titles on members of royalty and on chiefs. Indeed these titles receive much further attention in the book. About a quarter of the entire volume is devoted to listing the royal officials of Perak. In some cases this involves no more than a record of their titles and names, in others there is a summary of their careers in royal service. In this attention to titles and to traditional ceremony, Raja Lob’s *Account*, whatever the author’s own personal preoccupations may have been, was evidently catering for the more conservative concerns of its audience. During the 1930s there must still have been large numbers of courtiers and commoners who would find meaning and reward in such a presentation of monarchy. We see mention of this type of royal subject, for instance, in the third text discussed in the next chapter. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that one of the most perceptive European observers of the 1920s considered that the “great majority” of Malays of that time continued to express a “strong attachment” to the sultans.<sup>40</sup>

The innovatory, modern, elements in the description of the Sultan and the coronation ceremony were perhaps directed in particular at that specific Malay audience which would have approved the text’s endorsement of modernization. Such readers – the sort of people who could be expected to have reacted positively to the doctrines



propagated in such papers as the *Utusan* – are likely to have been especially impressed, for instance, by the emphasis given in the coronation proceedings (and the account of the proceedings) to such British-inspired events as a state ball, a seventeen-gun salute, the electrical lighting of the capital and the football games on the “Polo Ground”.<sup>41</sup> In considering the balance of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ concerns in the coronation text, it is revealing to examine the way Malay court writers have handled other royal installations. If we compare the Perak *Account* either with earlier, more conventional, descriptions of coronations or with later, post-colonial mementos (which at least follow the format of the 1939 text) it is striking how little mention Raja Lob’s work gives to traditional ceremony. In the Perak *Account*, the actual installation ceremony and the title giving, for instance, are described with striking brevity.<sup>42</sup> Distributing its emphasis in this way Raja Lob’s text once again gives a strong impression of an attempt to stress the modernity rather than the tradition of Perak monarchy.

Such a deliberate neglect of tradition is remarked on by other, non-courtly, writers of the inter-war period. A modern Malay history written in the 1920s, for instance, comments that “nowadays the royal customary ceremonial and sumptuary regulations are fading”. Since coming under British influence, the book explains, the rulers had been attracted rather to the “progressive institutions of our era”.<sup>43</sup> In the coronation text, by contrast, the shift of emphasis to the ‘progressive’ did not entail a rejection of ceremony *per se*, and it definitely offered no implication of compromise over the centrality of the Sultan in Malay life. As the timetable of the coronation (printed in Raja Lob’s book) suggests, the Perak court and its chronicler might rather be seen as having attempted to bolster the ceremonies by incorporating modern institutions such as the state ball, sports events and electric lighting. The aim, one assumes, was not to undermine but to update the rituals of the *kerajaan*. Whether the Perak ideologues underestimated the ideological costs of this updating is another matter.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the renovation of the monarchy involved the presentation of the ruler himself as a modern administrator. Here Raja Lob built upon the type of presentation we found in the *Hikayat Johor*. Sultan Abdul Aziz, in fact, is described in the Perak memento almost as a politician.<sup>44</sup> In the account of his life and career, and in the wording of his royal address, one gets the impression that he competes unashamedly with other leaders in the expanding public sphere. The coronation account records that Sultan Abdul Aziz was born in 1887 and educated at the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar. (The “Malay Eton”, as it was often called, was established by the colonial administration to train the sons of the Malay establishment.)<sup>45</sup> The

‘biography’ then provides considerable detail about Abdul Aziz’s career. He is revealed to be an experienced bureaucrat. After holding the post of Assistant District Officer in a number of districts he became Deputy Head of the State Council. He was the Perak representative on the Federal Council, the federal legislative body located in Kuala Lumpur, the administrative centre of the Federated Malay States. He was a member also of the “Standing Committee”<sup>46</sup> of the State Council (the state level legislative body) and of the “Inquiry into State Industries”. Discussing the Sultan’s character and attitudes, the coronation text again moves well beyond the conventional qualities of “justice” and “sincerity”. It is explained that the Sultan likes to get up early in the morning, appreciates cleanliness and is “careful and conscientious”. (All these qualities are presumably signs of ideal bureaucratic material.) He enjoys working to “modernize education” and to “improve the lives” of his people.<sup>47</sup>

These compliments, remarks the author, in a sentence which would be unimaginable in pre-colonial *kerajaan* writings, are “not merely presented as praise”. Clearly hoping to distance himself from earlier styles of panegyric, Raja Lob stresses the point that his statements about Sultan Abdul Aziz “are true statements and can be proven”.<sup>48</sup> The author then proceeds to provide what he seems to consider factual proof in the form of an examination of the way Abdul Aziz had performed in his earlier administrative career. It is noted that as heir apparent (Raja Muda) he had walked many miles inspecting rice fields. He encouraged paddy planters to “work diligently”. He wanted the rice production of Perak to be just as progressive as that of the best fields in Malaya. Abdul Aziz also promoted health measures. He encouraged cleanliness, especially in villages located many miles distant from towns. He arranged for water to be piped to such villages rather than leave the people to drink from rivers. He took steps to obtain medicines for them. In the field of education, the text explains, Abdul Aziz offered prizes as incentives; he also lectured people on the “usefulness of knowledge” and encouraged them to be “diligent and industrious in their study”.

The Malays, according to the *Account of the Coronation*, had been the object of the Sultan’s particular attention. He was always concerned about the fact that the Malays had been “left behind” in the modernization of the state. As a result he had “busily sought ways to encourage” the Malays. He opened daily and weekly Malay markets, for instance, in the hope that they would gain “practice in trade”.

Reading this check list of royal achievements and qualities, we begin to tick off the themes encountered repeatedly in the *Utusan*, *Al Imam* and their successor newspapers. Many of them appear again, of course,

in Sayyid Shaykh's *Islam and Reason*. Conscientious "to do" government (to use the language of *In Search of Southeast Asia* introduced in the last chapter), a commitment to fostering education and industry and a concern about Malay backwardness were objectives enthusiastically supported by the *kerajaan's* rivals. According to the coronation account, Sultan Abdul Aziz even possessed an "egalitarian (*samarata*) point of view". He "does not distinguish between his subjects...between poor and rich". The "proof" of this statement, according to the *Account*, is that when residing in the town of Telok Anson he "ordered his only son to study at the Anglo-Chinese school" and "directed the teacher not to distinguish between his son and others".<sup>49</sup> (There is plenty of evidence that earlier sultans were equally determined to prevent their children being educated alongside commoners.<sup>50</sup>)

No less than his commoner rivals, the new Perak Sultan – according to the coronation text – also urged "unity" among his subjects.<sup>51</sup> In the past, we are told, he had wanted the people to "work together and unite because otherwise we cannot be successful." He had pointed to certain causes of division such as the desire of some Malays not to mix with those younger than them, or those they considered less pious. (The latter is a clear reference to the division over religion with which we have often been concerned.) Townspeople, too, sometimes did not mix with those in the country. In such circumstances, Abdul Aziz had declared: "How can we possibly unite our race (*bangsa*)"?<sup>52</sup> This last statement, reported in the Perak text, is highly significant. The Sultan is presented here as a promoter of *bangsa*-mindedness. He is not content, so the chronicler suggests, to be identified merely with the sultanate. Far more than in the case of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, he is portrayed in the context of the Malay *bangsa*. Indeed, the implication is unmistakable that the Sultan possesses a certain claim to leadership of the race. Urging the unity of the *bangsa* he might be understood as merely assisting the new political leaders. But his expressed concern about *bangsa* could also indicate a desire on the part of the ruler (or the chronicler) to challenge the new middle-class leaders who followed in the steps of Mohd. Eunus Abdullah.

The timetable of the coronation events printed in Raja Lob's book provides a further indication of the ruler's position *vis-à-vis* the *bangsa*. A list is given of the "speeches of submission" which were delivered before the Sultan in a ceremony at the Polo Ground. Among the groups participating in this ceremony, mention is made of an "Association of the Brotherhood of Malay Pen Friends".<sup>53</sup> This association was one of the earliest Malay *bangsa* organizations to extend across state boundaries. It rose to 12,000 in membership and by 1939 was promoting what appears to have been a self-consciously Malay program of

literary and linguistic reform.<sup>54</sup> To draw attention to the participation of this Malay association in the coronation underlines the ruler's engagement with the *bangsa* and not just the *negeri*. What is more, it seems to imply a significant leadership role for the ruler in relation to the non-political peasantry, and also to the middle classes who had taken important initiatives in the development of a *bangsa* consciousness.

In three further areas the Sultan is portrayed as possessing what might be termed leadership claims. First, although aware of the particular problems and needs of the Malays, he is described by the text as reaching out to all the races of his state. As we noted in the case of Johore,<sup>55</sup> such transcending of ethnic loyalties is a feature frequently encountered in discussions of monarchy. The Perak text makes no secret of the huge non-Malay population of the state. It even includes official population statistics showing, for instance, that in 1937 Perak had 376,950 Chinese and only 307,245 Malays.<sup>56</sup> In the description of the coronation it is recorded that not only Malays but also Chinese, Ceylonese, Indians and Japanese made formal declarations of loyalty to the Sultan. The ruler himself, in a speech printed in the volume, announces that he had "always been friends with many of the other races in this state... I have not forgotten the help these races have given in making Perak wealthy and prosperous".

In the same speech he talks of being "very loyal" to the British and praises the resigning Resident of his state. This British relationship is the next area on which the text claims expertise for the Sultan. The handling of the British is presented as a complex matter. Just as there is ambiguity in the praise of the residential administration and its consequences so it is difficult to interpret the Sultan's reported declarations of loyalty. Thus, when the Sultan's speech expresses the hope that the new Resident will give him "help and advice" and "lessen my own very heavy obligations",<sup>57</sup> one senses a certain patronizing tone. In expressing his gratitude to the British official, the Sultan treats him almost as a servant of the Sultanate rather than as an instrument of intrusive European imperialism. In the coronation ceremony too it is difficult to decide whether the inclusion of the British High Commissioner, and such features as the state ball and the seventeen-gun salute, are signs of weakness or of strength. At one level, they recognize British colonial domination but they also involve a degree of *kerajaan* assertion by means of incorporation. Whether or not by specific design on the part of the author, the institution of Malay monarchy is represented as potent in the face of British threat. In fact, the Perak text sometimes gives the impression of deliberately situating the 'progressive' products of colonialism, not only novel items of ritual but also economic and administrative 'development', within the framework of the *kerajaan*.

Raja Lob's book, therefore, communicates the impression that Sultan Abdul Aziz, and even the institution of the *kerajaan*, has the capacity to accommodate the British. He is portrayed as being accomplished in dealing with British officials. His speeches and skills suggest that he possesses the diplomacy, the experience and the personal stature to cope with the potentially difficult colonialists.

The third area in which Sultan Abdul Aziz's leadership capacities are stressed is that of religion. As in the case of the *Hikayat Johor*, the Perak text takes pains to publicize the ruler's piety. The new Sultan is described as reminding his people to "study religious knowledge and perform good works and always visit the mosque and religious schools".<sup>58</sup> In the written program of the coronation ceremony, prominence is given to Sultan Abdul Aziz's visits to various mosques and to the participation in certain events of the *mufti* and other religious officials. Comparing this program with the Malay accounts we possess of pre-colonial ceremonies (contained, in particular, in court *hikayats*), it would seem that Islam and Islamic officials assumed a higher profile in the 1939 coronation than in those of the nineteenth century and earlier.<sup>59</sup> It is possible that such changes in ceremonies and in descriptions of ceremonies reflect genuine changes in commitment to Islamic doctrines. It may also be the case that Raja Lob was attempting to placate actual or potential religious critics. If the latter is true, however, the accommodation involved no compromise regarding the position of the ruler himself. The coronation text is adamant about the authority of the Sultan in religious matters. The ruler's role is not formulated in a manner which would have pleased the *shari'ah*-minded critics of *Al Imam*. The *shari'ah* itself is presented as being "in the hands of" the Sultan and the immediate responsibility for the religious administration of the state is said to be the duty of the senior royal official, the Raja Bendahara.<sup>60</sup>

The only place in which the text reacts with some directness to the type of claims being made by the *shari'ah*-minded is in its statement about the divisions in the Malay community. When the Sultan warns of the dangers of people refusing to mix with those they consider less pious, he might be seen as opposing those who insisted on the primary importance of the *umat*. The unity of his subjects and, perhaps in particular, of the Malays seem in this statement to be given higher status than the unity experienced in the community of God. In future decades other sultans, and also the nationalist leaders of the independence period, would often warn of the dangers of divisiveness and would blame the Fundamentalists for their role in bringing it about.<sup>61</sup> The coronation manifesto, by referring to the sultan's leadership in overcoming religious dispute, implies that in this area also royal leadership has advantages over any other type of leadership in Malay society.

In issues relating to the non-Malay communities, to the British imperialists, and to Islam, therefore, the sultan is described as possessing a convincing claim to leadership. In discussing such matters Raja Lob's book – compiled ostensibly to commemorate a coronation and provide guidance for future ceremony – conveys a specific vision of monarchy. Not just in its discussion of the qualifications and policies of a particular sultan but in the way it describes the ritual of the coronation and the history and administration of the state, the *Account of the Coronation* stresses the “usefulness”, the relevance, of monarchy in regard to the major problems of Perak and the Malays. Like Sayyid Shaykh's *Islam and Reason*, Raja Lob's text addresses important issues of the day. The plural society, the British presence, Malay economic backwardness, Malay disunity, the opposition between hierarchy and egalitarianism: these were precisely the topics which dominated the Malay debate, or at least Malay newspaper writing, which, as we shall learn, burgeoned in the 1920s and 1930s. In each specific case, the royal chronicler insists that his patron can provide answers, can offer leadership. And in this respect the message of the coronation manifesto is similar to that of *Islam and Reason*.

The coronation memento and *Islam and Reason*, it is now clear, are not just genuine reactions to ideological and other challenges facing Malay society. They also promote rival philosophies and competing leaderships. Indeed, by presenting Sultan Abdul Aziz in such dynamic terms, the Perak text will actually surprise many students of the colonial era in Malaya. Sultan Abdul Aziz, unlike Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore, was the ruler of a state actually under formal British authority. Much of the secondary literature on British Malaya insists that such Protected Sultans were only figureheads; they tend to be portrayed as doing little more than “grac[ing] the imperial scheme of things at occasional durbars”.<sup>62</sup> They were allowed to indulge only in “pomp and ceremony”.<sup>63</sup> The “actual substance of political power” lay in British hands.<sup>64</sup> As suggested above, however, Raja Lob (unlike these modern commentators) is unlikely to have dismissed as insignificant the symbolic aspects of monarchy. He would have understood the continuing importance of royal ceremony for the conservative Malay majority and even for those Malays who merely sought to anchor new change in longstanding institutions. But Raja Lob also offered the image of rajaship, even during the colonial period, as active political leadership. Even more vigorously than the *Hikayat Johor*, the Perak text represents the ruler as engaging practical issues of government.

### The Coronation text in context

Particularly in respect to this claim about royal political action, we may ask to what extent Raja Lob's account of rajaship under British imperialism can be seen as realistic. Was he merely an optimistic or ambitious courtier who, in the course of his panegyric, misled his readers about the opportunities available to Malay royalty in the colonial situation? The situation is complex, but there are indications that certain sultans exercised great influence even in negotiations with their British 'protectors'. In some cases, as we saw in chapter 8, sultans proposed new legislation; it is also known that their wishes were often respected in the choice of British administrative personnel to serve in their state. One of the rulers' powers often mentioned is that of censorship: they were able to ban the publication of books or expel religious teachers of whom they disapproved. Perhaps the most convincing testimony to the continuing authority of the sultans in the colonial period, however, comes from their ideological opponents. At the end of the British era some of these Malays recalled the "fear" of the sultans which prevented many Malay subjects from taking part in political activity.<sup>65</sup>

This fear, of course, did not always prevent the expression of antagonism toward royal power. Sayyid Shaykh's *Islam and Reason*, as has been noted is primarily concerned with his liberal opponents, nevertheless the author also criticizes sultans who governed "according to their lusts". Similarly, a poem of 1937 in the newspaper, *Majlis*, contains bitter sentiments in a sarcastic prayer:

Oh, save the Sultans  
and the noblemen and the wealthy ones  
...  
oh, pray that  
they are saved from going to hell  
because of their negligence  
in protecting  
the welfare and the security  
of the *rakyat*<sup>66</sup>

We find attitudes of this type expressed again, though a little more diplomatically, in our third text of the inter-war period, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Vigorous condemnations of this type, however, tend to communicate an image of potency on the part of the condemned. They imply the Malay *rajās* were men of some power rather than "mere figureheads".

In this way, the comments of the twentieth-century opponents of the sultanates (like those of Abdullah or the *kerajaan* a century earlier) actually provide confirmation of the apparently ambitious claims made in many court documents.

The impression of a dynamic, colonial, sultanish which the coronation manifesto conveys is qualified in one vital respect. The text gives further weight to the impression that although the descendants of the pre-colonial rulers retained a good deal of authority in British Malaya they were nevertheless gradually losing ideological hegemony. In the very energy of Raja Lob's reply to liberal and *bangsa*-minded doctrines, there is a tone of defensiveness. In its almost feverish recording of the new Sultan's experience and qualities to rule, the coronation text is similar to Sayyid Shaykh's *Islam and Reason* in communicating a sense of troubled urgency. Both works give the impression of being composed in the face of a formidable challenge. To a high degree, for instance, they each address an agenda formulated primarily by their liberal opponents. Unity, economic backwardness, progress and equality are portrayed both as Islamic and as royal causes. Moreover, the language used by Raja Lob – although employing certain elements of the vocabulary and style of traditional court writing – also displays the heavy influence of such writers as Eunus. The *Account of the Coronation* is by no means a book concerned primarily about *kerajaan*, *nama* and *adat istiadat*. It addresses the problems of a 'state' and a 'race'. The author is anxious about the canons of good 'government', the fostering of a work ethic and the maintenance of social unity. To return to Partha Chatterji's terminology, the "problematic" of Raja Lob's work may differ from that of liberal authors, or that of Sayyid Shaykh, but to a large extent all these authors have begun to share a single 'thematic'. They write very much in the same liberal, political, discourse.

Raja Lob, of course, aimed to strengthen rather than weaken Perak kingship by appropriating the language of liberalism and addressing issues usually neglected in *kerajaan* texts. In his intentions he seems to have had much in common with Haji Mohd. Said, the author of the *Hikayat Johor*. Both men were drawing liberal thinking into the royal sphere. As noted in chapter 8, however, in the long term the incorporation of such new doctrines is likely to have had far-reaching conceptual implications for the *kerajaan*. Even when the royal chronicler simultaneously expressed respect for traditional *kerajaan* ideas or institutions, the introduction of such novelties is certain to have had ideological costs. In some matters Raja Lob goes so far as to offer deliberate criticism of the old courtly culture: again he may have considered it possible to condemn one element without damaging the whole. Thus, in his concern to provide correct statements about the



Sultan – statements which are “true” and “can be proven” – Raja Lob directly implies a distrust of *kerajaan* epistemology. Like his acceptance of European notions of good government, such declarations bring into question the entire ideological structure of the *kerajaan*. They indicate a sense of embarrassment about the traditional royal ideology, an embarrassment felt most acutely perhaps when he considered himself to be addressing the emerging middle-class audience. (We shall examine further this audience in the last section of this chapter.)

The relative neglect of ‘traditional’ ceremony in the timetable of the coronation may also be an indication of such discomfort. The fact that the post-colonial coronation mementos give more rather than less attention to tradition (here is the ‘revival’ if not the ‘invention’ of tradition)<sup>67</sup> may suggest they were designed for a different audience. In the independence period, in the early years of a democratic political electorate, the royal courts may have feared losing not only the middle class but also the conservative support for monarchy. By contrast, in the 1930s it is possible that the Perak text was designed specifically for the relatively small but apparently growing bourgeois public sphere.<sup>68</sup> The compiler may have been inclined to take for granted the allegiance of the more conservative, often rural, segments of the Perak community.

### The public sphere

The expansion of the public sphere or public tribunal (which we discussed initially in chapter 5) is critical to explaining the preoccupations and the style of both the *Account of the Coronation and Islam and Reason*. The presence of a substantial public of “rational readers” is implied in each book and there are also numerous other indications of such an audience expanding in the 1930s. In the decade or so before the Japanese Occupation many new Malay-language newspapers were established as well as a number of political organizations. As will be seen in the next chapter, it was actually in the 1930s that the word ‘politics’ came into circulation. The excitement of this new politics was remembered in later years. For instance, several Malay memoirs of the period have been written and they speak with rapt enthusiasm of the way the pioneer journalists “delves into the political situation of the homeland”.<sup>69</sup>

Certain Europeans also noted the growth of this middle-class tribunal. According to one observer, an educationalist named L. Richmond Wheeler, it included schoolteachers and “superior agricultural Malays, some of whom are acquiring considerable wealth through rubber”. This “middle class” formed a “growing section of the public, men with a stake in their country...able to take an intelligent interest

in public progress...and to make a stand against old superstitions or extravagant feudal claims". Such "men" deposited money in savings banks and "developed ideas" by reading newspapers, by "mutual intercourse", and by "conversation" with those Englishmen "who are able to converse fluently in Malay". Among the expanding Malay middle class, there was particular support for "the racial and national ideas" which Wheeler considered to be increasingly prevalent in Asia. "Sometimes", he reported, such ideas were "associated with modern democratic notions".<sup>70</sup> In the next chapter, in discussing the third text of the 1930s, we will examine a Malay "nationalist" who possessed notions of this type to a radical degree.

Some factors leading to the expansion of a Malay middle class in the last decades of the colonial period are not difficult to identify. The growth of Malay smallholder production in the rubber industry, for instance, helped to establish a prosperous peasant group.<sup>71</sup> A recent study on Pahang rural society during the British era gives actual examples of Malays who, having amassed wealth through rubber production, sent their children to modern schools. These children were likely to be politically aware and even be members of the new political movements.<sup>72</sup>

The specific educational influences which would have promoted the advance of a public sphere in the inter-war years have been examined with care by William Roff.<sup>73</sup> He identifies three separate streams of education: an English-language and a Malay-language stream, both under British administration, and an independent Islamic school system. Many Islamic schools offered significant elements of a modern education, for instance, making use for reading matter of current Malay newspapers. The European-run streams were at first treated with suspicion by Malays but at least by the 1920s this attitude had changed. In the Federated Malay States, enrolment in the government Malay vernacular schools increased from 6,000 in 1900 to 20,213 in 1920.<sup>74</sup> Even English-language schools became increasingly popular.<sup>75</sup> In discussing the geography, the *Hikayat Dunia*, we saw the potential for Western training to shape a new political consciousness. In the 1920s, more than ever before, the government education reports speak of the propagation of a "new learning" and of "scientific" knowledge.<sup>76</sup> They declare with pride that school teachers were now on a "different intellectual plane".<sup>77</sup> In these years European government officials declared publicly that their educational policy was having revolutionary effects, and certain of these effects must inevitably have played a role in fostering the public forum.

In one respect, this educational activity gave British policy a contradictory character. Although the British took pains to support the royal

courts, such vigorous action in the field of education, together with the introduction of new political and social concepts in the actual process of government, inevitably had the effect of undermining the hegemonic *kerajaan* ideology. The new learning, of course, also challenged certain Islamic doctrines; but here British aims were consistent. There is no doubt that many Islamic doctrines caused them concern. In 1906, R. J. Wilkinson had feared that the “native of the Peninsula is becoming less of a Malay and more of a Mussulman”.<sup>78</sup> Islam, he believed, damaged the welfare of the Malays and was also a “quasi-political force, a militant brotherhood”.<sup>79</sup> One way in which the British hoped to undermine Islamic influence was through education, particularly through the risk-laden attempt to combine traditional culture and “new learning”. A direct form of attack on Islam was believed to be the substitution of the Roman for Arabic script in the writing of the Malay language. As the *Annual Report on Education* for 1904 declared, the Arabic character was “associated with the unintelligent study of the Koran”; the Roman alphabet was “associated in the Malay mind with the vigour and intelligence of white races”. The report recommends that the Arabic character be “gradually discontinued”.<sup>80</sup>

It was in the context of this type of British opposition that Sayyid Shaykh wrote *Islam and Reason*, just as Raja Lob’s portrayal of the Perak monarchy was designed for a readership that he considered to be imbued with the colonial “new learning”. The texts examined in this chapter are certainly not the only indications that their authors were entering a new political sphere. Thus, Sayyid Shaykh took the innovatory step of choosing the genre of novel – he has been called the ‘father’ of Malay novel writing – in which to express his religious views before a wider audience.<sup>81</sup> He also promoted the teaching of English and other aspects of a modern education in Islamic schools.<sup>82</sup> Aristocrats like Raja Lob, as noted already, were engaged in obtaining real political experience as members of British-inspired government councils.<sup>83</sup> The actual wording of such texts as *Islam and Reason* and the *Account of the Coronation*, however, offers insights into precisely what was involved in entering the new politics, and, of course, the particular type of influences which may have determined that new consciousness.

In considering the circumstances in which these two texts were produced, therefore, it is essential to stress the character of British imperialism in Malaya. We need to note, in particular, the economic, administrative and educational forces unleashed by the British on the Peninsula. The third text of the pre-war period, Ibrahim Yaacob’s *Surveying the Homeland*, a left-wing analysis of the state of Malaya and of Malay society, actually contains a Malay attempt to assess these forces. It is no disinterested analysis, however. Like the two other texts, it also

participates in the increasingly heated ideological debate taking part in Malay society. Ibrahim Yaacob, a product himself of the British educational system, condemns colonial rule and (in the manner of Munshi Abdullah's writings) also advocates some of the doctrines most fashionable in Europe at the time he wrote. It was Malay authors such as Ibrahim Yaacob who established the agenda and language of politics and thus placed on the defensive both the *ulama* and the courtly writers. In certain areas, however, he was himself vulnerable to the rival ideologies of his opponents.

### Notes

- 1 For surveys of twentieth-century British Malaya, see B.W. Andaya and L.Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (London: MacMillan, 1982), chapters 5 and 6; J.M. Gullick, *Malaysia: Economic Expansion and National Unity* (London: Ernest Benn, 1981), chapters 3, 4 and 5; R. Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1964), *passim*; Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *Question of Class: Capital, the State and Uneven Development in Malaya* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), parts 2 and 3; W.R. Roff *Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), *passim*; R. Heussler, *British Rule in Malaya: The Malayan Civil Service and Its Predecessors 1867-1942* (Oxford: Clío, 1981), *passim*; Shamsul A.B., *From British to Bumiputra Rule* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986).
- 2 Emerson, *Malaysia*, 195, 283.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 507. Emerson's book was read, for instance, by Ibrahim Yaacob; see A. Samad Ahmad, *Sejambak Kenangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1981), 111.
- 4 *Ugama Islam dan 'Akal* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Dian, 1965; (orig. pub. 1931)). On Sayyid Shaykh, see chapters 5 and 6 above. Also see Sarim Mustajab, *Islam dan Perkembangannya dalam Masyarakat Melayu di Semenanjung Tanah Melayu 1900-1940*. MA thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan, 1975, 40-53; Tan Seng-huat, *The Life and Times of Sayyid Shaykh Al-Hadi*, BA (Hons) thesis, University of Malaya, 1961, *passim*. The fact that Sayyid Shaykh's opponents referred to him as 'Kaum Wahhabi' suggests strongly the continuing *shari'ah*-mindedness which he displayed; Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *Modern Muslim Thought in Egypt and Its Impact on Islam in Malay*, PhD thesis, University of London, 1965, appendix 2.
- 4 From the journal, *Al-Ikhwan*, 16 October 1926; quoted in Seng-huat Tan, *The Life and Times of Sayyid Shaykh al-Hadi*, BA (Hons) thesis, University of Singapore, 1961, 93.
- 5 Tan, Sayyid Shaykh, 13. On Mohd. Abduh, see Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), see especially 108-09; Muhammad Abduh, *The Theology of Unity* (trans. Ishaq Musa'ad and K. Cragg) (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966). The influence of Mohd. Abduh on Sayyid Shaykh is discussed, for instance, in Sharon Siddique, *Some Malay Ideas on Modernization, Islam and Adat*, MA thesis, University of Singapore, 1972, 56; Tan, Sayyid Shaykh, 63.
- 6 *Islam dan 'Akal*, 16.
- 7 See the discussion in chapters 6 and 7 above.
- 8 See W.R. Roff, 'Kaum Muda - Kaum Tua: Innovation and Reaction Amongst the Malays 1900-1941', in K.G. Tregonning (ed.), *Papers on Malayan History* (Singapore: University of Malaya Press, 1962), 162-92.
- 9 *Islam dan 'Akal*, 132, 120. He refers to "we Malays" (*orang Melayu kita*) on p.38.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 17.

- 11 *Ibid.*, 18. I am grateful to Professor A.H. Johns for his advice on the absence of the word *aql* in the Koran.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 26–9.
- 13 The word used is *persamaan*; *ibid.*, 33.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 17 See R. Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 293.
- 18 *Islam dan 'Akal*, 41.
- 19 See the discussion of *perhimpunan* in chapter 7 above. *Masharakat* does not appear in Marsden's dictionary of 1812. R.J. Wilkinson's dictionary of 1903 has *musharakat* defined as "a partnership; an association for common business". In Wilkinson's *A Malay-English Dictionary* (Romanised) (London, MacMillan, 1959), first published in 1933, *musharakat* is defined merely as 'partnership'. H.C. Klinkert *Nieuw Maleisch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek* (Leiden: Brill, 1930) defines 'moesjarakah' as 'genootschap, maatschappij, vereeniging, gemeenschap'. In R.J. Wilkinson, A.E. Coope and Mohd. Ali bin Mohamed, *An Abridged Malay-English Dictionary* (London: Macmillan, 1963), *musharakat* or *masharakat* is defined as 'society'. In Kathay's *New Crown Dictionary of National Language* (Singapore: Kathay, 1961), *masharakat* is defined as 'society, community'.
- 20 *Islam dan 'Akal*, 51. Shaharuddin Maaruf, *Malay Ideas on Development* (Singapore: Times Books, 1988), 65 refers to the Sayyid's "capitalistic Islam".
- 21 *Islam dan 'Akal*, 51.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 55.
- 23 See, for instance, Muhammad Abduh, *Theology*, 149–50;
- 24 *Islam dan 'Akal*, 121.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 122.
- 26 See chapter 7 above.
- 27 Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Sir Abdul Aziz* (Penang: Persama Press, 1940).
- 28 See, for instance, *The Coronation of Victoria, Queen of England in Westminster Abbey, June 28, 1838. A Historical Chronicle* (London: W.E. Painter, ca. 1838); also the *Official Souvenir Program of the Coronation of His Majesty King Edward VIII* (London: King George Jubilee Trust, n.d.). (The latter is a dummy volume as Edward was not actually crowned.) For an account of the Sultan of Perak's visit to England for the coronation of King Edward VII, see H. Clifford, *Bushwhacking and other Asiatic Tales and Memories* (London: Heinemann, 1929), 205–22. It would not be surprising if the Sultan made arrangements to obtain a published account of the coronation proceedings. In the 1970s I found the Sultan of Pahang's private secretary to be minutely interested in the formal proceedings of British royalty, seeing them as a possible model for the Pahang monarchy.
- 29 See, for instance, the editorial in the newspaper, *Warta Malaya*, 8 March 1930. See, also, Abdul Hadi bin Haji Hasan, *Sejarah Alam Melayu*, vol. 2, 215.
- 30 Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 2, 41.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 36ff. For Hugh Low's career, see E. Sadka *The Protected Malay States 1874–1895* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968), 106–09.
- 34 See chapter 8 above.
- 35 Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 40.
- 36 Yeo Kim Wah, *The Politics of Decentralization* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 30.
- 37 When both Europeans and Chinese read Malay they were likely to do so in the romanized script. For comments on European officials' competence in Malay, see, for example, H.G. Turner, *Recollections of Life in the Malayan Civil Service 1929–1944* (unpublished manuscript), MSS. IND OCN S259, Rhodes House, 119, 134; *Memoirs of Sir William Goode*, MSS. IND OCN S225, Rhodes House, 5. Even some

- of the more scholarly officials tended to prefer to work in romanized rather than Jawi Malay; see R.F. Ellen, M.B. Hooker and A.C. Milner, 'The Hervey Malay Collection in the Wellcome Institute', *JMBRAS*, LIV, 1 (1981), 82–92. In 1891 the Department of Education urged the teaching of romanized in preference to Arabic characters because Europeans and others would then be able to read the language; *Annual Report for the Education Department, Straits Settlements, 1891*, 273.
- 38 Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 63–9.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 40 Wheeler, *Modern Malay*, 233.
- 41 *Padang Polo*; Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 64.
- 42 For post-colonial ceremonies, see, for example, the account of the 1985 coronation of the present Sultan of Perak; *Pertabalan Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah etc.* (no publication details displayed). See also the Pahang coronation of 1975; *Pertabalan Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah etc.* (Kuantan: Nordin Abd. Ghani, 1975). For pre-colonial ceremonies, see, for instance, the accounts in the Perak text, Raja Chulan, *Misa Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1962), 50–3. See also V. Matheson and B.W. Andaya (eds) *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al-Nafis)* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 296; and C.C. Brown (ed.), 'Sejarah Melayu: or, Malay Annals', *JMBRAS*, XXV, 2–3 (1952), 17. Discussion of Malay coronation ceremony is to be found in R.J. Wilkinson, 'Some Malay Studies', *JMBRAS*, X, 1 (1932), 78–82; R.O. Winstedt, 'Kingship and Enthronement in Malaya', *JMBRAS*, XX, 1 (1947), 129–39; and Syed Alwi bin Sheikh Al-hadi, *Adat Resam Melayu dan Adat Istiadat* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1960), 96–13. I should like to thank Dr V. Matheson Hooker for advice regarding coronation accounts.
- 43 Abdul Hadi, *Sejarah Alam Melayu*, vol. 2, 215.
- 44 See especially, Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 9–17.
- 45 On the Malay College, see R. Stevenson, *Cultivators and Administrators: British Education Policy Towards the Malays 1875–1906* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975) 177–90; Khasnor Johan, *The Emergence of the Modern Malay Administrative Elite* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984) 26–47.
- 46 The English words are used, but written in Jawi letters: Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 10.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 50 Kalyan Kumar Ghosh, *Twentieth-Century Malaysia: Politics of Decentralization of Power, 1920–1929* (Calcutta: Progressive, 1977), 141–3.
- 51 The word I define as 'unity' is *bersatu*; Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 17.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 54 See Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 212–21. In 1946, it is interesting to note, Sultan Abdul Aziz took a positive approach to the developing nationalist movement; Arriffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community 1945–1950* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), 123.
- 55 See chapter 8 above.
- 56 Raja Lob Ahmad, *Riwayat Pertabalan*, 49.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 7, 8.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 59 See note 42 above. Islamic elements, of course, are present in the pre-colonial ceremonies. In Riau, for example, the Koran is mentioned specifically and the ruler agrees to follow the "commands of Allah"; see Matheson and Andaya, *Precious Gift*, 296.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 41, 42, 45.
- 61 I discuss this matter in 'Inventing Politics: The Case of Malaysia', *Past and Present*, 132 (1991), 104–29.

- 62 Yeo Kim Wah, *Politics of Decentralization*, 50; see also Khasnor Johan, *The Emergence of the Modern Malay Administrative Elite* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), 169.
- 63 Emerson, *Malaysia*, 140.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 211.
- 65 See above chapter 8, note 4.
- 66 Quoted in Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origin and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk, 1985), 61–2. For further criticism of rulers in Malay newspapers, see Zulkipli bin Mahmud, *Warta Malaya. Penyambung Lidah Bangsa Melayu 1930–1941* (Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan, 1979), 34, 79.
- 67 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 68 For tables indicating the numbers of Malays (in Malaya rather than Perak alone) in different occupations, see Emerson, *Malaysia*, 183 (for the 1931 census) and Norton Ginsburg and Chester F. Roberts *Malaya* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1958), 195 (for the 1947 census). The latter figures certainly suggest that although the vast majority of Malays remained in agricultural occupations a growing number were placed in the categories: “professions”, “commercial and financial occupations” and “public administration and defense”.
- 69 A. Samad Ahmad, *Sejambak Kenangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1981), 57. See also Ahmad Boestaman, *Memoir Seorang Penulis* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979), chapters 3, 4, 5; and Keris Mas, *30 Tahun Sekitar Sastera* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979), 5–10; Tan Sri Datuk Dr Mohamad Said, *Memoirs of a Menteri Besar* (Singapore: Heinemann, 1982), 163. See, also, Zulkipli, *Warta Malaya*, 108–09. The next chapter contains further discussion about the expansion of the newspaper industry.
- 70 Wheeler, *Modern Malay*, 234. Yeo Kim Wah’s *Politics of Decentralization*, 166–7, quotes an example of this “middle class” concern for “public progress”. A letter of 1920 (in the English-language newspaper, the *Malay Mail*) from an “Anxious Malay Father” expresses concern about the employment situation for members of the Malay “middle class”. For a further comment on the greater “sophistication” displayed by the Malays in the 1920s, see Governor Guillimard to Secretary of State, 8 November 1920, CO (Colonial Office), 717/5. The historian Khoo Kay Kim also identifies the 1920s as a time when there emerged in Malay society “an educated class” which was “increasingly...able to give free expression to its thoughts on the welfare of the masses”; ‘Malay Society, 1874–1920s’, *JSEAS*, v, 2(1974), 198.
- 71 Lim, *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy*, appendix 4.2 and *passim*.
- 72 M.L. Koch, *Malay Society in Temerloh Pahang under British Colonial Rule 1889–1948*, PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1982, 193–5, 208–10. For some comparable data on the formation of a wealthier, educated peasant élite, see Shamsul A.B., *From British to Bumiputra Rule*, Chapter 2.
- 73 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, *passim*.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 127.
- 75 Philip Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya 1874–1940* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), 125–7. See also the comment in the *Annual Report on Education, Federated Malay States, 1921*, 7: “Education is the daily topic of the Malay press”.
- 76 *Annual Report on Education, Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States, 1929*, 11.
- 77 *Federal Council Proceedings*, 25 November 1919, B45.
- 78 R.J. Wilkinson, ‘Malay Customs and Beliefs’, *JMBRAS*, 3, 4(1957), (orig. pub. 1906), 40.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 5. See also Wilkinson’s comments on the advance of Islamic law among the Malays, quoted by W.R. Roff in ‘Islam Obscured? Some Reflections on Studies of Islam and Society in Southeast Asia’, *Archipel*, 29(1985), 15.
- 80 *Annual Report in Education, Straits Settlements, 1904*, 10.
- 81 The novel is titled, *Setia 'Ashok Kepada Ma'ashok-nya atau Shafik Afandi Dengan Faridah Hanom* (Pinang: Julatong, 1925–26). Some commentators (see, for instance, Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, ‘Modern Developments’, *JMBRAS*, 17, 3 (1940), 152) have suggested Sayyid Shaykh wrote the novel primarily to make money. There are

indications, however, that just as with the novel in eighteenth-century England, Sayyid Shaykh's Malay novel was a vehicle for ideological propagation and speculation. On the English novel, see P.M. Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1976).

- 82 For Sayyid Shaykh's role as an educator, see Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, 'Modern Developments', 155; Tan, Sayyid Shaykh, 16-17 ; Rahim bin Osman, 'Madrasah Masyhur Al-Islamiyyah, Pulau Pinang', *Islam di Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, n.d.), 75-85 and Muhammad Aboulkhir Zaki Badawi, *Modern Muslim Thought*, appendix 4.
- 83 For further discussion, see especially Gullick, *Rulers and Residents*, *passim*.



## CHAPTER 10

### *Surveying the Homeland: Sedar and Dialogic Processes*

On first impression our final text, *Melihat Tanah Ayer* or *Surveying the Homeland*, seems to view the world much as we do. It provides an analysis of the Malay community of British Malaya at the end of our period, on the eve of the Japanese Occupation. It possesses a language, style and perspective congenial to many present-day readers. This perspective – nationalist, left-wing, and highly political – promises a familiar vantage point, permitting us to discern the essential realities of colonial Malaya. In short, the text, on initial encounter, offers the opportunity of an appropriate closure to this study.

Despite this first reaction, however, on closer inspection the ideological imperatives of the text are less straightforward. *Surveying the Homeland*, like so many of the earlier texts, is constructed dialogically. Although participating in, and even promoting, the new political sphere, its ideological messages are only partly a product of Western influence. They emerge also from a perceived need to satisfy long-standing Malay preoccupations, one of which concerned the relation between the individual and society. To some extent this apparently unambiguous, liberal-socialist, document arises from a process of ideological concatenation reaching back to the confrontation between the *kerajaan* and Munshi Abdullah.

The author of *Surveying the Homeland*,<sup>1</sup> Ibrahim Yaacob, declares his particular perspective in the opening paragraphs of the ‘introduction’. He describes the ninety-six page book as “a gift” to the Malays and declares his intention to “carry out a service to my *bangsa*”.<sup>2</sup> He seeks, he says, a “strategy” (*muslihat*) for the advance of his people. The fact that the ‘introduction’ makes no pious reference to Allah immediately conveys that, unlike Sayyid Shaykh, this author was not seeking a “strategy” among the doctrines of Islam. He displays a different type of

disrespect toward the *kerajaan*. Here it is revealing to note the way that Ibrahim expresses his “acknowledgments” to members of certain royal courts for assisting him in his travels around Malaya. (These travels, he suggests, led to the writing of the book.) The manner in which he thanks these figures contrasts revealingly with his devoted references to the Malay *bangsa*: “I wish to express my great debt,” he declares, “to the Tengkus, Rajas, Datuks, Tuans, Inchis, friends and comrades who have given me all sorts of help” It is not just the use of the familiar ‘I’ (*saya*) in this author’s remarks which distinguishes them from those used by more traditional authors in addressing royalty. Rather the summary jumbling together of different types of Malay titles (Tengku, Raja, Datu, Tuan, Inchi) has an unmistakably irreverent effect. In not listing the precise and complete titles of those who had helped him, he communicates a lack of respect toward Malay convention. It is an irreverence which is reminiscent of that of Munshi Abdullah and it is always present in *Surveying the Homeland*.

Almost immediately following the ‘introduction’, Ibrahim Yaacob’s disdain for the Malay royal courts is expressed even more openly. People of “high rank,” he declares, tend to be “absorbed in finding ways to secure and increase their rank. They forget about the ordinary people.”<sup>3</sup> Here is one of the most persistent criticisms of Malay royalty made by earlier liberal ideologues, and yet, one ought to add, it would certainly not be true to say that *Surveying the Homeland* is in every way a liberal document.

Ibrahim Yaacob was a journalist who, both during and after the Japanese Occupation, was also a controversial political leader. Like Mohd. Eunos Abdullah many decades earlier, he studied to what was in British Malaya the highest level of the colonial educational system. He attended the élite Teachers’ Training College in Perak, an experience which gave him access to a range of European doctrines including that of anti-colonialism.<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim’s radicalism was significantly different from that of Eunos. Had Eunos been able to read *Surveying the Homeland*, he would have been struck by the degree of its antagonism toward colonialism and its consequences. (This attitude actually led Ibrahim to be imprisoned by the British.<sup>5</sup>) Eunos would also have noted two further novel features. Although possessing some of the same concerns, and using much of the same language as his predecessors, Ibrahim gives an even greater stress to *bangsa*. Secondly, as already stated, he replaces the earlier bourgeois liberal doctrines with something closer to a modern socialist perspective. Both of these innovations, the added stress on *bangsa* and the socialism, can be interpreted not merely in terms of prevailing intellectual trends in the wider world. They were to some extent products of the ideological

debate taking place in Malay society. They may both be seen as answers to the challenge of rival Islamic and royal ideologies.

In the manner of the *Voyage of Abdullah*, *Surveying the Homeland* presents both an account of the Malay condition and an ideological summons. Ibrahim's book is actually divided into two sections. The first is a brief survey or overview of the history and the government of Malaya. It includes also an important discussion about the impact of capitalism. The second section is a more detailed report on several of the states and Settlements, noting their social and economic conditions. This section covers only the west coast states (including Kedah and Perlis), Pahang and Penang. On the last page Ibrahim promises a second volume which will deal with Kelantan, Trengganu and Johore. (This volume was apparently seized by the colonial police.<sup>6</sup>) The report section, too, is often polemical in style, complementing effectively the declarations of the first part of the book. Ibrahim never seems to soft-pedal or disguise his ideological position. He also persistently displays an analytical and ideological rigour that would have been striking to his readers. This rigour was present not only in his writing. We know, for instance, that a fellow journalist in the 1930s considered that even Ibrahim's spoken language was unusual in its "precision".<sup>7</sup>

### Reportage

Contained in the reportage chapters of Ibrahim's book is a quantity of valuable data on the pre-war situation. In particular, Ibrahim's observations throw light on the context in which ideological debate was taking place. It is revealing to consider these observations before examining in some detail the main thrusts (such language is appropriate when faced with his didactic style) of Ibrahim's argument.

First, although *Surveying the Homeland* possesses an explicitly anti-colonial bias, in some ways its description of British colonial government seems remarkably restrained. The British administration in Malaya is in no sense presented as a juggernaut, thrusting into the Malay lands. (The way Ibrahim portrays capitalism is another matter.) Rather Ibrahim's account is in important respects consistent with that of Raja Lob in the coronation text. In describing the administration of Malaya, Ibrahim distinguishes between the Straits Settlements, which are "subject" to the British, and the Malay sultanates which are "protected states".<sup>8</sup> That is, in the manner of the *kerajaan* author, he takes seriously the legal sovereignty of the monarchs. Especially when we compare his portrayal of the British Malayan states with his references to those Malay states under Thai authority, the sovereignty of the Malay rulers in the British sphere is evident. Thus, the states of Patani and

Singgora are said to be not 'protected' but "under the administration" of the Thai government. (The Malay word persistently used for 'protected' in this and other Malay texts, *naung*, also suggests 'sheltered'.<sup>9</sup>)

Ibrahim's discussion of the actual operation of government helps to explain this choice of terminology. He focuses especially on the working of the state councils. (In legal terms, the supreme authority in each state rested in the ruler in his state council, but just how significant the councils were in the running of a state has been a matter of some scholarly discussion.<sup>10</sup>) The British adviser or Resident in each state was a member of the state council and Ibrahim persistently emphasizes his strictly advisory status. The Resident's views are certainly described as carrying considerable weight in the councils of the Federated Malay States: "usually it is he who answers and gives deciding opinions on questions and problems brought before the council."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, even these FMS advisers operated, so Ibrahim observes, in a council headed by the sultan. In the case of the Unfederated States, Ibrahim's account suggests, the British official was far less influential. Kedah, he explains, still had an "aristocratic system; that is, the right to govern is entirely in the hands of the Raja and chiefs." The British adviser was "the only British official" on the council and his task was "strictly to give advice."<sup>12</sup> In the Johore council, Ibrahim emphasizes, the adviser talked only about those matters for which he was responsible.<sup>13</sup>

In denying the British officials centre stage, *Surveying the Homeland* tends to attribute a correspondingly greater prominence to certain Malay protagonists in the colonial situation. In fact, in Ibrahim's writing – just as in Raja Lob's – the sultans and certain other contenders for power in Malay society seem to possess a larger degree of agency than is suggested in most historical studies of the period. Ibrahim makes us increasingly sceptical about the judgement that the rulers were "mere figureheads". His assessment makes us question especially the view expressed in a major study of the inter-war period that the British had "acquired complete effective control and direction of every state and settlement in Malaya."<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim's book reminds us, at least as convincingly as Raja Lob's text had done, that this "control and direction" allowed a real degree of political and ideological elbow room to members of several Malay élites.

In the case of the sultans, he asserts their enduring potency, as other critics of the *kerajaan* had also asserted it, partly by means of his actual antagonism toward them. Even though the sultans were "protected" and forced to tolerate the presence in their courts of a British adviser, Ibrahim still presents them as his principal ideological opponents. He insults them. He repeats the old charge that the rulers are preoccupied with status issues and also claims that, since the fall of Malacca to the

Portuguese in 1511, they had failed to provide the Malays with suitable leadership.<sup>15</sup> We shall see that Ibrahim was especially exercised about the way in which Malay royalty was able to frustrate the development of a Malay *bangsa*-consciousness.

Alongside such expressions of irritation, *Surveying the Homeland* also offers insights into the nature of the rulers' authority. Like Raja Lob's text, Ibrahim's book suggests that in the colonial period the rulers were not presented or displayed before their people merely in traditional terms. Interestingly, he implies that the Perak court leadership (described in such innovative terms in the coronation text) was relatively conservative. In Perak, the insistence was maintained that the "hornbill must fly with the hornbill, the sparrow with the sparrow";<sup>16</sup> that is to say, that the ranks in society ought to be respected and observed. In Selangor, however, relations between commoners and the aristocracy had become more informal and relaxed. The ruling groups there, Ibrahim explains, were "becoming conscious of the weakness of their race in these times."<sup>17</sup> In a number of states, political associations had been formed in the late 1930s to defend Malay rights. (In the Straits Settlements, Eunos' Singapore Malay Union of 1924 had been the first such organization.) Some of these associations, so Ibrahim reports, were actually supported by the royal courts. In the case of Pahang, the association was led by a son of the late Sultan Ahmad, the Sultan who had sulked for so many years after British intervention.<sup>18</sup>

Was this involvement in modern political organization an innovation aimed at safeguarding the position of the rulers *vis-à-vis* their subjects? Ibrahim's book – like the coronation text – certainly gives the impression that the rulers were concerned to shore up their authority. They are presented as doing so, for instance, with respect to their Chinese subjects. Thus, in Kelantan the Sultan is noted as having bestowed a title on a Chinese merchant.<sup>19</sup> In Johore the state council building reminded Ibrahim of a Chinese audience hall because it was decorated with Chinese writing. He asked for an explanation and learned that the writing "records the praiseworthy services [of rich Chinese people] to the Raja."<sup>20</sup>

*Surveying the Homeland* says far less about the Islamic, *ulama* leadership than it does about the royal élite. Yet Ibrahim's frequent mention of the modernization of *ulama*-run, "Arab schools" (as they were sometimes called)<sup>21</sup> at least conveys a suggestion of the presence of the type of ideological activity which Sayyid Shaykh represented. (We know from other sources that Sayyid Shaykh was an active supporter of such educational reform<sup>22</sup> and *Al Imam* certainly hammered home the need to introduce secular and scientific instruction into the Islamic syllabus.<sup>23</sup>) Ibrahim stresses also the international networks in which the

Malayan Islamic schools were engaged. Thus, he describes female students going from the peninsula to institutions in West Sumatra;<sup>24</sup> certain Islamic groups in Kedah established a school of the “Egyptian style”;<sup>25</sup> and another “new style” of school had been established in Perlis.<sup>26</sup> The teacher of this Perlis school, Ibrahim records, was actually an Egyptian.<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim seems to support much of this educational change. He is impressed, for instance, that “a little English” is taught in the Perlis Arab school – but adds that it is “not sufficient”.<sup>28</sup> He also clearly welcomes the displacement of the old Islamic system in which texts were “merely learnt by heart.”<sup>29</sup>

These comments by Ibrahim on Islamic schooling suggest he would have applauded some of the central declarations in *Islam and Reason*. Such a positive reaction from a *bangsa*-minded critic, of course, was intended. To win the respect of people with Ibrahim’s educational background is certain to have been one of Sayyid Shaykh’s objectives. There is absolutely no indication, however, that Ibrahim was attracted to the ideological or religious perspective enunciated in *Islam and Reason*. Ibrahim does not assert a religious piety; his book contains no quotations from the Koran, no invocations of Islamic doctrine. Ibrahim, it would appear, merely approves those *ulama*-led reforms which coincide with his own “strategy” for Malay reform. That is, although his comments on Muslim education imply a degree of approval of his *ulama* rivals, they also define the very limited area which he will accept as common ground. It may be through the silences in *Surveying the Homeland*, therefore, that we sense most distinctly the presence of the *shari’ah*-minded challenge in the ideological struggle for hegemony taking place in Malay society.

Not surprisingly the ideological protagonists to whom Ibrahim gives greatest attention are those of his own persuasion. He discusses openly the rivalry between the “old style” and what he calls his “new style”<sup>30</sup> leadership. The royal courts had so failed the Malays, he argues, that the Malay people were like a “boat which had lost its steersman.”<sup>31</sup> The “new leadership”, which he refers to time and again, is described as giving the Malay people in many matters a “correct understanding”.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that Ibrahim considered *Surveying the Homeland* itself contributed to the inculcation of such an understanding. As author, he presents himself as a prominent member of the “new leadership”, and the book seems designed to assist him in the “War of Position” against the *kerajaan*. Equally, the actual journey or tour which led to the writing of *Surveying the Homeland* was in the service of this war. As the book records, Ibrahim lectured to Malay groups all over the country, urging them to consider the plight of their people and promoting among them a consciousness of *bangsa*.

There is nothing new, of course, in this attempt to ground a claim to leadership in the possession of a "correct understanding". Eunus in the *Utusan* of 1907 had declared his intention to teach Malays to "understand matters taking place" in the world; the *ulama* of *Al Imam* and the royal chroniclers were equally vigilant in propagating their own perceptions of the world. What is novel about Ibrahim's book is the extent to which he makes clear that his own campaign is carried on in the context of contending claims. He speaks explicitly of Malay society containing "no single aim or set of beliefs regarding *bangsa*" but rather numerous different "understandings" on the part of different "sides" or "parties".<sup>33</sup> Writing in this way, Ibrahim not only participates in but describes the debate. Moreover, by presenting the description within his report on the British colonial presence and its consequences, he encourages the impression that this ideological struggle was in no sense a peripheral development. To an important extent, *Surveying the Homeland* focuses on the rivalry between Malay ideological sides (*pihak*) rather than the matter of British imperial domination.

Playing down in such ways the administrative predominance of the colonial power, Ibrahim's survey of Malaya nevertheless attributes a weighty significance to the economic and social forces unleashed by colonialism. These forces, he implies, were of the greatest importance in understanding the ideological changes taking place among the people. In *Surveying the Homeland*, as we shall see, it is not British officialdom but rather the force of "capital" (*modal*) which was transforming Malaya.

Putting aside for the present the socialist perspective in which this analysis is embedded, the book's actual eye-witness description of the process of transformation is enormously valuable. In many regions of the Peninsula, Ibrahim explains, the Malays were "jostled" or "pressed"<sup>34</sup> by the invasion of foreign capital, foreign goods and foreign labour. The Malays were losing land which they once used for agriculture or mining. They were unable to afford the heavy machinery used by Chinese and other foreigners.<sup>35</sup> The Malays were also being pushed out of the markets in the towns. Even in such places as Kedah where efforts were made to encourage Malays to engage in trade the Malay merchants could not compete.<sup>36</sup> On the Pahang river, too, where there had once been a lively indigenous trade, the Chinese now outmanoeuvred the "Malay middleman".<sup>37</sup> In trade, as in agriculture and mining, the Chinese and other foreigners had the advantage of "capital". They entered such states as Pahang on the new highways and railways using their capital to open mines, establish plantations and dominate trade.<sup>38</sup> In some areas nearly all the coolie labour was "in the hands of Chinese and Indian workers".<sup>39</sup> The number of Malays with no work at all, explains Ibrahim, "increases year by year".<sup>40</sup>

The “jostling” or “pressuring” of the Malays, as presented in *Surveying the Homeland* and also in several current academic studies,<sup>41</sup> affected all aspects of life. Not only were Malays withdrawing from the towns<sup>42</sup> but even the Malay language was in retreat. Malay merchants, for instance, increasingly found it necessary to use foreign languages “which they do not wish to learn”: in legal matters, too, the Malays had to use English.<sup>43</sup> Malay culture was also changing because of the influx of capital. Ibrahim makes a link, for instance, between the changes in house style and furniture types and the new economic forces. It was particularly in the villages near to the new highways, he explains, that these new styles were encountered. “Bedsteads replace mats; and the custom of the people is no longer to sit cross-legged but many rent tables and chairs.”<sup>44</sup> With transformations in material life, as Ibrahim portrays it, there came alterations of consciousness. He notes that the “good character” of the people had been “damaged”.<sup>45</sup> They were now confused; they would not work together; everyone “follows his own wishes”.<sup>46</sup> One aspect of this changing “disposition” (an encouraging aspect from Ibrahim’s point of view) was that some Malays rejected their old, royal leadership.<sup>47</sup> Another aspect was the emergence among the Malays of what Ibrahim refers to as a “consciousness” or “awareness” (*sedar*) of their plight.

### Awareness

The word *sedar* is used persistently throughout the book. It is in the 1930s, Ibrahim explains, that Malays had become “increasingly aware (*sedar*) of the feebleness and degradation of their situation, of the poverty of their lives.”<sup>48</sup> They became “aware” of these matters and blamed the foreigners. In the 1930s, he notes, a real “feeling of hatred” toward foreigners had developed.<sup>49</sup> Ibrahim disapproves of this feeling of hatred, insisting that the cause of the Malay crisis was foreign capital not foreign races. Nevertheless, the actual “awareness” (*sedar*) of crisis is something he welcomes. And in the second section of the book he meticulously describes the presence or absence of *sedar* in each of the states. At certain points, Ibrahim seems to attribute this new *sedar* entirely to the impersonal workings of capital. The new Malay “consciousness” is brought about “not by education or knowledge but by the pressure of poverty on their lives.”<sup>50</sup> In other instances, *Surveying the Homeland* draws attention to the significance of the “modernization” of education and the growth of the newspaper industry in the expansion of awareness (*kesedaran*) among the people.<sup>51</sup>

Although *sedar* is obviously a word of vital significance – and one which we shall see has resonances elsewhere in the colonised world –



precisely what it means in Ibrahim's writing is not entirely clear. In specific terms it certainly relates to an awareness of Malay "feebleness and humiliation." But it also appears to suggest a more general engagement in the political sphere. Thus he writes of certain Malays in Kedah being "*sedar* and able to think about the political (*siasah*) matters of their state (*negeri*)."<sup>52</sup> This statement seems to refer to the type of attitudinal changes which led some observers of the 1930s to speak of the rise of politics. Ibrahim's comments would appear to relate precisely to that "growing section of the public" which consisted of people whom Wheeler described as having a "stake in their country" and as taking an "intelligent interest in public progress". Reading Ibrahim's comments on the decade before the Japanese Occupation, it is not surprising that it was in this period that the word "politics" came into more general currency. The fact that Ibrahim uses two words for politics – *siasah* and *politik* (the first in brackets after the second)<sup>53</sup> – encourages the impression that the concept was at first used experimentally and perhaps with some caution. Indeed, we know from other sources that it was only in the 1920s that these words began to be used in Malay newspapers. (*Siasah* generally implied 'policy' or 'organization' and was used less frequently for 'politics'.<sup>54</sup>) The term *politik*, it would seem, suggested a specific and novel manner of behaviour. Thus, when a Malay article of 1926 described an Egyptian nationalist leader being trained in France, it is explained that the Egyptian "became acquainted with and involved himself in the customs (*adat*) of political people".<sup>55</sup> The word *politik*, we can assume, signified what the author recognized as a novel practice which it was necessary to learn.

*Surveying the Homeland*, in some respects, merely confirms what has been said earlier in this study about the way in which the new political consciousness was being aroused. Ibrahim's stress on the influence of the press is repeated in other writings – both Malay and English – about the decade. The emergence in the 1930s of "a fully professional class of Malay journalists"<sup>56</sup> has been commented upon, together with an increase in the numbers and print-runs of newspapers. (While the *Utusan Melayu* had a run of only some hundreds, certain 1930s papers reached about 2,000.<sup>57</sup>) A Malay contemporary commented that such newspapers exerted "a strong influence in shaping public opinion among their readers, in spreading general knowledge about the world, and in awakening and shaking off the apathy of the Malays towards progress".<sup>58</sup> Sometimes, editorials expressed explicit politicizing aims. It will be remembered, for instance, that the newspaper editor, Mohd. Eunus Abdullah, had been a pioneer in urging Malays to become involved in political matters affecting their community. In the 1930s the influential paper, *Warta Malaya*, also declared that it aimed to make

Malays “aware of what is taking place” in the world and expressed enthusiasm when Malays took an earnest interest in “matters of importance to the *negeri*.”<sup>59</sup>

In *Surveying the Homeland*, Ibrahim Yaacob adds a further dimension to our understanding of the expansion of a political sphere when he describes his own lecturing tour around the country. (As we have noted, the book itself was to a large extent a product of this tour.) In one district of Selangor, for instance, Ibrahim reports that “they listened to my speech on the matter of *bangsa* sentiment.”<sup>60</sup> In regard to the interior of Pahang, he records that “when I arrived in Kuala Lipis I was asked by the Malay Association of Kuala Lipis to lecture”. That request he valued highly: he had been born and went to school in Pahang, and now he was returning to the state as a “lecturer in the matters of *bangsa* and the homeland.”<sup>61</sup> By listening to such speeches, we might assume, the Malays of Pahang were drawn gradually into the political life emerging on the peninsula. Ibrahim’s audiences were developing *sedar*. His listeners would have been learning, too, not merely from the content but also from the style of these speeches. As in the book itself, Ibrahim would have demonstrated the type of sharp analysis, of rational precision, which might serve as a model for debate and discussion in the growing public sphere. Finally, as Ibrahim would undoubtedly have added, those speeches were delivered in the specific context of the expansion of capital which “jostled” and “pressured” the lives of the Malays.

In these different ways Ibrahim’s writing throws light on Malay cultural and socio-economic change as well as the advance of colonialism on the peninsula. Particularly in his reports of his own political activity, Ibrahim helps to illuminate the circumstances in which ideological debate was carried on within the Malay community. It is abundantly apparent, however, that his primary aim was not to present a disinterested survey. Rather his purposes were transparently polemical.

### Socialism

One of Ibrahim’s two principal contributions to the debate is his enunciation of a socialistic perspective. A certain Marxian rigour is immediately evident in the way in which he examines the transformation of the peninsula in terms of the march of “capital”. He enunciates his viewpoint no less explicitly and trenchantly than Sayyid Shaykh had done. “Political matters,” Ibrahim proclaims with formidable certainty, “cannot be separated from economic matters.”<sup>62</sup> This principle underlies the historical framework in which he

encapsulates his analysis of the Malay situation. The Malays, he explains, had been in the process of moving from one system to another. They had left the "power of the Maharajas' iron hand" and entered the "power of capitalist (*kaum modal*) democracy."<sup>63</sup> This transition, he adds, also involved a global revolution (noted by some of our earlier authors) in which the East had declined as the countries of the West arose.<sup>64</sup> In the eighteenth century, Ibrahim continues, the "administrative power of the capitalists from Europe had become increasingly great and strong in the East."<sup>65</sup> Indeed, it was in these circumstances that the Malay states, which had for centuries been engaged in civil wars, came under British power and entered the world economic system.<sup>66</sup> Within that system, capital and labour now entered Malaya while, on its part, the fertile soil of Ibrahim's "homeland" produced the type of products (rubber and tin) which "are much needed in a world possessing modern armies and the wonders of electrical power."<sup>67</sup>

The implications for the programmatic content of Ibrahim's ideological position of such an analysis of the Malay, and Malayan, historical situation are obvious. This perspective is at variance, first, with the type of interpretation of the Malayo-Muslim plight enunciated in Islamic writings which lay particular stress on the efficacious significance of Islam and its Divine Law. It is the transforming power of capital rather than religion which is given emphasis in *Surveying the Homeland*. Secondly, Ibrahim's approach to the Malay community contrasts sharply with the type of individualistic policies advocated by Eunos. (Some years later Ibrahim actually described those urging such policies as *burdjuis feodalis*.<sup>68</sup>) It is not personal energy and freedom which Ibrahim urges. He seems to abhor the idea of individual Malays "following their own hearts" or "caring only for themselves". He stresses time and again the need for organization. He urges Malay unity and the creation of Malay associations to advance Malay interests. In trade, as in other areas, he explains, Malays must combine together. They will fail if they try to "stand alone" with insufficient capital.<sup>69</sup> Malay problems cannot be overcome by hard work alone. Those Malay leaders who (in the spirit of Eunos) persistently call upon Malays to work more diligently were misled. As Ibrahim knew from observing farmers in the fields, Malays were far from lazy and yet their economic situation had actually declined, not improved, since the 1930s.<sup>70</sup>

Advocating rejuvenation through combination is an important element in the second of Ibrahim's contributions to the ideological debate, his energetic *bangsa*-mindedness. Ethnic unity is an obvious basis on which to organize a community in response to the international challenge of capitalism. Moreover, there were models readily

available for combining socialism with ethnic and other forms of social unity. Ibrahim, we know, was particularly well aware of socialistic and nationalistic developments in Indonesia during the inter-war period.<sup>71</sup> The socialism of *Surveying the Homeland*, however, may also be seen to some extent as a response to ideological failure; it is in one sense a product of the failure of liberalism. For many Malays, the liberal program and the liberal analysis, both of which must always have faced scepticism from a community nervous about individualism, had simply not worked in practical terms. The dilemma was identified in chapter 7, in considering one Islamic, *shari'ah*-minded response to liberalism. By the 1930s the economic arguments for anxiety about individualism were difficult to resist. For instance, although the temporary success of individual Malay rubber (and coconut) growers would have encouraged some optimism earlier in the century, recent research has demonstrated that the smallholders were soon undermined by colonial government policies and international economic processes. Following the Great Depression, the prospects for individual economic endeavour looked especially dismal,<sup>72</sup> and, as a result, those Malays who paid attention to public affairs would have found little in liberal-style philosophies that could explain their economic and social predicament.

Sayyid Shaykh certainly offered a rival explanation for Malay economic and social crisis, and one likely to be attractive to an audience already imbued with Muslim values. His analysis situated Malays within a much wider Muslim crisis and he advocated programs for the reform of the Malays which, like those of Ibrahim Yaacob, were not focused primarily on the individual. Raja Lob's analysis was in some ways the most conservative. He recognized the need to protect and reform the Malays as a community and suggested that this was best done under the aegis of a modernizing sultan. Reading *Surveying the Homeland* alongside Raja Lob's and Sayyid Shaykh's books encourages one to perceive Ibrahim's socialistic *bangsa*-mindedness, also, as a contribution to this debate. The stress on *bangsa* was more than a consequence of his exposure to new doctrines from England and the Dutch East Indies. In his advocacy of modern education, of political engagement, of a rational-scientific mode of thought, and of the Malay socialistic *bangsa*, Ibrahim shared much with his liberal predecessors. But in adopting a socialistic viewpoint he was also reacting to the challenges of his *kerajaan* and Islamic rivals.

#### Dialogic *bangsa*

Ibrahim's vigorous *bangsa*-mindedness might be understood in other ways also as a reactive measure. The vigour itself is significant. The

emotional nature of Ibrahim's commitment to *bangsa* is evident from the first introductory comments where he dedicates his work to the Malays. The first chapter is called "My People"<sup>73</sup> and the language he uses to describe the "retreat" of the Malays in their own country could hardly be more powerful, more heavily loaded with sentiment. The Malays are presented as being "jostled", "squeezed", and "pressured". They are "humiliated".<sup>74</sup> Throughout the entire text Ibrahim constantly declares his desire to instil a "feeling of Malayness",<sup>75</sup> a *bangsa*-consciousness, in the people. Along with these passionate and polemical declarations, moreover, the book charts the development of this *bangsa*-consciousness throughout the peninsula.

In *Surveying the Homeland*, more than in any previous text, the *bangsa* is revealed as a community which needed to be actively constructed or conceptualized. Ibrahim explains that after the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese, in the period when the Malay world was divided by all sorts of squabbling and warfare, the people did not even "know their *bangsa*".<sup>76</sup> During the time Ibrahim was writing, he says, many Malays continued to give priority to local or factional identities. In Perak, for instance, he encountered immigrant peoples from Minangkabau (Sumatra), Banjar (Borneo), and Bawean (near Java) who did not consider themselves Malays.<sup>77</sup> In Perlis many of the Malays did not "understand how to love their *bangsa*". In commenting on this absence some years later he added that the Perlis people were "loyal only to their Raja."<sup>78</sup> This opposition between court and *bangsa* is a persistent theme in the book. The sultans are portrayed not just as alternative focii of loyalty but also as active enemies of *bangsa*-mindedness. The royal courts, Ibrahim asserts, "still hold firmly to the old feeling and strongly oppose the new desire to unify the Malay people."<sup>79</sup> In Kedah, for instance, a certain section of the ruling élite opposed the formation of a Malay association on the ground that Kedah "possesses a raja".<sup>80</sup>

The apparent ability of the sultans to frustrate the *bangsa* movement, as suggested above and in other accounts of the inter-war period,<sup>81</sup> illustrates again their continued potency in the colonial period. It is a reminder that much of the old ideology, as well as the old establishment, remained powerful in the Malay community. But Ibrahim's account conveys also, of course, the dynamic character of the movement to create a Malay identity and a *bangsa* community. In the west coast states – in Pahang, in Kedah, indeed in "every state of Malaya" – he records the rise of a "spirit of unity" among the people.<sup>82</sup> It is well known that newspapers had in the late 1930s done much to promote this spirit.<sup>83</sup> Associations had also been formed to struggle for the Malays and in some states such as Selangor they were explicitly called "Malay associations".<sup>84</sup> (In Perak as in Kedah, Ibrahim explains

that royal opposition seems to have discouraged the use of the term “Malay”.<sup>85</sup>) Young people, in particular, were acquiring a consciousness of *bangsa*, and partly at Ibrahim’s instigation. On his visit to Selangor, for instance, Ibrahim stresses this aspect of his lecture to an audience of Bawean youths. He tells them to be aware that Bawean was only a small island north of Java and urges them to remember the important thing was that their *bangsa* is Malay.<sup>86</sup> (It is in reports of this type, of course, that Ibrahim throws most light on the way in which the *bangsa* movement was promoted.)

Although no text of a lecture is given, it is clear from Ibrahim’s comments in *Surveying the Homeland* that he was passionately concerned both to make his listeners conscious of political matters and to instil among them “a feeling of *bangsa* identity.”<sup>87</sup> As he declares at one point, he hoped to “erase” the divisions within the Malay community.<sup>88</sup> It would seem that Ibrahim travelled all over the peninsula, in almost electioneering style, to achieve these aims, arousing wherever he could a Malay sentiment and inculcating a vision of a united Malay race struggling against the forces of capitalism. Such electioneering offers us a glimpse of the spirit of the contest of ideologies. Ibrahim Yaacob’s account of the *bangsa* campaign brings the writings of both Sayyid Shaykh and Raja Lob into sharp focus. Ibrahim, as already noted, is entirely open about the fact that he advocates *bangsa*-mindedness in the face of competition from other types of social identification. In his presentation, the *bangsa* contends not only against local identifications (Bawean is one example) but also against that other social construct, the *kerajaan*. In the case of Islam, he does not debate head-on against his Islamic rivals. He argues more by emphasis, answering the author of *Islam and Reason* by neglecting the *umat* of Islam in favour of the *bangsa Melayu*. Islam, as Ibrahim actually remarked in a later writing, was in one sense to serve the purposes of the *bangsa*.<sup>89</sup>

Occasionally in the writings of the pre-war years this competition between *bangsa* and Islam is not merely implied but declared, and such declarations can throw light on the processual character of *bangsa*. Abdul Rahim Kajai, one of the other influential journalists of the period, is known to have stated the claims of the *bangsa* in particularly stark terms. He pronounced in 1940 that Islam was “not a *bangsa*”,<sup>90</sup> and by so doing implied a warning to religious leaders that Malay unity must not be neglected in favour of the bonds of Islam. Kajai was at least partly concerned to discredit Islamic leaders of Arab or Indian descent. (Sayyid Shaykh is just one example.) Kajai argued that if the “Malay” movement was led or even merely joined by foreigners then it could not be understood to be a Malay *bangsa* movement.<sup>91</sup> He expressed a similar viewpoint by the insulting way in which he described Malays of mixed

ethnic origins. Thus he referred sarcastically to Malays possessing Arab or Indian "blood" as DKA (*Darah Keturunan Arab*) and DKK (*Darah Keturunan Kling*).<sup>92</sup>

Such a stress on descent makes Kajai's *bangsa*-mindedness a little reminiscent of the "scientific" racism which had developed in Europe.<sup>93</sup> By contrast, Ibrahim's understanding of *bangsa* seems to be characterized by its inclusiveness. He invokes a broadly defined Malayness. He does not specifically exclude Muslims of Arab or Indian "blood" and, for instance, explains to his readers that the Malays consist not just of two and a half million people in Malaya but also of 65 million in Indonesia.<sup>94</sup> The latter claim has an obvious significance in the development of a nationalistic perception of *bangsa*. In later years – specifically in the 1940s and 1950s – it led Ibrahim to become a proponent of a Greater Indonesia incorporating the British and the Dutch colonial spheres in the archipelago.<sup>95</sup> In *Surveying the Homeland* he takes pains to focus primarily on the Malays of Malaya. In both cases, however, he certainly freights the concept of *bangsa* with a powerful territorial commitment.

Ibrahim, that is to say, goes beyond the editor of the *Utusan* in developing a nationalist dimension to *bangsa*. Indeed, he went beyond his contemporaries, because the impression one gains from memoirs and other writings on the period is that (at least until the late 1930s) "the peninsular Malays had not yet understood the idea of nation and nationalism".<sup>96</sup> In *Surveying the Homeland* Ibrahim declares, for instance, that he wants immigrant peoples in Malaya to acknowledge the "national rights" (*hak kewatanan*) of the Malay *bangsa*.<sup>97</sup> The Malay *kewatanan* conveys clearly the notion of 'national', as our earlier discussion of the word *watan* (state) suggests. Furthermore, Ibrahim's preoccupation with the concept of 'homeland' (*Tanah Ayer*), commencing with the actual title of the book, gives a distinct sense of this territorial dimension of his *bangsa*-mindedness. Whether or not he had doubts in 1941 about limiting the Malay 'homeland' to 'Malaya', there is clearly no question that the fostering of a *bangsa* sentiment entailed for Ibrahim the ideal of possessing a territorial state. And here again the passion of his advocacy is critical. Although the connection between the *bangsa* and *tanah Melayu* was established in Eunus' writing at the opening of the century, the added emotion embedded by Ibrahim in *bangsa* conveys the special character of his investment in the idea of a Malay nation. In this sense most of all, *Surveying the Homeland* contributes to the 'process' of *bangsa*; it helps to make *bangsa*-mindedness the equivalent of what we might term 'nationalism'.

The same emotiveness draws attention, once again, to the reactive element in Ibrahim's use of *bangsa*. Moreover, it is at this point we

return to the longstanding Malay concern about the relation between the individual and society. Ibrahim's emotional commitment, of course, was not unique. Although striking when we read *Surveying the Homeland* in dialogue with the writing of Raja Lob, Sayyid Shaykh or even Eunus, Ibrahim's sentiments are often repeated in *bangsa*-minded writing of the 1930s. The newspapers, for instance, were full of the type of sentiment expressed by Ibrahim when he speaks of "service to my *bangsa*." In the words of a recent memoir of the period they "fanned the fire of *bangsa* feeling among the Malays."<sup>98</sup> Thus, the *Warta Malaya*, which commenced in 1930, declared in its opening issue that the aim of the paper would be to "raise up"<sup>99</sup> the Malay race. And later editorials often refer to "loving one's race." The early Malay novelists working in these years also commonly wrote emotionally of their race. Some even dedicated their books to the *bangsa*. An author of 1930, for instance, declared his purpose to be that of "increasing the literature of my *bangsa*" and he hoped that his story "would give some benefit to the *bangsa* I love."<sup>100</sup> In songs and poetry the passion for *bangsa* became increasingly evident in the 1930s. One contemporary writer observed that although in the previous decade Malay music had been based on "traditional tunes" and possessed words "meaning nothing", in the early 1940s "our music instills a feeling for *bangsa* and a love for the Homeland."<sup>101</sup> As regards poetry, a recently published anthology of "nationalist poetry" illustrates superbly the intensity of emotion. "Raise the *bangsa* to the sky," cries one poet of 1929.<sup>102</sup> "Be Aware – Be Aware in this time, My brave and praiseworthy *bangsa*," declares another author of the same year.<sup>103</sup> In 1930 a third declared:

Love your *bangsa* until eternity  
Lift it up onto a throne.<sup>104</sup>

To explain such devotion to *bangsa*, expressed by Ibrahim and his contemporaries, we ought again to consider the colonial context. As noted in chapter 4, the commitment may have been fostered in part by British and other European examples of pride in race. And in Europe, too, racial and nationalist sentiment were often merged. Another factor helping to sharpen Malay ethnic consciousness, of course, was the growing perception of Chinese and Indian threat. (This point has often been made in studies of the period.<sup>105</sup>)

A further perspective, one with important consequences, arises from the specific vocabulary employed in the 1930s in relation to *bangsa*. This vocabulary draws attention to what might be termed an autochthonous line of interpretation. Here we encounter the reactive character of the concept. The vocabulary employed reminds us once



more of the need to read intertextually, and to examine ideological change in terms of dialogue and argument. In the 1930s, more than in Eunos' *Utusan Melayu*, we frequently encounter *kerajaan* language. When Ibrahim Yaacob writes of offering his book as a "gift" to the Malay people, the word he uses for 'gift', *persembahan*, carries the notion of 'obeisance' (*sembah*).<sup>106</sup> Similarly, his aim to do 'service' to his *bangsa* is resonant of court usage. The poetic statement about lifting the *bangsa* "onto a throne" is an even more explicitly *kerajaan* reference. The words for "praiseworthy" and "brave" used in one of the 1929 poems are also words often employed in court literature. In another poem, there is an allusion to "service" to the *bangsa* in terms suggestive of service to a raja. That is, the word *junjung* is used, and it suggests the way a royal subject 'carries on his head' the commands of his master.<sup>107</sup>

A certain *bangsa* indebtedness to royal tradition is not merely to be found in the appropriation of language. It is evident also in the early Malay attempts to construct a *bangsa* history, a presentation of the past focused not on some royal lineage but on the Malay people as a community. Although Ibrahim Yaacob writes of 500 years of civil war between rival royal houses as damaging the Malay people, he implies that the Sultanate of Malacca, before its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511, deserved the respect of the *bangsa*-minded. Only after the Sultan "ran from Malacca" are the Malays portrayed as being in decline<sup>108</sup>. Other writers of Ibrahim's time, and general frame of mind, presented the glory of the Malaccan Sultanate in far more direct terms. A large-scale history of the Malay world written in 1926, and likely to have influenced Ibrahim, gives much attention to establishing the importance of Malacca in Chinese as well as Malay accounts of the period.<sup>109</sup> The author of this history, Abdul Hadi, was a lecturer of the Teachers' Training College and it is noteworthy that one of his most prominent former students, Harun Aminurashid, wrote numerous novels celebrating the Malaccan period in a manner obviously designed to arouse *bangsa*-consciousness and pride.<sup>110</sup>

Although exploited by Malay ideologues, this growing interest in Malay historical achievement, in heritage and in history as a mode of thought, was stimulated to some extent by the British. Valorizing the pre-colonial sultanates, the origins and ceremonies of which were as much Hindu-Buddhist as Islamic, seems to have been one aspect of a strategy of promoting Malay "tradition" as a bulwark against what the British saw as the expansion of "pan-Muslim" influence among the Malays.<sup>111</sup> The British, at the same time, probably also expected the study of pre-colonial sultanate history would be to the ideological benefit of their royal 'allies'. Such writers as Ibrahim or Abdul Hadi, of course, appropriated the achievements of Malacca to enhance the

dignity not of Malay royalty but specifically of the Malay *bangsa*. We noted in the case of Eunus' *Utusan* that sultanhip was beginning to be perceived in terms of its service to the Malay race. (Even the court writers, Haji Mohd. Said and Raja Lob, to a certain extent, began to acknowledge this role.) It is also worth mentioning, that when Eunus and others started the first Malay political association, the Singapore Malay Union, the inaugural meeting was held in a former residence of the Sultan of Johore.<sup>112</sup> The use of such symbolism, together with the appropriation of royal history and royal vocabulary, throw light not only on the rhetorical techniques but also on the motivations of Eunus, Ibrahim Yaacob and other *bangsa*-minded authors.

In chapter 4 above, in considering the way Malay royal tradition was employed by the advocates of *bangsa*, it was been argued that this strategy may provide insights into certain Malay perceptions of 'race'. *Bangsa*, we noted, could have been expected to fulfil some of the purposes which the *kerajaan* had sought to satisfy. This impression is strengthened when we look at the type of discussion of *bangsa* which took place in the decade or so leading up to the publication of Ibrahim's book. In particular, the formulation of the concept of a Malay *bangsa* might be examined in terms of the rivalry with those other forms of community and identity offered by *kerajaan* or Islam. Increasingly during the colonial period the argument between ideological positions was not merely one of emphasis, assertion and counter-assertion. Authors reacted to one another. They debated, and their debates sometimes progressed in dialectical form.

The difficulty encountered in advocating Western notions of individualism seems to have initiated one such dialectic. In discussing Ibrahim's socialism and, earlier, *Al Imam*'s answer to Abdullah and his successors, we noted the problem of arguing these notions in a society not accustomed to foregrounding the private self at the expense of the community. The *kerajaan* through its ceremonial and status system certainly catered to a society of 'public men'. The Islamic writers of *Al Imam*, on their part, appeared to accept the individualistic perception of man and the desire for personal freedom, and then, almost instantaneously, they grounded this perception in the doctrines and community of Islam. Eunus of the *Utusan* attempted to foster both a sense of individualism and a sentimental attachment to *bangsa*. We asked whether he might have seen himself as addressing two types of Malay audience.

Ibrahim Yaacob took a relatively negative view of individualism. It has been seen that he rejected the notion of individuals "caring only for themselves." He expressed little economic hope for the Malays – faced, as they were, with the threat of international 'capital' – if they failed to

combine together, and merely acted as separate individuals seeking their own personal fortunes and “following their own hearts”. Such comments are far distant from Abdullah’s invitation to the individual to achieve “something great” or Eunos’ valorizing “hard work” which is capable of promoting personal independence. Ibrahim’s attitude has something in common with that of certain renowned socialistic Malay authors of the early 1950s who rejected what they called “the ‘I’ perspective”. In discussing creative writing these authors vigorously condemned the individualistic manner of thinking, urging one another to “go down into society and immerse [yourself] in the very being” of the people.<sup>113</sup> It would seem to be the thrust of Ibrahim’s argument that all Malays should “immerse” themselves in the *bangsa*. And here the use of *kerajaan* and other emotive language and symbolism is especially revealing.

The Islamic and court writers, confronting or exploiting anxiety about the “I” perspective, had reaffirmed their own characteristic paths to immersion. Thus, as Raja Lob’s attention to titles and status suggests, Malay royalty still claimed the loyalty of Malay subjects partly in terms of the *kerajaan*’s capacity to immerse human individuality in *nama*. Through the bestowal of titles, participation in royal ceremony and being named in royal documents, the court offered a *kerajaan*-based definition of *nama*. Islamic writers offered the opportunity of another type of “immersion” within another form of community, that of the *umat*. In the face of such competition, the use by the *bangsa*-minded of emotive language, in particular the employing of *kerajaan* terminology, can be viewed in part as a reply. The emotional (we might say psychological) needs of Malays, so such language suggests, might be satisfied just as effectively in the case of the *bangsa* as it was in the *kerajaan* or the Islamic *umat*. Not only might the notion of *bangsa* be able to cope with Malay discomfort about the “I” perspective. As we saw in our discussion of Eunos’ writing in chapter 4, *bangsa* was valuable too in that it was capable of providing an alternative basis for *nama*, the concern about which was in no sense restricted to courtly circles. As a Malay historian and social critic commented in 1929, Malays in general continued to be “preoccupied with the search for *nama*”. (The Chinese, he explained, devoted themselves to “industry” rather than *nama*.<sup>114</sup>) By invoking royal doctrine through royal language, the *bangsa* authors conveyed the idea that in the *bangsa*, no less than the *kerajaan* or the Islamic *umat*, Malays preoccupied with *nama* would be able to achieve the public reputation, the *nama* which lasts beyond death, which they so strongly desired.

From this point of view, the increasingly emotive perception of *bangsa*, just like the shift from bourgeois individualism to socialism, was

an admission of a degree of liberal vulnerability. It is true that the royal and Islamic ideologues were also, in important ways, very much in retreat. They were beginning even to argue in the discourse established by their liberal rivals. Where these *kerajaan* and *umat* ideologues themselves made positive contributions to a process or, more strictly, a concatenation of ideological development, was in the role they played in setting the agenda of debate. Specifically, in relation to the issue of individualism, the *kerajaan* and Islamic spokesmen raised questions and provoked anxieties (perhaps not always intentionally) to which Ibrahim Yaacob and others felt themselves forced to find answers. The urging of a socialistic and emotive presentation of *bangsa* was, at least in part, an attempt to provide such an answer. It was a formulation of *bangsa* designed specifically to compete with the *kerajaan* and probably also the *umat*. In attempts of this type, it is clear, Malay ideologues demonstrated that they were not merely locked into fixed oppositions. They joined in a dialogue which moved forward incrementally and to some extent dialectically.

*Surveying the Homeland*, therefore, does indeed offer one type of ending to a study of ideological contest in colonial Malaya. Here we find displayed, more than in any of the earlier texts, the dynamics of the struggle for hegemony within the Malay community. Ibrahim Yaacob explicitly reminds us that alongside – and within – the drama of colonial expansion, an internal Malay contest, a “War of Position” (as Gramsci called it), was taking place. In his book the struggle between *bangsa* and *kerajaan*, in particular, is brought to the foreground; competition with advocates of a community perceived in terms of the Islamic *umat* is only implied. In Ibrahim’s writing, it is equally important to stress, we also find those preoccupations and modes of expression, anticipated in the earlier writings of Abdullah and Eunus, which constitute the discourse of politics in which all ideological contenders were beginning to participate. Ibrahim writes in the rational style (“precise” in the view of his contemporaries) of twentieth-century Europe, and such works as *Surveying the Homeland* thus offered a model not only to his allies but also to his opponents. Finally, like so many early nationalists he was a disciple as well as a critic of the West, and yet in contributing to the process of ideological transformation he was more than the bearer of foreign doctrines and perspectives.

Although *Surveying the Homeland*, on first encounter, seems further removed than any of our earlier texts from the concerns and style of presentation of *kerajaan* writing, it might usefully be read as being in dialogue with that world. To describe Ibrahim’s book as the product of a Malay tradition, would of course be misleading. It is, nevertheless, a reaction to longstanding Malay concerns in a sense that it participates

in an autochthonous, dialogical, Malay process. In the manner of our earlier formulators of ideology, the author developed strategies in dialogue with both his predecessors and his contemporary rivals. Just as his own views of *bangsa* emerge to some extent from such dialogue, so too did his opponents begin increasingly to argue their own perceptions of Malay identity and community in the political discourse (the “thematic”, to use Chatterjee’s term) of which Ibrahim was so exemplary an exponent. In both directions of this exchange, *Surveying the Homeland* contributes not merely to a contest. It participates, in fact, in that dialectical drive which, although failing to resolve the debate over Malay political culture, transformed the actual issues and terms of that debate during the century of colonial rule.

In the next and concluding chapter we will review both the dynamic of change and the significance of the new discourse. What is the importance for the study of Malay society of the particular ideological contest described in the course of this study? What light might the Malay case throw on developments elsewhere in the colonized world?

### Notes

- 1 Ibrahim Yaacob, *Melihat Tanah Ayer* (Kota Bharu: 1941). See also the much revised and romanized edition published at a later date; *Melihat Tanah Air* (Kuantan: Timur, 1975).
- 2 *Melihat Tanah Ayer*, 4.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 4 Cheah Boon Kheng, ‘The Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–45: Ibrahim Yaacob and the Struggle for Indonesia Raya’, *Indonesia*, 28 (1979), 87–8; W.R. Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1967), 172–3; A. Samad Ahmad, *Sejambak Kenangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1981), chapter 8.
- 5 Cheah Boon Kheng, ‘Japanese Occupation’, 97.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 92, note 26.
- 7 Keris Mas, *Memoir: 30 Tahun Sekitar Sastera* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979), 10.
- 8 The Straits Settlements were “*tanah jajahan*”; the FMS were “*negeri Melayu yang dinaungnya*”; *Melihat Tanah Ayer*, 27.
- 9 *Melihat*, 82: “*dibawah pemerintahan kerajaan kebangsaan Thai (Siam)*”. *Naung* is used also in Abdul Hadi’s *Serajah Alam Melayu*. See, for instance, vol.2, 301. Also see Sir Richard Winstedt’s Malay-language history of Malaya; *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (Singapore: Kelly and Walsh, 1921), 106. *The Utusan Melayu*, 20 August 1908 uses *naung*, as does Raja Lob’s *Riwayat Pertabalan* (Penang: Persma Press, 1940), 4.
- 10 “The supreme authority in each state is vested in the Sultan as the ruler in State Council”, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the Federated Malay States for 1938* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printers, 1939), 5. For discussion of the role of the state councils, see Yeo Kim Wah, *Politics of Decentralization: Colonial Controversy in Malaya 1920–1929* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1929), 275–6 and *passim*; Kalyan Kumar Ghosh, *Twentieth-Century Malaysia* (Calcutta: Progressive, 1977), 57 and *passim*; R. Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1964), 178, 213, 240.

- 11 *Melihat*, 26; also, 20.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 31. In the 1975 edition of *Melihat*, British authority in the Malay states is given greater stress. British control as presented in this edition seems more direct and effective. It is possible that this change is an indication of a genuine change of perception on Ibrahim's part. That is, only after the end of the colonial period might Ibrahim have come to take less seriously the British retention of Malay royal sovereignty and other aspects of "indirect rule"; see the 1975 edition, 32–42. For further stress on the essentially advisory role of the British officials, see *Utusan Melayu*, 4 April 1914: the officials or advisers (*penasihat*), explains the editorial, "help the Sultan to bring about a perfect government" in their states. The difference between the Federated Malay States Sultanates and those of the so-called Unfederated States, in respect to the extent of British control, is discussed in Emerson, *Malaysia*, 176, 194, 249, 338; Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 95.
- 14 Yeo Kim Wah, *Politics of Decentralization*, 25. I discuss the significance of the *raja* in colonial Malaya in two essays: 'Malay Kingship in a Burmese Perspective', in I. Mabbett (ed.), *Patterns of Kingship and Authority in Traditional Asia* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 158–183; and 'Colonial Records History: British Malaya', *Modern Asian Studies*, 21, 4(1987), 773–792.
- 15 *Melihat*, 18, 43.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 89; see also Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 236.
- 19 *Melihat*, 34.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 29–30.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 22 See chapter 9 above.
- 23 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 66.
- 24 *Melihat*, 61.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 58. For a discussion of ship metaphors in Southeast Asian statecraft, see Pierre-Ives Manguin, 'Shipsape Societies: Boat Symbolism and Political Systems in Insular Southeast Asia', in David G. Marr and A.C. Milner, *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries* (Singapore and Canberra: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Australian National University, 1986), 187–214.
- 32 *Melihat*, 11.
- 33 "tidak ada satu tujuan atau pegangan kebangsaan yang boleh dipegang oleh mereka...". 'Sides' or 'parties' is the translation of *pihak*; 'understandings', *fahaman*; *Ibid.*
- 34 *Terdesak*; *ibid.*, 9. He also uses *terhempit* ('squeeze'), *ibid.*, 64.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 67, 8.
- 37 'middleman': *peraih*, *ibid.*, 87.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 86.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 57–8.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 41 Emerson, *Malaysia*, 499; Cant, *Pahang*, ch.11; Lim, *Peasants and their Agricultural Economy*, ch.6. For a modern account of Colonial Malaya placing much emphasis on 'capital', see Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *A Question of Class* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988).
- 42 *Melihat*, 64, 8.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 48.

- 44 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 45 The phrase I translate as 'good character' is *budi pekerti*; *ibid.*, 11, 46.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 49 *Ibid.* For other references to this feeling of hatred, see the discussion of Malay newspapers in the 1930s in Mohd. Kornain bin Hashim, 'Soal Kaum Imigran Dalam Akhbar Melayu (1930 an)', in Khoo Kay Kim and Jazamuddin Baharuddin (eds), *Lembaran Akhbar Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980), 82–104.
- 50 *Melihat*, 50.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 13, 61, 80.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 54 Mohd. Taib bin Osman, *The language of the Editorials in Malay Vernacular Newspapers up to 1941* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966), 3, 13. See also Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 217.
- 55 Lufti Effendi, 'Al-Marhum Mustafa Kamil', *Seruan Azhar*, April (1928), reprinted in Zabedah Awang Ngah (ed.), *Renongan: Antoloji Esei Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1964), 203. For comments on the development of vigorous political activity in the decade before the Japanese occupation, see D.J. Radcliffe, *Education and Cultural Change among the Malays 1900–1940*, PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1970, 159. also, see chapter 8 above, notes 74 and 75.
- 56 W.R. Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic Periodicals Published in the Straits Settlements and Peninsular Malay States 1876–1941* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 8.
- 57 *Ibid.*, *passim*. See also I. Proudfoot, 'Pre-war Malay Periodicals', *passim*. *Majlis*, which commenced in 1931, appears to have had a run of 2,000, as did *Warta Malaya* (commenced 1930). For a discussion of possible newspaper readerships and literacy percentages see Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 167.
- 58 Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (writing in 1941) quoted in Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 167, note 101.
- 59 *Warta Malaya*, 1 January 1930; 1 May 1930; 28 May 1930. See also the editorial of 1/2 December 1924 in *Majallah Guru*, quoted in Radcliffe, 'Education and Cultural Change', 151.
- 60 *Melihat*, 60.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 90.
- 62 Both *politik* and *ekonomi* are given with synonyms placed in brackets after them: *siasah* for the former, *iktisad* the latter; *ibid.*, 36.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*, 19.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 68 Ibrahim Yaacob, *Malaya Merdeka* (Jakarta: Kesatuan Malayu Merdeka, 1951).
- 69 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 71 Cheah Boon Kheng, 'Japanese Occupation', 90–1. For a discussion of Indonesian influence at the Sultan Idris Training College, where Ibrahim studied, see Awang Had Salleh, *Malay Secular Education and Teacher Training in British Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979), 143.
- 72 Koch, 'Malay Society in Temerloh', 177–82; Shamsul A.B., *From British to Burmiputra Rule*, 40–1. See also R.G. Cant, *An Historical Geography of Pahang* (Singapore: MBRAS Monograph No. 4, 1972), 118–19; Mohd. Kornain bin Hashim, 'Akhbar Melayu', 89.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 7, 8, 12, 38.
- 75 "*perasaan kebangsaan Melayu*"; see, for example, *ibid.*, 11.

- 76 "Tiada mengenal bangsa"; *ibid.*, 19. Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail informs me that *tiada mengenal* might also be translated as 'not care about'.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 59–60.
- 78 "love bangsa": *kasehkan bangsa*; *ibid.*, 81. For the later comment see the 1975 edition of *Melihat*, 81.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 11–12.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 81 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 230; Soernarno, 'Malay Nationalism', 26.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 83 Mohd. Kornain bin Hashim, 'Akhbar Melayu', *passim*; Zulkipli, *Warta Malaya*, especially 103–24; Zabedah, *Renongan*, 148–611.
- 84 Ibrahim Yaacob, *Melihat*, 62.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 71, 62.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 87 "perasaan kebangsaan Melayu", *ibid.*, 11.
- 88 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 89 See the later edition of *Melihat Tanah Air* (Kuantan: Timur, 1975), 86, where he suggests that in one village people of Bugis, Javanese, Sumatran, Arab, Indian, Chinese and other descents had "become Malays by embracing Islam". For an example of another author who placed the Islamic community ahead of the Malay one, see the comments of Za'ba in Abdullah Hussain and Khalid Hussain, *Pendita Za'ba dalam Kenangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1974) 236.
- 90 Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar, *Abdul Rahim Kajai: Wartawan dan Sasterawan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984), 373.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 373–4.
- 92 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*, 220. Kajai wrote of "purifying the definition" (*membersihkan ta'rif*); quoted in Zabedah, *Renongan*, 157.
- 93 D.A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians* (Leicester: Leicester Uniting Press, 1978), 13–14; R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 248–50. An indication of a growing European scientific attitude to race may be the way in which Winstedt's history, the *Kitab Tawarikh Melayu* (1921), focuses on the Malay race. He is particularly concerned to identify the origins of the race, see 4–5.
- 94 *Melihat*, 12.
- 95 See Cheah Boon Kheng, 'Japanese Occupation', 85–120.
- 96 This is a 1932 quote from Ibrahim Yaacob himself; Rustam Sani, *Origins of the Malay Left*, 88. See also Abdullah Hussain, *Harun Aminurashid. Pembangkit Semangat Kebangsaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1982), 281. I have discussed the state of knowledge about nationalism before the Japanese Occupation in 'The Impact of the Turkish Revolution on Malaya', *Archipel* 31 (1986), 117–30.
- 97 *Melihat*, 12.
- 98 Ahmad Boestaman, *Memoir*, 11; See also A. Samad Ahmad, *Sejambak Kenangan*, 55. Other comments on the rapid development of *bangsa*-mindedness in the period are to be found in Abdullah Hussain, *Harun Aminurashid*, 281; Abdul Aziz Ishak, *Katak Keluar Dari Bawah Tempurang* (Singapore: Princkerapat, 1959), 42; Abdullah Hussain, *Sebuah Perjalanan* (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1984), 178.
- 99 The word translated as 'raise up' is *membangkitkan*; it also suggests 'arouse'; *Warta Malaya*, 1 January 1930. See also 28 May 1930. The objectives, contents and style of the *Warta Malaya* are discussed in Zulkipli bin Mahmud, *Warta Malaya*.
- 100 Harun Aminurashid, *Melur Kuala Lumpur* (Singapore: Pustaka Melayu, 1964; orig. pub. 1930), 'preface'. See also the prefaces in Ahmad Kotot, *Hikayat Perantaraan Kasih Kemudahan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1975; orig. pub. 1927); and Ahmad bin Haji Muhammad Rashid Talu, *Kawan Benar* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979; orig. pub. 1927).
- 101 Ishak Haji Muhammad *Anak Mat Lela Gila* (Kuala Lumpur: Federal, 1975; orig. pub. 1941), 114–5.



- 102 Mahmud Ahmadi, 'Sedarlah' (1929), in Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar (ed.), *Puisi-Puisi Kebangsaan 1913-1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1987), 20.
- 103 Harun Aminurashid, 'Semenanjung' (1929), in *ibid.*, 22.
- 104 Rahimu Yakubi, 'Buah Percintaan' (1930), in *ibid.*, 39.
- 105 See, for instance, T.H. Silcock and Ungku Abdul Aziz, 'Nationalism in Malaya', in W.L. Holland (ed.), *Asian Nationalism and the West* (New York: Octagon, 1973; orig. pub. 1953), 286; Soernarno, 'Malay Nationalism', 11-12; Andaya and Andaya, *Malaysia*, 248; and Gullick, *Malaysia*, 247.
- 106 *Melihat*, 4. For *Persembahan* see R.J. Wilkinson, *Kamus-Jawi-Melayu-Inggeris* (Melaka: Penerbit Baharudinjoa, 1985 (orig. pub. 1903)), 405.
- 107 Harun Aminurashid, 'Seloka Harapan' (1930) in Abdul Latiff Abu Bakar, *Puisi-Puisi*, 29. For *Junjong*, see Wilkinson, *Kamus-Jawi-Melayu-Inggeris* (1903), 234. For a further example see Tan Liok Ee, *The Rhetoric of Bangsa*, 17.
- 108 *Melihat*, 18.
- 109 Abdul Hadi, *Sejarah Alam Melayu*, vol.2, ch.8.
- 110 See, for example, his *Panglima Awang* (Singapore: Pustaka Melayu, 1958) and *Sultan Mahmud Shah Melaka* (Singapore: Pustaka Malaya, 1967).
- 111 Awang Had Salleh, *Malay Secular Education*, 94-107 provides a review of the British publication program. For further reference to possible British anti-Islamic motivations, see chapter 9 above.
- 112 Roff, *Origins of Malay Nationalism*.
- 113 Asraf, quoted in Thani A.M. (ed.), *Esei Sastera ASAS 50* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1981), 25. I should like to thank Dr V. Hooker for drawing my attention to this quote.
- 114 Abdul Hadi, *Sejarah Alam Melayu*, vol.3, 6. See also the 1972 comment by Ahmad Boestaman expressing concern about *nama; Merintis Jalan Ke Puncak* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Kejora, 1972), viii.

## CONCLUSION

### *The Malay Political Heritage*

We have travelled from nationalism to politics, and in doing so have examined questions of importance for understanding present-day Malay politics. At the outset we noted the danger of structuring colonial Malay social history around the master narrative of the development of nationalism. Concepts of 'the nation', it was shown, were enunciated only in the most limited and hesitant way. What preoccupied the ideologues examined in this study was the contest between several social ideals, particularly that between the monarchical vision and two other concepts of community, the first based upon the community of Allah and the other upon Malay ethnicity. The ideals, moreover, were never static. They were persistently reformulated, often in dialogue with one another. Analysing colonial Malay society in this way, I have countered the incremental development of nationalism with an alternative image of fluidity and contest. In the course of this study, however, there has emerged one vital qualification to such an interpretation.

In an important sense, my project was hijacked. The initial aim was to avoid the 'retrospective' creation of master narratives, and to investigate a series of textual episodes in the subversion of Malay royal authority. By demonstrating the range and character of ideological debate in Malay society, I expected to be able to evoke the element of contest rather than consensus.

In many parts of the world, the "destruction of royal authority", as Michael Walzer has noted, "was a long and difficult process" which frequently entailed a "sense of adventure and of danger".<sup>1</sup> In focusing on the Malays, I selected a colonial situation in which different and competing ideological strains came to the fore in the course of a sustained and sometimes subtle attempt at destruction.

Investigating these ideological elements and their operations, it might be assumed, would contribute to a wider, comparative analysis. Would the Malay experience, I wondered, suggest new perspectives for examining political debate and political change in such countries as Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia, which had also possessed well-entrenched monarchies? The Malay material, one could anticipate, would provoke questions about the process of undermining royal hegemony. It might also help us to understand what happened – for instance, in Burma – when the colonial power actually destroyed a royal regime with a single death blow. My Malay study was intended to assist in a reconsideration of monarchy not only as a traditional institution but also as an ideological contestant in a colonial and post-colonial context. In examining the Malay contest I was determined, as well, to bring to light the historical agency of the Malay participants themselves. Through a close and inter-textual reading of my documents I hoped to draw attention to the ways in which Malay authors, despite the presence of colonialism, were able to experiment with new ideas as they tried to test, reinforce or undermine the doctrines they inherited from the pre-colonial period.

Concepts and ideals which have assumed a dominating significance in modern Malaysia were formulated during the British era. The concepts of 'progress', of the territorially-defined 'state', of 'national-ism', even of 'Malayness' itself, were all experimented with and debated during the years examined in this study. It was my intention not merely to reveal how historically contingent and contested these ideas were, but also to investigate the human dynamics involved in such an ideological process.

In certain respects, these research aspirations, developed early in the project, have been achieved. The turbulent and splintered character of Malay ideological activity, in particular, is undeniable. The 'conceptualizing'<sup>2</sup> of a Malay national community and, more often, a Malay ethnic community has always taken place in the face of competition from advocates, on the one hand, of the Islamic religious community (*umat*) and, on the other, of the *raja*-defined community (*kerajaan*).

In tracing the course of this three-cornered contest, however, we have increasingly encountered another, and to a certain extent counter-vailing, development. Despite my efforts to resist a master narrative, the interrogation of Malay writings has identified an important social theme: the constitution of a discourse of politics. In attempting to account for this theme, moreover, it has been necessary to return time and again to the presence of colonialism. Finally, and again unexpectedly in terms of my earlier anticipations, one of the consequences of this theme appears to be the promotion of an element of unity rather than division in Malay society. In fact, in identifying the invention of politics in the

intertextuality of Malay ideological dispute, we discover the expansion of a public sphere which gives substance to the development of the modern Malayan/Malaysian state.

The deciphering of transitions in discourse is by no means a new type of historiographical concern. There have been widely influential studies of changing structures of perception and understanding, for instance, in the historical analysis of such fields as scientific discovery, mental health and criminal punishment.<sup>3</sup> In Asian studies, investigations of this type are relatively rare. One exception is the case of Vietnam, where changes in political culture during the colonial period have been treated with linguistic sensitivity by David Marr and Greg Lockhart. The latter's analysis of such changing or emergent concepts as 'monarch', 'country', 'people' and 'nation' has immediate analogues in our Malay writings.<sup>4</sup> In Malay studies Henk Maier has examined critical transitions in the field of literature. He has demonstrated, for instance, how traditional *hikayat* literature has been read in entirely new ways by modern Malaysians, how a "radical transformation within intellectual circles" has led to Malay communities being "no longer willing to accept the relevance and skillfulness of the heritage".<sup>5</sup>

The present study is also concerned with the 'how': in seeking to delineate the issues and progress of ideological debate it throws light on the actual process by which a new 'politics' emerges. It is the stress on the mechanisms of change, particularly on the acquisition of a new vocabulary, a new agenda and new structures of justification which gives the Malay experience a wider significance. To study the emergence of politics in such a colonial and non-European context may supplement the pioneering research which has been carried out regarding the introduction of a political 'civic humanism' in Italy and other European societies. It contributes, I would argue, to an intercultural investigation into the expansion of what Jurgen Habermas has called the "public sphere".<sup>6</sup>

### Contesting Community in Malaysia Today

It is important at this point to qualify some of my earlier discussion of the struggle of ideas between the *kerajaan* élite and its rivals. To stress in our investigation of Malay textual episodes three types of community vision or orientation – the *kerajaan*, the *umat* and the *bangsa* – offers certain explanatory advantages. But it also risks over-simplification.

Identifying these orientations, each based upon a concept of community – the monarchical, the religious and the ethnic – certainly provides a point of departure for assessing significant divisions in Malay society, not only in the colonial but also in the post-colonial period. Two major developments in the recent past of the last decade are illustrative in this regard. In what has been termed the 'constitutional

crisis' of 1983–84, there occurred a confrontation between the prime minister and the sultans which was, at least in part, a dispute over whether *bangsa* ought to be given precedence over *kerajaan*. Similarly, the emergence of the Islamic *dakwah*, or missionary movement, which burgeoned in Malay society during the 1970s and continues to be influential today, promoted debate about the merits of all three types of community. Those advocating the *bangsa*, for instance, sometimes described the Islamic activists as dangerously dividing the Malay people; the *dakwah* people, some of whom actually gained control of the opposition Islamic Party (PAS) in 1982, declared 'nationalism' to be in conflict with the tenets of Islam. This party (which in the 2000 election obtained a half of the Malay vote) claims to be concerned, of course, with the fortunes of the Islamic *umat* rather than merely those of the seemingly narrower and parochial Malay *bangsa*.<sup>7</sup>

A clear illustration of the continued significance of the three-cornered ideological struggle in the independent Malaysian state appears in a widely publicized speech (of 1983) by Anwar Ibrahim, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia 1994–98. In the context of the constitutional crisis, he warned the sultans to remember who their true protectors had been. Despite their real differences, he explained, the ruling United Malays National Organization, the party of the *bangsa*-minded, had been willing to defend the institution of the sultanate since independence; but he warned that certain Islamic fundamentalists, by the 1980s influenced by the Iranian example, passionately desired to reconstitute Muslim society in Malaysia in a manner which would exclude monarchy.<sup>8</sup>

Part of the business of representative government in modern Malaysia, it is clear, is to manoeuvre politically between the three orientations. The existence of this range of ideological perspectives among the Malays adds to the plurality of a Peninsular Malaysian society already divided by the presence of a huge (36 percent) Chinese and Indian minority. Why the contest for hegemony within the Malay community has not been settled is a puzzling and important issue. In some other communities that have faced genuine threat, no such ideological splintering has occurred. A 1985 study of Japan, for instance, suggests that in its critical late Meiji period the creation of a new dominant ideology was far more consensual.<sup>9</sup> The reason for the lack of resolution in the Malay case may lie with colonialism. It suited the British to prevent either the complete overthrow of monarchy or the triumph of one of its opponents. In the post-colonial period the Chinese and Indian role may also have been decisive. They, too, perceive certain advantages from the presence of a divided Malay majority and partly for this reason, from time to time, they forge temporary political alliances with both royalty and the Islamic party. At the same time, it must be admitted, the fact that the Malays are still only about 57 percent of the total population helps to explain the

passion with which many of them continue to strive for the unity of their community. It also suggests why, in the first half of the twentieth century, the exponents of the *bangsa*-based vision moved so tentatively toward a full-blown nationalism. In the anticipated nation-state, the Malay community, no longer guaranteed in its sovereign existence by British colonialism, would indeed be vulnerable.

To perceive the struggle within the Malay community in terms of *bangsa*, *umat* and *kerajaan*, therefore, draws attention to long-term tensions in Malay society. It is an approach which possesses, also, the further advantage of demonstrating the depth of ideological division. Although the three Malay concepts allude to different social visions and different versions of the past, what each of them signifies above all is a competing notion of community. That is to say, in the struggle for hegemony there was a fundamental disagreement even over the character of the community for which the rival philosophies were designed. It is a disagreement, obviously, which entails at the same time a far-reaching dispute about personal identity.

In considering now the analytical costs of this three-cornered analysis of Malay political debate, the problem of over-simplification arises. To stress these broad divisions tends to obscure other competing viewpoints and to ignore the extent to which each of these three orientations itself contains a range of sometimes competing doctrines. My discussion of the *umat* perspective, for instance, does not bring to the fore the confrontation between those Islamic groups often referred to as the *Kaum Muda* and the *Kaum Tua* – between the advocates, on the one hand, of a modernized Islam and, on the other, of apparently more conservative doctrines. This confrontation, as noted in chapter 9, is well documented. For my purposes, however, it is significant that those placing the *umat* above either the *kerajaan* or the *bangsa* could be found in both *kaum*. When such *Kaum Muda* figures as Sayyid Shaykh vigorously argued the claims of Islamic fundamental doctrine they presented themselves as inheritors of a long tradition of *shari'ah*-mindedness in Malay society. It was a tradition which was fostered also by those religious scholars who, at least by the 1930s, were to be branded as members of the 'conservative party'.<sup>10</sup> By appropriating Islamic doctrines, for instance by translating and commenting upon the canonical texts, these scholars helped to provide a body of Islamic learning to compete with the wisdom of the 'indigenous' (or 'Hindu-ized') *kerajaan*. In the language of post-independence Malay writing, many of the *Kaum Tua*, no less than the *Kaum Muda*, were *pejuang-pejuang Islam*, or "warriors for Islam".<sup>11</sup>

Another division in Malay society that I have neglected is that between the religiously pious and those people whom a Malay author of 1936 described as viewing religion with "scientific doubt and broad-minded

indifference".<sup>12</sup> This so-called 'progressive' group was compared with those people in power in Kemal Ataturk's Turkey. Members of the Malay 'progressive' or 'Turkish' party may well have formed a significant element among the *bangsa*-minded, and some are likely to have been included among the more modern-minded advocates of the *kerajaan*. In later years they have been found in important positions in government and certain political leaders, including Mahathir Mohamad, have been called 'Kemal Ataturk-Types'. Again, however, my concern with religious commitment is focused not on private piety but on the implications of religious belief for perceptions of social organisation and identity. Whether a person was committed to being a 'warrior' for the Islamic *umat*, rather than for the *bangsa* or the *kerajaan*, is the issue of first importance in my analysis.

For similar reasons, I give little stress to the distinction between the Malay and the English educated which is a crucial element in William Roff's study of colonial Malay society. This distinction, it is true, promoted rivalry and tension, and has continued to do so in post-independence Malaya/Malaysia. In the advancing of the *bangsa*, however, graduates of the government Malay education system often combined with those of the English system. Eunos and Dato Onn, for instance, were both trained in English schools, but we have seen that they were not less vigorous than Ibrahim Yaacob or Abdul Rahim Kajai (both Malay educated) in pursuing the *bangsa* cause. The point is that education, in a modern sense, was the crucial leavening factor, not English as against Malay education.

Finally, the book does not attempt to investigate all those local or parochial sympathies which Ibrahim Yaacob identified and confronted in his attempt to promote commitment to the *bangsa*. The fortunes of certain Indonesian immigrant groups – the Bawean, for example – are indeed 'others' tales' (to recall Joan Scott's phrase which I quoted in my Introduction) which are obscured in studies focused on such master themes as the development of a state, a nationalism, or even a dominant ethnicity. They are 'might have beens' and, having noted their existence, I have tended to ignore them, as many before me appear to have done, largely to reduce the level of complexity in my analysis.

In one area, at least, it has been possible to temper the oversimplifications inherent in my approach, and in doing so we encounter what has emerged as the central theme in this volume. The textual episodes which we have examined suggest that only in certain specific instances are the relations between the three orientations entirely antagonistic and exclusive. The battle lines are drawn with clarity, for instance, when Abdullah or the *Al Imam* journal condemn the *kerajaan*. When an Islamic spokesman declares that in Islam there ought to be no

*bangsa*-consciousness as something distinct from a commitment to the "aims and obligations of the religion",<sup>13</sup> and a *bangsa*-minded journalist later replies that Islam is "not a *bangsa*",<sup>14</sup> we see further indications of ideological confrontation. In struggles taking place within Malay society in recent decades we continue to encounter examples of such stand-off.<sup>15</sup>

The essential ideological divisions in Malay society, however, are not always so rigid. Indeed, the texts examined in this book suggest none of the specific orientations – *kerajaan*, *umat* or *bangsa* – has been a fixed or static category; each was reformulated over time, often in fundamental ways. The point is particularly telling in the case of *kerajaan*. The spokesmen of the royal courts so restructured the claims of their patrons that the presentation of the sultanate at the end of the colonial period, and in recent years, would have been inconceivable in the early 1800s. Certain Malays, it is true, have followed their ancestors in continuing to perceive the sultanate as an all-embracing *kerajaan* in which the *nama*, the reputation and status, of every subject could be located: for these Malays the ceremonies and ritual of the court are all-important. From the middle years of the British period, however, monarchy began to be re-defined. In the Johore text the polity itself is described territorially and not merely as an extension of rulership; the sultan is portrayed primarily as a governor or administrator. The 1938 Perak coronation account goes further: this document, which is in some ways a precursor of the royal celebratory albums that appear today, praises the Perak ruler in a manner that reminds one of a modern election manifesto.

The Islamic '*umat*', too, signified new things by the end of the colonial period. Indeed, in the writing of Sayyid Shaykh and also more recent Islamic spokesmen, it takes the form of an association ideally suited to the needs of an economic and political progress defined in broadly Western-modern terms. Finally, *bangsa*, which was still quite novel as a term for 'ethnic group' in Abdullah's time, acquired a growing force and a territorial connotation during the following century. Our review of the development of *bangsa* is a reminder that Malay ethnicity must be perceived as a dynamic process rather than a fixed primordial identification. It is a process, moreover, which leads into the development of what was to be later described as Malay nationalism.<sup>16</sup> In the 1990s Malays struggled with the term '*bangsa*' again when Prime Minister Mahathir took the radical step of urging them to think of themselves as members of a '*bangsa Malaysia*' rather than merely a '*bangsa Melayu*'.

In considering such revising and reconstituting of ideological positions, this book has examined the colonial context of Malay society. The British government, it has been argued, endorsed explicitly or implicitly certain elements, for instance, of the liberal program developed by the *bangsa*-minded. The socio-economic change of the period also produced a new



middle class likely to be attracted to the type of egalitarian and individualistic attitudes expressed not only by Abdullah and Eunos but sometimes by their Islamic and royal opponents. It requires emphasizing, however, that colonialism and its consequences cannot obscure the genuinely intellectual dimension of Malay ideological work. Moreover, creativity in this area was stimulated by interaction and dialogue between the different orientations. Here again the three-cornered analysis has not disguised complexity.

The texts examined in this book, in fact, often give the impression that ideas were forged in dialogue. Examining Eunos' presentation of *bangsa*, Sayyid Shaykh's *umat* and the description of monarchy by Haji Mohd. Said or Raja Lob reminds one of Kenneth Burke's dictum that "critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose".<sup>17</sup> Specific statements in our Malay documents react to and build upon one another so that *bangsa*, for instance, becomes in significant respects indebted to the *kerajaan*. That is, in order to compete with the royal ideology, *bangsa*'s own development – its emotive content, its role as an object of devoted service and a focus of personal identity – begins to be shaped by a *kerajaan* agenda. Despite the association of *bangsa*-mindedness with many of the tenets of modernity, certain authors sought to adapt the concept of *bangsa* not just to the needs of a middle class acquiring modern values, but also for those Malays who, even when monarchy itself was being undermined, possessed older-established concerns, such as anxiety about *nama*. Such efforts to reformulate *bangsa* have implications for the way Malays view their ethnicity and nation even in the twenty-first century and, in addition, suggest the need to reassess the significance or potency of 'tradition'. Speaking of 'autonomy' with respect to Malay political development does not imply that 'tradition' continues to be a rigid template for social action. Rather, autonomy arises from the fact that 'tradition' continues to act as a dynamic force, driving forward a dialectical change.

The dialogue between ideological orientations – *kerajaan*, *umat* and *bangsa* – undergoes one further and critical form of transition during the colonial period. In our textual episodes we have been able to track the development of a new discourse that is of far-reaching importance in modern Malaysia. In the changing terms of debate we have discerned an 'invention of politics', an expansion of the public sphere.

### The Invention of Politics

In one sense the struggle for hegemony, the 'war of position', which divided Malay society was resolved neither during the colonial period nor even in the decades of independence which have followed. Even today Malay ideologues disagree radically about both the past and the future

of Malay society, and about the proper reference point for community loyalty and personal identity. In these matters we continue to see presentation of what appear to be mutually exclusive claims. By the time of the Japanese Occupation, however, there are indications that a victory was achieved at the deeper level of discourse, or of what Partha Chatterjee calls the "thematic".<sup>18</sup> In the texts of the early colonial period we noted that differences between orientations were not merely "programmatically" but also "thematically"; that is, the differences concerned not just the claims of ideology, the possibilities and programs, but also the 'justificatory statements', 'rules of inference' and epistemological basis. By the 1940s, so our texts indicate, a significant degree of resolution had taken place at the underlying level of discourse, or of the "thematic": the *kerajaan* and the *umat* were to a large extent defeated.

The royal and Islamic spokesmen in effect capitulated when they began to defend their respective patrons with new arguments in a new language. The innovations are implied in the various reformulations of *kerajaan*, *bangsa* and *umat*. These reformulations entail a type of interaction between ideological orientations fundamentally different from that existing in the early nineteenth century. By the mid-colonial period, Sayyid Shaykh, Raja Lob and Ibrahim Yaacob all assumed the need for what has been referred to as a "to do" government which addressed a 'development' agenda. Each recognized the fact that the Malay Muslim community faced a crisis and that there was a necessity for social unity. The values of rationalism and egalitarianism were also given in their writings, and furthermore in virtually the whole range of Malay political writing in the present day.

In analysing Munshi Abdullah's work and the geography, the *Hikayat Dunia*, we took note of the origins of such concepts. The state as a territorial unit, government as an instrument for facilitating the exploitation of that territory, the categorising of humans as individual persons and as members of states and races, are all concepts or values established in these early colonial writings. The idea that rulers are responsible to their subjects rather than merely to transcendent principles and designs, the justification of social programs in terms of the perspective and interests of the individual subject, and the right of that ordinary subject to engage in the administration of his community, began at least to be implied in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts of the *umat*-minded and the *kerajaan*. A sultan, that is, was now said to acknowledge the existence of, and communicate with, a nationalist organization; an Islamic author now identified a human, rational essence behind worldly titles and public face, and insisted that the success of a ruler depends on his ability to serve the welfare of a community of such individuals.

Rational individuals, so our texts begin to take for granted, combine together in a political community, a rational tribunal, to which all rival

ideologues appeal. The very assumption of a public of individuals possessing the right to be consulted is perhaps the most fundamental element in the new politics. In its consultations and disputes, moreover, this community is revealed as using a novel vocabulary. Those whom Ibrahim Yaacob calls "people of awareness" (*sedar*), irrespective of which ideological background they emerge from, all tend to speak of *negeri* and *bangsa*; they also reduce in meaning (to 'government') the formerly potent word *kerajaan*. When "aware people" (in our chosen documents) advocate one form of community rather than another they do so in terms of abstractions: rival ideologues at least share the view that the 'individual' must live in 'society' (*perhimpunan*), and only then argue about which moral or legitimate basis (monarchical, religious or racial) that 'society' should possess. Spokesmen of all three orientations cite the actual standards of a modern rational tribunal in several ways. Grounding their contending programs in an assessment of the past, for instance, they each – *bangsa*, *umat* and *kerajaan* authors – insist this assessment is founded on precepts not of superstition but of positivistic fact. Knowledge of this fact, all our competing texts suggest, is not reserved to an aristocratic or spiritual elite; it is available to all who possess rational power. In this spirit, readers are urged 'to think'. Even the syntax of the new Malay writing tends to stress the active, rational and instrumental rather than the passive and organic. Employing such a style, all the 'modern' authors, commencing with Abdullah but most especially in the case of Ibrahim Yaacob, reinforced the message that individual Malay subjects possessed the capacity to engage in the engineering of their own destiny.

The process by which this new discourse of politics emerged has been discussed at various points in the book. As in our examination of the formulating of the different ideological orientations, I have situated this development in the circumstances of an expanding British imperialism and a transformed economy. Ideology, as so often remarked by historians, tends to be enmeshed in changes in the wider social structure.

Colonialism, in my analysis of discourse, involves not merely the role of a persistent European threat and a large-scale Asian immigration in making a common crisis for all Malays. It entails such specific developments as the introduction of a technology of printing and the fostering of a close, urban settlement, both of which promoted the newspaper industry. Benedict Anderson has observed how such "print capitalism" fostered the imagining of a national community in many colonial societies.<sup>19</sup> In the first instance, however, it promoted the development of a public sphere in which not just nationalism but all types of social identity or political policy might be debated.

The colonial education system, too, together with the particular procedures and style of colonial bureaucratic government, effectively

provided and endorsed specific models of administration and political participation for the Malay intelligentsia. Similarly, new economic mechanisms and alien concepts of law (including land law) ushered in by colonialism communicated potentially political precepts. Considering the role of European-derived law in this way suggests colonial Malaya might be compared, for instance, with British Bengal, where Ranajit Guha has drawn attention to the fundamentally exotic character of the British “rule of property”.<sup>20</sup> What impact, we may ask, did such radically new doctrines have when located implicitly within those colonial institutions which exercised the widest influence on the subject community? Changes in the legal, administrative or economic spheres, as far as the colonialists themselves were concerned, probably possessed no deliberate ideological purpose. Nevertheless they tended to promote, for instance, perceptions of the individual and his role in society which would have challenged profoundly certain critical and longstanding Malay doctrines.

The impact of colonialism, therefore, provides a context in which to explain the discursive or thematic transformation which took place in Malay society. Identifying this impact reminds us specifically that the new ‘politics’ is to a large extent a derivative discourse. Partha Chatterjee, we have noted in chapter 1, has argued that nationalism, although ostensibly the principal antagonist of colonialism, in fact shares the same “thematic” with its designated enemy. In other words, despite the fact that nationalism and colonialism are radically opposed to one another in respect to programs or “the problematic”, they are both grounded in the same “justificatory structures” – the same epistemological principles, rules of inference, types of moral justification and so forth. They are both products of post-Enlightenment Western thought.<sup>21</sup> What our readings in Malay ideology reported in this study suggest – particularly in the case of Sayyid Shaykh, Haji Mohd. Said and Raja Lob – is that in Malay society, and perhaps other societies, not only nationalist but also religious and monarchical ideology may become established as derivative discourses.

### Ideological Work

Once again the hegemony of colonialism should not be exaggerated. In the interstices of British power we encounter important examples of Malay ideological innovation. Several of our authors executed what J.G.A. Pocock has described, in his meticulous investigations into the changing idioms of modern European thought, as those critical “moves” which “modify or innovate upon” an established “language” or “discourse”.<sup>22</sup> Abdullah made such “moves” in the way he wrote about *bangsa* and *negeri* and also dropped the word *kerajaan* as a description of ‘sultanate’. Haji Mohd. Said’s writing reconstitutes the Johore polity in territorial terms and refers to a written constitution (rather than the

monarch) as the 'body' of the *kerajaan*. Sayyid Shaykh performed a similar reversal in the Malay context when he defended the *umat* in terms not of its obedience to God but of its capacity to satisfy the rational requirements of a modern political community. In each of these innovations – these strategic “moves” – the terms of ideological debate were radically revised.

Just as in the formulation of the different orientations in Malay society, the actual creation of the new political discourse emerges often from dialogue. Tacking back and forth between different texts, as we have done, helps to retrace the steps in this process. It alerts one to the way Malay ideologues responded to each other, noting threats and opportunities, acting with ingenuity and imagination. To perceive them as mere cynics, ideological ‘hired-guns’ concerned only to defend their patron, would conceal the intellectual character of their endeavours. They engaged in genuine experimentation. Like so many ideologues in other countries and other eras they must also have been driven by a sense of real puzzlement.

The fact that not all innovative moves arise solely from strategic necessity needs to be stressed. As participants in an intellectual milieu, the Malay ideologues were stimulated by the formulations of fellow writers as well as by the demands of patrons. In the excitement of debate, moreover, their responses sometimes ignored or neglected long-term political consequences. Did Haji Mohd. Said and Raja Lob, for instance, realize the impact on the interests of monarchy of their acceptance of a broadly European epistemology? They wrote in dialogue with such authors as Eunos and, in choosing to endorse the empiricism of modern historical research rather than what might now be dismissed as the magical knowledge of the old *hikayat*, they were perhaps driven above all by a desire to update *kerajaan* ideology. It is in hindsight that such concessions to modernity necessarily undermine the *kerajaan*'s actual conceptual foundations: perhaps believing themselves to be engaged merely in ideological repair, these authors were in fact helping to establish an entirely new ideological architecture.

Reading our texts in dialogue with one another, reading them intertextually, thus encourages speculation about the possible mechanisms of innovation. Indeed, by noting the presence of unexpected outcomes, our intertextualism leads to a further series of questions about ideological linkage, about the possibility of regular interconnections which may promote the clustering of concepts and perceptions. In this respect a phrase employed by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins is helpful. He uses the expression “structure of the conjuncture” when referring, for instance, to such a generalized phenomenon as commercial exchange having “its own sociology”.<sup>23</sup> To what extent, we may ask, is ‘politics’ a component in such a structure? Are certain ideas about the individual

person, the polity, government and perhaps 'truth' inevitably bound one to another? Can we then move automatically from the interconnectedness of concepts to the establishing of a fixed relationship with economic and social 'reality'? In seeking to ground the conceptual manoeuvrings of the ideologue in specific historical context, we necessarily aim to balance the significance of Malay agency against the imperatives of imperialism.

### Politics and the Malaysian State

The enquiry with which I wish to conclude, however, reaches out in another direction. Does the emergence of politics in modern Malaysia and elsewhere, it may be asked, foster a certain type of social unity? Indeed, might politics be understood to add substance to the state? Our investigation of ideological struggle in colonial Malaya suggests the modern Malaysian state has inherited not only an unresolved dispute between *kerajaan*, *umat* and *bangsa*, but also the foundations of a new and unifying discourse of political contest. The sample of texts examined in this book reveals only early and tentative steps toward establishing this discourse. Ibrahim Yaacob alone seems to have been sufficiently imbued with the new consciousness to define it as *sedar*.

In today's Malaysia, although there are still strong complaints about restrictions on democratic freedom, the practice of politics in undoubtedly well established. The idiom is Malay, of course, and this is partly to be understood in terms of the continued relevance of the struggle between *bangsa*, *umat* and *kerajaan*. In Malaysia, as one perceptive commentator has explained, there are "different visions of what the national identity should be".<sup>24</sup>

The impact of the Malay heritage, however, is evident in other ways in which politics are carried on in the modern state. The post-independence prime ministers, many of whom have aristocratic or royal backgrounds, have tended to act with some of the formal dignity once associated with the hierarchical tradition of the sultans. Like the royal leaders of the past (including Sultan Abdul Aziz of 1930s Perak), they also appear to see their governing task partly in terms of educating the Malaysian community, and this can involve censorship as well as didactic speechmaking about social, economic and religious issues.<sup>25</sup>

The specific relationship between leader and follower in Malay political life is also reminiscent of an earlier period, at least with respect to the degree of devotion which Malays often display in their allegiances. One consideration here is that the follower or supporter in the Malaysian context can often expect material advantages. Voters may be given special land selection rights; members of a particular national leader's faction may receive permits, licences, approvals and contracts that bring

great wealth.<sup>26</sup> This is the 'money politics' often condemned by critics of Malaysia but, as the discussion in the early part of this book suggests, it is also consistent with the patronage system of the pre-colonial era – a system that was not then perceived to be immoral.

The devotion of the follower in modern Malay political life, however, also seems to be inspired by the desire for less tangible gains. Watching the manoeuvres of prominent Malay leaders over the last decades – right down to Prime Minister Mahathir, former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and the Kelantan political-prince, Tengku Razaleigh – one sometimes gets the impression that their followers are driven by something quite similar to the search for security and personal reputation (*nama*) that had characterized Malay behaviour in the pre-colonial sultanates' period. So dependent is Malay identity on personal allegiance in today's political system that one social analyst has referred to modern Malays as participating in "a culture of deference".<sup>27</sup>

The complex process by which earlier Malay style influences current political practice, however, can in no way disguise the degree to which a novel discourse has impacted on modern Malay life. The public sphere has continued to expand and its protagonists are presumed to share a cluster of pivotal assumptions. Islamic, nationalist and *kerajaan* leaders all claim to address a rational audience possessing the right to judge. Politics are designed to benefit both the individual and society. Even one of the most prominent leaders of the Islamic party – noted for his rigorous *shari'ah*-mindedness – claims that Islam more than any other doctrine caters for the *individu*.<sup>28</sup> Government is judged in nearly all pronouncements in terms of service to society; and in a broad range of Malay writing the term 'society' (now usually *masyarakat* rather than *perhimpunan*) suggests a generalized community which, in political conversation, actually transcends the concepts of *kerajaan*, *umat* and *bangsa*.

The terms of debate encountered in this advancing public sphere in Malaysia – terms which have the effect of mediating all contending ideological orientations – can actually gain greater currency and potency in the heat of increasingly adversarial contest. The acceleration of debate – a phenomenon which has been particularly evident during the two decades of the prime ministership of the quintessentially adversarial Mahathir – can unintentionally temper rather than exacerbate tension. That is, the impassioned pleadings of Mahathir and his Islamic and royal antagonists, so long as they continue to be expressed in the discourse of politics, have the effect of entrenching that discourse. The strengthening of discursive bonds, what is more, has the capacity to envelop Chinese and Indian contestants no less than Malay. And it is particularly in considering this last possibility that the student of modern Malaysian society begins to consider the contribution that 'politics' can make to constituting the modern state.

In Malaysia, where despite the recent attempts of the government to promote the concept of a single 'Malaysian people' (*bangsa Malaysia*), nationalism remains in contest, the ideological content of the state is likely to be especially nebulous. Other forces capable of binding a citizenry include the bureaucracy, the communications system and structures of the state economy: in Malaysia's case all three institutions have tended to be vigorous, despite the challenge of the 1997–99 Asian economic crisis. In some countries a pervading threat of state violence is significant, although it is a relatively remote possibility in Malaysia. The actual visibility of the state, its visual solidity, is constituted primarily in its architecture – the physical structures which house the government and bureaucracy – and in the highway systems which enmesh province with metropolis.

Working against such unifying forces, of course, are all types of powerful and conflicting loyalties. Until Malaysia has developed the type of melting-pot nationalism capable of bonding together members of all the main ethnic communities, the issue which might be considered in the Malaysia case – as in certain other post-colonial and post-communist countries – is whether the plurality of competing loyalties, which seemingly subvert the progress of state formation, can in certain circumstances also act to promote a more fundamental unity. When Mahathir or his opponents have been at their most aggressive, gesticulating energetically as they spell out one point or another, is it possible that this expression of adversarialism, so long as it is delivered in a specifically political discourse, can promote the expansion of a socially-bonding public sphere which adds substance to the state? Or must we conclude that 'politics' flow too easily within or beyond ideological or state boundaries, creating new unities, sometimes wider, often more parochial? The question, which concerns the relation between political discourse and social structure, requires specific case studies. In Malaysia, where political debate seems to be increasing, there will be further opportunity to test whether 'politics', which had once exercised a corrosive influence on the Malay *kerajaan*, nevertheless has a special capacity to contribute to the modern process of nation-building.

### Notes

- 1 M. Walzer, *Regicide and Revolution: Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 88.
- 2 At the opening of chapter 4, I contrast the act of 'conceptualising' with that of 'imagining', explained in B.R.O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 3 See, in particular, M. Foucault's writings: *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1973); *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Plume, 1971); and *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979).
- 4 G. Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People's Army of Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), see especially ch. 2; see also David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley: University of California, 1981).
- 5 H.M.J. Maier, *In the Centre of Authority: The Malay Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* (Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 1988).



- 6 For a discussion of Habermas' approach to the "public sphere" and of scholarship on "civic humanism", see chapter 5, above.
- 7 The "constitutional crisis" and the *dakwah* movement are discussed in A.C. Milner, 'Malaysia', in Anthony Milner and Mary Quilter (eds), *Australia in Asia: Communities of Thought* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996) 165-71.
- 8 See Penulis Khas, 'Suatu Mengenai asas Kenegaraan Melayu', in *Utusan Melayu*, 16 November 1983. In considering the current Malaysian political situation, Wang Gungwu's paradigm of the 'quadrilateral state' (i.e. a state possessing four centres of power - Sultanate, Secular Nationalism, Islam and 'Plural Society', i.e. Chinese and Indians) is an excellent starting point; 'Reflections on Malaysian Elites', *RIMA*, 20, 1 (1986), 100-28.
- 9 C. Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Yoneo Ishii's *Sangha, State and Society: Thai Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986) chapter 8 suggests the Thai case was similar to that of Japan.
- 10 Za'ba, writing in 1936, quoted in A.C. Milner, 'The Impact of the Turkish Revolution on Malaya', *Archipel*, 31 (1986), 124.
- 11 For use of the expression see, for instance, Ahmad Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan Ke Puncak* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Kejora, 1972), 125.
- 12 Za'ba, writing in 1936, quoted in A.C. Milner, 'The Impact of the Turkish Revolution on Malaya', *Archipel*, 31 (1986), 124.
- 13 *Saudara*, 24 November 1928; see also Za'ba, noted above in chapter 10, note 89.
- 14 Abdul Rahim Kajai; see chapter 10, note 90. Dato Onn's antagonistic comments on Islamic activists are discussed in Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origins and Early Development* (Singapore: Pelanduk, 1985), 9-10.
- 15 See, for instance, Safie bin Ibrahim, *The Islamic Party of Malaysia: Its Formative Stages and Ideology* (Kelantan: Nuawi bin Ismail, 1981) 22, 32-3; interview with Haji Yusof Rawa, in Yusof Harun, *Dialog dengan Pemimpin* (Petaling Jaya: Pena, 1986), 294.
- 16 An introduction to developments in the use of the term '*bangsa*' is Tan Liok Ee, *The Rhetoric of Bangsa and Minzu: Community and Nation in Tension, the Malay Peninsula, 1900-1955* (Clayton: Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies Working Paper, 1988). A recent detailed study of the concept of *bangsa Melayu* during the 1940s is Ariffin Omar, *Bangsa Melayu: Malay Concepts of Democracy and Community 1945-50* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993). Regarding the early independence period, some discussion of *bangsa Melayu* is contained in A.C. Milner, "Malayness". Confrontation, Innovation and Discourse', in V.J.H. Houben, H.M.J. Maier and W. van der Molen (eds), *Looking in Odd Mirrors: The Java Sea* (Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit, 1992), 43-59.
- 17 K. Burke, quoted in C. Geertz, 'Ideology as a Culture System', in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York and London: Free Press, 1964), 70.
- 18 See discussion in Introduction and chapter 2.
- 19 *Imagined Communities*, *passim*.
- 20 R. Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris: Mouton, 1963). The book is discussed in E.W. Said, 'Third World Intellectuals and Metropolitan Culture', *Raritan*, 14, 3 (1990), 27-50.
- 21 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (New York: Zed Books), 38.
- 22 J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14-15.
- 23 M. Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Island Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 38.
- 24 A.B. Shamsul, 'Nations-of-Intent in Malaysia', in Stein Tonnesson and Hans Antlov (eds), *Asian Forms of Nation* (London: Curzon, 1996), 324.
- 25 See Deborah Johnson, Political Discourse and Pedagogy: The Central Role of Successive Malaysian Prime Ministers, Masters thesis, Australian National University, 1996.
- 26 H. Crouch, *Government and Society in Malaysia* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996) 36-43.
- 27 Clive Kessler, 'Archaism and Modernity: Contemporary Malay Political Culture', in J.S. Kahn and Frances Loh Kok Wah (eds), *Fragmented Vision: Culture and Politics in Contemporary Malaysia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 148.
- 28 Haji Abdul Hadi Awang, interviewed in Yusof Harun, *Dialog*, 237-8.

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### ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BKI</i>	<i>Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indie</i>
CO	Colonial Office
FMS	Federated Malay States
ISEAS	Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore
<i>JAS</i>	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
<i>JIA</i>	<i>Journal of the Indian Archipelago</i>
<i>JMBRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSBRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSEAH</i>	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian History</i>
<i>JSEAS</i>	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i>
LMS	London Missionary Society
MBRAS	Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
<i>RIMA</i>	<i>Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Studies</i>
SS	Straits Settlements

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